Course Description:
You will be introduced in this course to the philosophical (and academic) discipline of ethics with a special emphasis on questions of political morality. As currently practiced, ethics addresses three sorts of questions. The first sort asks about the status of moral judgments, e.g. judgments about right and wrong, or good and bad. Is it, possible, for moral judgments to be true? Can they be objective? Can they be universal? Questions such as these constitute the branch of ethics known as metaethics. The second branch of ethics, normative moral theory, aims to discover and develop the most general and basic elements of moral thought. For example, two quite different approaches to normative moral theory differ over the old issue about ends justifying means. Consequentialism maintains the right thing to do is whatever will bring about the best consequences. In other words, the ends justify the means. Kantian ethical theory denies this, maintaining that morality is not just about trying to bring about the best consequences. Another approach, virtue ethics, maintains that both consequentialists and Kantians make a fundamental mistake by focusing initially on what makes acts obligatory, permissible, or impermissible. Instead advocates of virtue theory maintain that before considering acts we need to ask what we as human beings ought to be like—what sort of character we ought to have. In other words, we need to know what we should be before we can know what we should do. The final area of ethics, practical or applied ethics, is less abstract than the other two, focusing on particular practices or moral problems trying to figure out what moral judgments it is reasonable to make about those practices or problems. Examples would include debates about abortion, euthanasia, and just wars. All three areas of ethics will be considered during the semester, but much of our focus will be on the application of normative moral theory to the political realm.

Readings:
All of the readings on the syllabus are from the required textbooks:
Cahn & Markie, Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues, 5th ed. [C], and
Sandel, Justice [S].

Requirements and Grading:

1. Assignments on the Readings (10%):
There are twenty-four days during the semester for which new readings are assigned. For at least fifteen of these days, you are to complete a short (about one page and no more than two) written assignment. For some of these days, I will provide specific question(s) I would like you to address. For days I do not provide
specific questions, you should articulate and develop one question that you think would be a good one to raise about some aspect of the reading. These assignments must be completed by the beginning of class. A hard copy could be brought to class, but it would be much better to send me a copy electronically as an email attachment. (Please name the attached document "(your last name) on (the authors name)." These will be assessed as being satisfactory or unsatisfactory and will constitute 10% of your final grade. For full credit you must complete fifteen of the assignments satisfactorily. Late reactions will not be accepted.

2. Short Papers (80%):
There will be four short (5-7) page papers tentatively due at the beginning of class on October 2, October 23, November 20, and December 11. The first paper must be rewritten taking account of the comments. The first draft of that paper will be returned with comments but no grade. The final draft will be graded both on its quality and the quality of its response to comments. The second and third papers may be rewritten and resubmitted up until one week after the day they are returned to the class in an attempt to improve the grade. The rewritten paper can improve the grade on the paper no more than one full letter grade (e.g. from B- to A-). The fourth paper may not be rewritten for an improved grade. Late papers will be accepted up until one week after the due date, but they will be penalized one grade (e.g. from A to A-) for each two days they are late (e.g. from A to A- on the first day late and from A to B+ on the third day they are late).

Note: To receive credit for the course all four papers must be completed.

3. Take-Home Exam (10%):
There will be a take-home final exam due by 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, December 15. It will be based on the topics covered during the last two weeks of the semester. Late exams will be accepted until 12:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 18, but will be penalized one grade for each day late.

4. Class participation will be considered and can either raise or lower the final grade by one grade (e.g. from B+ to A-). At a minimum, you are expected to attend class regularly.

Academic Integrity: I follow the College’s policies on academic integrity.

Summary of Paper and Exam Due Dates:

October 2—First Paper
October 23—Second Paper
November 20—Third Paper
December 11—Fourth Paper
December 15—Take-Home Final Exam
Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings

I. Introduction  

II. Example of a Substantive Moral Argument—Abortion  
Warren, 828-38 [C]  
Marquis, 838-48 [C]  

III. Can Morality be Objective and/or Universal (Metaethics), and Can it Influence How We Behave?  

A. Relativism & Subjectivism  
Rachels, 747-54 [C]  
Mackie, 540-50 [C]  

B. Psychological Egoism  
Plato, 65-72 [C]  
Feinberg, 584-91 [C]  

IV. Utilitarianism (Consequentialism)  
Singer, 873-80 [C]  
Bentham, 353-61 [C]  

First Paper Due  

Mill, Ch. I-IV, 362-83 [C]  
Focus primarily on Chapter II  

Williams, 657-73 [C]  
Mill, Ch. V, 383-96 [C]  

V. Kantian Ethics  
Regan, 893-907 [C]  
Kant, 313-22 [C]  
Kant, 322-41 [C]  
Kant, 341-52 [C]  
Foot, 606-12 [C]  

VI. Liberty and Rights
Feinberg, 673-83 [C]  
*Second Paper Due*  
Oct. 23

Nozick, 60-73 [S]  
Oct. 30

VII. Rawls’s Theory of Justice  
Rawls, 203-221 [S]  
Nov. 1

Rawls 223-226 [S]  
Rawls 567-70 [C]  
Nov. 6

Nozick, 226-235 [S]  
Nov. 8

VIII. Aristotle and Virtues  
Aristotle, Books I & II, 124-40 [C]  
Nov. 13

Aristotle, 264-295 [S]  
- Recommended: Nussbaum, 704-723 [C]  
Nov. 15

IX. Community  
MacIntyre, 315-328 [S]  
*Third Paper Due*  
Nov. 20

Sandel, 328-334 [S]  
Nov. 27

X. Rawls’s Theory of Justice Revised  
Rawls, 343-358 [S]  
Nov. 29

Sandel, 359-377 [S]  
Dec. 4

XI. Same-Sex Marriage  
*Goodrich v. Department of Public Health*, 379-382 [S]  
Kinsley, 383-384 [S]  
Finnis, 384-392 [S]  
Dec. 6

Macedo, 392-403 [S]  
*Fourth Paper Due*  
Dec. 11

*Take-home Exam Due*  
*Dec. 15 at 12:30 p.m.*