

## **Ethics 201: Syllabus Fall, 2009**

**Section 002; LA 1015**  
**M,W,F 9:00-9:50**  
**Email: nabarron@usi.edu**

**Dr. Nicholas Barron**

### **Introduction**

Ethics is often defined as “the study of morals.” Broadly speaking, to study ethics is to examine and critically scrutinize a particular society, culture, or civilization’s moral values and principles. And this will be this course’s objective. In short, this semester will present a philosophical overview of sorts. During the course of this semester, we will inspect some of the more significant moral theories given to the West. The approach of this course will be both descriptive and historical. Thus, aided by philosophy and “philosophical literature,” this semester’s approach will seek to describe and explore Western civilization’s wide-ranging vision of the good life. Large personal and collective moral questions such as: “what ought I to do,” or “how ought we to live,” these are the underlying ethical questions linking our civilization’s past to its present, and likewise, will silently, implicitly underlie our entire semester, binding this course’s diversity of subject matter to unity. As a result, this semester will hopefully prove expository, but even more importantly inviting. Hopefully, this semester will expose students to some of Western civilization’s more significant moral ideas and thereby invite students to critically re-think their own moral assumptions within the light of, arguably, a few of this civilization’s more insightful moral considerations.

### **Core Curriculum Goals and Objectives:**

This course may be used to fulfill Category B1: The ability to make informed, intelligent ethical judgments

Goal #1: Enhanced understanding of ethical obligations to others.

Objective: Students will understand the moral character and moral reasoning of Socrates as one model of the moral life and moral thinking.

Goal #2: Enhanced understanding of one's responsibility to contribute to the common good.

Objective: Students will be able to critically examine Utilitarian Ethical Theory.

Goal #3: Develop an ability to articulate important ethical issues and to identify alternative positions on those issues (including the grounds for those positions).

Objective: Students will be able to answer the question that follows. Is theism, atheism or agnosticism logically defensible?

Goal #4: Develop or refine students' ethical viewpoints and their ability to defend them.

Objective: Students will be encouraged to develop their critical response to some ethical viewpoint.

### **Required Texts:**

St. Augustine. *The Confessions*

Homer. *The Odyssey*

Plato. *The Trial and Death of Socrates*

### **Course Requirements:**

3 Exams

100 points each

1 Short Essay

100 points

### **Attendance Policy:**

Students are required to attend all classes. Except in exceptional circumstances, students who miss, or are late (entering the classroom after the lecture/discussion has begun) more than 3 times for any reason will have their final grade lowered 5 points for every additional absence or late arrival. For example, with the fifth absence, a student with a final grade average of 80 (B) who misses will have his/her final grade average reduced to 75 (C). Therefore, students who find that they have personal or job-related problems/responsibilities (illness, change in work schedule, etc.) that cause them to miss more than four classes should seriously consider withdrawing from the course. In order to be given credit for attending a class, a student must attend the whole class. With the 6<sup>th</sup> absence the student will automatically receive an F in the course.

Make-up exams will only be given at the discretion of the professor. Before considering a request for a make-up, you are required to supply written documentation of some extraordinary

circumstance (e.g., a medical emergency) that precluded you from taking an exam at the scheduled time and place.

**Finally, students have the responsibility of tracking their own absences.**

**Classroom Department Policy:**

Please be respectful of other students and the educational process by adhering to the following classroom department policy.

Prior to entering the classroom, all cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices must be turned off.

Except when invited to do so by the instructor, please do not read books, articles, and other printed material once class has begun. Readings assigned for the class should be completed before coming to class. Reading materials unrelated to the class (e.g., newspapers, textbooks assigned for other classes) are never permitted.

Except when asked to do so by the instructor, please do not whisper comments to other students. Contrary to popular belief, whispered comments are often heard by the instructor and are almost always distracting to the instructor but also students in the immediate vicinity of the “whisperer.” This behavior is distracting and shows disrespect to the instructor and other students.

**\*As required during the course of the semester, I reserve the right to alter the syllabus. It is the responsibility of the student to be aware of these changes.**

### **I. The Homeric Ethic: A Didactic Reading of Homer's *Odyssey***

- Course Introduction
- Historical Background to the Ancient Greek World: the 5 periods of Ancient Greek Civilization
- Background to Homer and the "Homeric Vision of the Good Life"
- A Didactic Reading of Homer's, *Odyssey*
- Review

#### ***Exam 1: October 2***

##### **• Film 1**

### **II. The Hellenic and Hellenistic Philosophical Traditions**

- Background to Plato and Socrates
- Plato's, *The Trial and Death of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, and Phaedo*
- Aristotle
- Background to Hellenistic Philosophy: Alexander the Great and his Empire's Impact upon Hellenistic Philosophy
- The Rational Hedonism of Epicurus
- The Stoic Tradition
- Review

#### ***Exam 2: November 6***

##### **• Film 2**

### **III. The Medieval Ethic and a Few Significant Ethical Systems of the Modern World**

- A Didactic Reading of Augustine's *Confessions*: Augustine's Life as Manifesting his "Christian Eudaimonism"
- Thomas Aquinas' Ethic of "Charity and Sin"
- John Locke
- Topics in Applied Ethics: Deontological, Utilitarian, and Divine Command Strategies of Action in Regards to "the Morality of Killing"
- Review

#### ***Exam 3: Finals Week***