DPLS 747 Leadership & Classical Ethics

Fall 2010 2 Credits
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Tilford 115
Every other Saturday (September 4, 18, October 2, 16, 30: 8-12 AM

Texts (These recommended editions are available in the GU bookstore and online)

General description of the course's content
This course analyzes primary source material in four distinct voices vital to any philosophically informed discussion of leadership ethics - Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill. There are several seminal philosophical approaches to contemporary ethics - emotivism (C. L. Stevenson), prescriptivism (R. M. Hare), contract ethics (John Rawls) and discourse ethics (Jürgen Habermas) - that some philosophers regard as "classical" theories because they are so fundamental to current discussion. However, there is a virtually universal consensus that contemporary theories are extrapolations of the concepts embedded in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Mill. Indeed, Alfred North Whitehead once famously wrote that all of philosophy is but a footnote to Plato. Whitehead may have been exaggerating for the sake of emphasis, but it cannot be denied that a good grasp of the primary ideas in these four thinkers will serve as an excellent foundation for grasping seminal and current approaches in ethical theory.

It should be noted that the course is restricted to Western philosophical sources; the insights of the great religious traditions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity are not addressed. This does not imply that the religious traditions are unworthy of study. Indeed, over the years they have influenced philosophical ethics. However, philosophy addresses ethics in an abstract, theoretical voice. It is an intellectually rigorous activity that prioritizes questions and theory rather than answers and data. The religious traditions are more involved with ethics as a practical, applied way of life.

Philosophy is an abstract, purely theoretical investigation of meaning. It can be frustrating in its repudiation of closure, its passion for the open-ended question, and its adamant refusal to be "down to earth." William James described this aspect of philosophy well in the opening paragraphs of his well-known 1907 essay, "Pragmatism, a New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking."
Philosophy is at once the most sublime and the most trivial of human pursuits. It works in the minutest crannies and opens out the widest vistas. It "bakes no bread" as has been said, but it can inspire our souls with courage; and as repugnant as its manners, its doubting and challenging, its quibbling and dialectics, often are to common people, no one of us can get along with the far-flashing beams of light it sends over the world's perspectives. These illuminations at least, and the contrast effects of darkness and mystery that accompany them, give to what it says an interest that is much more than professional.

James insight here is important to our course. It will, at times, seem odd, even unfeeling, that we discuss the heartfelt and serious issue of right and wrong in such an abstract, distanced manner. Philosophy certainly has more passion for the activity of thinking about right and wrong than it does for rights and wrongs themselves. Since our course involves reading, discussing, and analyzing the primary philosophical voices, we can expect a great deal of abstraction. We will encounter what James described as the sublime and the trivial, and at times we may be repulsed by the doubting, the challenging, and the apparent verbal quibbling. But as we open our vistas and develop our intellectual courage we will find those far-flashing beams of light and those dark areas of mystery that are so vital to authentic ethical leadership.

The Course's anticipated outcomes
The primary sources are challenging in their rigor and subtlety. Class discussions will center on clarifying the readings as well as their implications for leadership. The goal in class sessions is to understand the primary concepts and general spirit of the philosopher under discussion. The goal of the course is an intellectual and personal understanding of the similarities and differences among the classic ethical voices we call "Platonism," "Aristotelianism," Kantianism, and Utilitarianism.

More specifically, the primary anticipated outcome of the course is the final essay. This is a reflective paper that describes the "ideal leadership ethical values" embedded in the primary ideas of each philosopher we study. The secondary outcome is the completion of the reading response questions and active participation in class discussion.

The Assignments
Readings
Each student is required to complete the entire reading assignment for each class session. The reading assignments are attached to this syllabus.

Reading question responses
Each student is required to come to class prepared to discuss the reading questions (attached to this syllabus). In addition, each student is required to have word-processed (double-spaced) responses for one philosopher. Each class session begins with a large group discussion of the reading questions. The students responsible for the particular philosopher under discussion will read their responses to the reading questions to the group. Discussion will follow.

More specifically, each student is responsible for one word-processed set of reading question responses that are read to the class. After reading the response aloud, the class will share ideas
and come to an understanding of the philosopher's concepts. Students may make use of secondary sources in responding questions, but must cite them. Also, students need to cite any quotations or paraphrases from the reading. The word-processed set of responses must be turned in at the end of the session; please retain a copy for your records because the copy you turn in will not be returned. Each student is also required to come to every session prepared to discuss each question, even though they are not scheduled to read any responses for that session.

**Final paper**
The final paper, due three weeks after the course is completed (due date is Saturday, November 20) is a research-based analysis of each philosopher we study. The paper also includes a speculative interpretation of the leadership values implied by the philosopher's concepts. The essay should be divided into four sections, one analysis of the major ideas of each philosopher we study along with the ethics of leadership you find embedded within those ideas. You may focus on the philosopher you wrote about for class discussion, comparing and contrasting those ideas with the other three thinkers if you wish. Feel free to make use of secondary sources, but your primary attention should be on the primary sources we study in class. Please use APA format. The paper should be at least 18 pages in length.

**First Session Schedule (September 4)**
8:00 - 8:45 Introduction and review of the course syllabus
8:45 - 9:30 Lecture: Introduction to classical ethics - the general ideas in Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Mill
9:30 - 9:45 Break - students write questions for discussion
9:45 - 10:30 Responses to written questions; discussion
10:30 - 10:45 Break
10:45 - 11:00 Student selections of responses to study questions
11:00 - 11:45 Lecture: Platonism
11:45 - 12:00 Good of the order

**Session Schedule for September 18, October 2, 16, 30**
8:00 - 9:30 General discussion based on responses to reading questions
9:30 - 9:45 Break
9:45 - 10:15 Continuation of discussion based on responses to reading questions
10:15 - 11:00 Lecture - rather than interrupt the lecture, please jot down your comments and questions. You will have the opportunity to discuss the lecture after the break.
   - Session 1 Plato
   - Session 2 Aristotle
   - Session 3 Kant
   - Session 4 Mill
   - Session 5 No Lecture
11:00 - 11:10 Break
11:10 - 12:00 Responses and discussion

**Reading schedule and discussion questions**
Please provide specific responses, citing margin or page numbers that indicate specific references to the text. Your response to each question should be at least two paragraphs in length.
September 18: Read *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito* Plato

1. What do you think is the main point Plato is making in the dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro?
2. What does Socrates presuppose about human nature in the *Apology* when he says, "The unexamined life is not worth living"?
3. What is Socrates' position on the proper relationship between the individual and society in *Crito*?
4. What sort of ethical leadership does Platonism advocate?

October 2: Read Books I - IV and VIII - IX in *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle

1. Book I - II: What does Aristotle mean by the term "happiness"?
2. Book III - IV: What does Aristotle presuppose about human nature in his explanation of virtue as the mean between extremes, especially the virtue of magnanimity?
3. Book VIII - IX: Explain each of the three types of friendship and why Aristotle believes that friends are necessary to happiness.
4. What sort of ethical leadership does Aristotelianism advocate?

October 16: Read the Preface, First Section, and Second Section of *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant

1. First Section: Explain what Kant means by "There is no possibility of thinking of anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be regarded as good without qualification, except a good will."
2. First Section: Explain what Kant presupposes about morality when he writes, "An action done from duty has its moral worth, not in the purpose that is to be attained by it, but in the maxim according to which the action is determined."
3. Second Section: Explain what Kant means when he writes, "Hence there is only one categorical imperative and it is this: Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."
4. What sort of ethical leadership Kantianism advocate?

October 30: Read Chapter I and II in *Utilitarianism*, Mill

1. Chapter II: What does Mill mean by the term "greatest happiness principle"?
2. Chapter II: What does Mill presuppose about human nature when he claims, "It is better to be a human being disatisfied than a pig satisfied"?
3. Chapter II: What is Mill's point in writing, "The utilitarian morality does recognize in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others. It only refuses to admit that the sacrifice is itself good. A sacrifice which does not increase or tend to increase the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted."
4. What sort of ethical leader does utilitarianism advocate?