

**Philosophy 213b: Ethical Theory**

Spring 2008

9-10 MWF

201 Asbury Hall

**Instructor:** Erik Wielenberg, Associate Professor of Philosophy  
PhD from UMass-Amherst, 2000; started at DePauw fall 1999  
Office: 211 Asbury Hall  
Hours: 10:15-11:30 MWF, 10-11 TR & by appointment  
Phone: x6275  
E-mail: ewielenberg@depauw.edu

**Text:** The required texts for the course are these:

1. *Nicomachean Ethics*, by Aristotle
2. *A Clockwork Orange*, by Anthony Burgess
3. *Passions within Reason*, by Robert Frank
4. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, by Immanuel Kant
5. *The Road*, by Cormac McCarthy
6. *Utilitarianism*, by John Stuart Mill
7. *Laches and Charmides*, by Plato
8. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, by Leo Tolstoy
9. PHIL 213b course packet (available only at Fine Print)

**Description:** The goals of this course are: 1. To introduce you to some of the main topics in moral philosophy. 2. To improve your abilities to understand unfamiliar and difficult texts, to think and write clearly, to evaluate critically the positions of others, and to develop and support your own views.

We will carefully examine both historical and contemporary attempts to answer each of the following questions:

1. What is the nature of a good human life?
2. What is the nature of virtue?
3. What makes morally right actions right?
4. What is the relationship between morality and self-interest?

We will be concerned with understanding and evaluating these both historic and contemporary efforts to answer these questions.

**Requirements:** Everyone is expected to do all the assigned reading and to come to class prepared to discuss that reading. There will be three tests and three short writing assignments (4-6 pages). Your grade in the course will be determined as follows:

Three writing assignments:	37.5% of course grade
Three tests:	37.5% of course grade
Reading quizzes:	12.5% of course grade
Contribution to class discussion:	12.5% of course grade

**Reading Quizzes:**

I've noticed that students sometimes need a little extra motivation to do the required reading and/or get to class on time. I'm here to help. Reading quizzes will provide that extra kick of motivation you might need. Over the course of the semester, a total of seven *unannounced* reading quizzes will be given at the *start* of class. Each quiz will consist of two questions about the assigned reading for the day. A total of fourteen questions will be asked through these quizzes during the semester. Each correct answer earns you one point, up to a maximum of *ten* points. Your overall grade on the reading quiz portion of the course will be determined by the total number of points you earn during the semester (10 points = 100%, 9 points = 90%, 8 points = 80%, and so on).

**Grading Scale:**

93-100	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-
0-59	F

**Academic Integrity Policy (*Read This Carefully!*):**

Cheating, plagiarism, submission of the work of others, and multiple submission (submitting the same paper for more than one class) each violates the DePauw policy on academic integrity. Of particular note here is plagiarism, which the student handbook defines as “[u]sing the words or ideas of another writer without attribution, so that they seem as if they are your own” (p. 6). The rule to follow here is: ***If you didn't think of it yourself, cite the source(s).***

The DePauw academic integrity policy recommends that when a student violates the policy the instructor impose a penalty *more* severe than giving the student a *zero* (far worse than the typical F) on the assignment in question. *Typically the penalty will be a zero on the assignment together with a further reduction of the student's grade in the course* (p. 9). This can often make it mathematically impossible for the student to pass the course. ***I take plagiarism seriously. If you violate the DPU academic integrity policy, I will catch you and I will act in accordance with the policy.***

## Schedule

### Day and Topic

### Assigned Reading

#### **Week One (January 28-February 1)**

Monday: Course introduction  
Wednesday: Truth and knowledge in ethics  
  
Friday: The Ring of Gyges

“Knowledge of Goodness,”  
Colin McGinn; “Illustrations  
of the *TAO*” (packet)  
Plato’s *Republic* 359c-360d  
(packet )

#### **Week Two (February 4-8)**

Monday: The case of Ivan Ilyich  
**Monday, February 4 is the last day to withdraw from a class and not have it show up on your record.**  
Wednesday: Courage as “endurance of the soul”  
*First writing assignment handed out in class*  
Friday: Perplexity?

*The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

*Laches* 178A-194C

*Laches* 194D-end

#### **Week Three (February 11-15)**

Monday: G-beings and E-beings  
  
Wednesday: Bad Alex  
  
Friday: Good Alex?  
*First writing assignment due at the start of class*

“The Evil Character,” Colin  
McGinn (packet)  
*A Clockwork Orange*, first  
half  
*A Clockwork Orange*, second  
half

#### **Week Four (February 18-22)**

Monday: Myths about happiness  
  
  
Wednesday: The quest for *eudaimonia*  
  
Friday: Two objections to hedonism

“Explaining  
Happiness,” Richard  
Easterlin; excerpt from  
*Stumbling on Happiness*, by  
Daniel Gilbert (both in the  
packet)  
*Nicomachean Ethics* I.1-5;  
“Letter to Menoeceus,”  
Epicurus (packet)  
Plato’s *Philebus* 21a-d;  
“The Experience Machine,”  
Robert Nozick (packet)

#### **Week Five (February 25-29)**

Monday: Review for first test  
Wednesday: First test  
Friday: *Eudaimonia* and the human function

NE I.7-12

**Week Six (March 3-7)**

Monday: Becoming virtuous NE I.13, II.1-4  
 Wednesday: The Doctrine of the Mean NE II.5-9  
 Friday: Aristotelian ethical virtues NE III.6-12 and IV

**Week Seven (March 10-14)**

Monday: Virtuous self-love and a surprise ending NE IX.8 and X.6-9  
 Wednesday: In defense of the ethical life  
*Second writing assignment handed out in class*  
 Chapters 10&11 of Peter Singer's *How Are We to Live?*  
 Friday: The challenge of the sensible knave  
**Friday, March 14 is the last day to make course adjustments**  
 "Conclusion" of *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, David Hume  
 (packet)

**Week Eight (March 17-21)**

Monday: Commitment problems  
*Passions within Reason*, chapters 1-3  
 Wednesday: Two problems w/sensible knavery  
*Passions within Reason* chapters 4-7  
 Friday: The good will and reason's function  
*Second writing assignment due at the start of class*  
*Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* 393-405; "Duties of the virtuous and the vicious"  
 (packet)

**Week Nine (March 24-28)**

SPRING BREAK

**Week Ten (March 31-April 4)**

Monday: The Categorical Imperative and four examples  
*Groundwork* 406-430  
 Wednesday: Review for second test  
 Friday: Second test

**Week Eleven (April 7-11)**

Monday: Respect for Persons  
 Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* 421-452 (packet)  
 Wednesday: Kant on lying  
 Kant, "On a supposed right to lie from philanthropic concern"; "The Ethics of Erasing a Bad Memory"  
 (on-line)  
 Friday: Utilitarianism -- ethics for pigs?  
*Utilitarianism*, pp. 1-12  
*Third writing assignment handed out in class*

**Week Twelve (April 14-18)**

Monday: Mill against the critics  
 Wednesday: Our obligations to others

*Utilitarianism*, pp. 13-26  
 Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (packet); Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" (on-line)  
 Brad Hooker, "Rule-Consequentialism and Obligations toward the Needy" (packet)

Friday: Rule utilitarianism and our obligations to others

**Week Thirteen (April 21-25)**

Monday: *Prima facie* obligation

Wednesday: Divine Command Theory: Four Legs

Friday: Divine Command Theory: Four Arrows

W.D. Ross, excerpt from *The Right and the Good* (packet)  
 "God and Morality," Philip Quinn, pp. 664-671 (to be distributed in class)  
 "God and Morality," pp. 671-678

**Week Fourteen (April 28-May 2)**

Monday: Is character a myth?

Wednesday: Or is it real?

Friday: Post-apocalyptic ethics

Chapter 3 of *Lack of Character*, John Doris (packet)  
 "Saving Character," Wielenberg (packet)  
*The Road*, first half

**Week Fifteen (May 5-9)**

Monday: Carry the fire

Wednesday: Review for third test

*Third writing assignment due at the start of class*

*The Road*, second half

The third test will be given on **Tuesday, May 13, at 9 am**. Please make your travel plans accordingly.