

Introduction to Ethics
Phil 2200
Summer 2009
Syllabus

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Description and Objective

It is one of the pitfalls of language that the repeated use of words hides the fact that their meaning is far from clear. A prime example is any word that is used to refer to one's self. "I feel hungry". "I think you're wrong". "I don't know about that". These are all common non-puzzling statements at first glance. But once we stop and actually ask ourselves what they mean confusion sets in quickly. Simply ask yourself what the "I" in the preceding sentences actually refers to? What does a reference to self mean? Clearly in the above sentences the "I" cannot be any of the things, or states, it is described as having. For example, in the first sentence the "I" cannot be the feeling of hunger itself. For if it were then the sentence would simply be "I am I". Rather the sentence treats the feeling of hunger as a quality of the "I" not as the "I" itself. So too for the other sentences; the descriptions are supposed to be qualities that some particular "I" happens to have, they are not meant to be the "I" itself. What then is this "I"?

This question - What is the self? - will be one of the two questions that will be the focus of our short summer session version of Introduction to Ethics. The second question, and the more directly ethical one, is what qualities does a person (an "I") need to have to be a good person? What attributes *should* we strive to acquire? After all to say that "I am an ethical, or a good, person" seems to ascribe a certain quality to myself. What is this quality, or if it is a collection of qualities what are these qualities?

We will read four different philosophers, each of whom have a different answer to these questions. Each of the texts justifies its answer to this question through arguments. Arguments are the primary tool of philosophy. You will be expected to become familiar not just with the claims that the philosophers make, but also with the arguments they use to justify these claims. In other words you will be expected to know both *what* each philosopher says and *why* he says it. This is a difficult task that will take considerable practice. Improvement in your ability to recognize, create, and use arguments is the primary goal of this course.

You are at a significant disadvantage taking this course in the short summer session. Reading philosophical texts, and understanding arguments are skills, and like any skills they require considerable time and practice. (Take into account both that the harder the skill is to acquire the more time and practice it requires and that working with arguments is a difficult skill to acquire). The shortness of the summer course does not admit of considerable time. The only way to overcome this problem (insofar as it can be overcome) is to compensate with a lot of out of class work. The shortened summer course and the regular length semester course are worth the same amount of credit, and as a result you will be expected to perform up to the standard of the regular course in spite of the fact that you have considerably less time to get a handle on the material.

Reading

Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Plato, *Meno*. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*.

Study

Philosophy is not like other disciplines. It is not enough to simply remember what a philosopher says, you must also be able to understand (and express) *why* he says it. There is no way for me (the teacher) to make you (the student) *understand* the arguments the philosophers use. I can go over the arguments with you, and I can explain accounts to you, but the understanding comes after you've read, heard and thought about all of this. The understanding rests squarely on your shoulders (as Plato will point out in one of our readings). This grasping of arguments takes *a lot of practice*. Unfortunately we tend to overlook the fact that thinking needs to be practiced and learned (as Nietzsche will point out in one of our readings). You will need to read each of these assignments several times just to get the general idea of what the philosopher has in mind. You will need to read it several more times to get some level of understanding of how he is justifying the claims he is making. These texts can be incredibly rewarding, but that reward must be earned.

Grading

Quizzes (average of top three quizzes)	10%
Paper #1	20%
Paper #2	30%
Final Exam	40%

Readings and Assignments

The readings should be completed before class on the day listed. You are expected to have the text being covered that day with you in class. You should come to class with questions and prepared to discuss the material. You will be called on during class to help us navigate the material. This schedule is a loose guideline for what we will be covering in class. More than anything else it is a reasonable reading schedule for you to follow. **This schedule is flexible and subject to change.**

Monday 6th	Tuesday 7th	Wednesday 8th	Thursday 9th	Friday 10th
Syllabus Arguments	Arguments	Lao-Tzu 1 - 20 Argument Quiz	Lao-Tzu 21 - 40	Lao-Tzu 41 - 60
<u>11th</u> Lao-Tzu 61 - 81	<u>12th</u> Plato's <u>Meno</u> 70a - 80d Argument Quiz	<u>13th</u> Plato's <u>Meno</u> 80d - 89e	<u>14th</u> Plato's <u>Meno</u> 89e - 100b	<u>15th</u> Day to catch up reading. Will finish Plato in class.
<u>16th</u> Kant 1 - 19 1st Paper Due	<u>17th</u> Kant 19 - 33 Argument Quiz	<u>18th</u> Kant 33 - 44	<u>19th</u> Kant 44 - 48	<u>20th</u> Nietzsche 3 - 24
<u>21st</u> Nietzsche 25 - 42	<u>22nd</u> Nietzsche 43 - 74 Argument Quiz	<u>23rd</u> Nietzsche 74 - 92 2nd Paper Due	<u>24th</u> Review and re-read	<u>25th</u> Final Exam