INTRODUCTORY NOTES

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY

The word _philosophy_ is Greek, for lover of wisdom: lover (philo) and wisdom (soph). But although philosophy originally meant lover of wisdom, it has always mostly been the discipline of questioning and critique, and so **philosophy is questioning**. Philosophy is questioning or clarifying the limits & basic tenets of a subject

At its origins, in Ancient Greece, philosophy was the field or subject of all theoretical knowledge. This was so, even into the Middle Ages. Philosophy had 6 main branches, aesthetics (theory of beauty & art), ethics, natural philosophy (now hard sciences) cosmology (now astronomy & most advanced theoretical physics) and metaphysics (still just metaphysics) and logic.
But beginning in the Renaissance (15th century), fields of knowledge began separating from philosophy, becoming disciplines on their own
Today, fields of knowledge (_at universities_) are broadly divided into Sciences, Social Sciences, & Humanities; and philosophy is now just a sub-field of the humanities. But there are a couple of holdovers from the early supremacy of philosophy:
All highest degrees of learning are Doctors of Philosophy (PhD). (except medicine, MD)
Studying the basis of a subject is still philosophy of that subject, for example; philosophy of art, philosophy of physics, philosophy of economics, etc.

WHAT IS ETHICS (MORALITY)?

Ethics is and always has been a branch of philosophy.
ETHICS is defined as**: Standards that distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad**

There are 3 branches of ethics:
APPLIED ETHICS
Applied Ethics studies ethical dilemmas, issues, and questions as they arise in various practical or professional contexts. Also called _casuistry_, Applied Ethics is what we will be doing in this class, applying ethics to real cases.

NORMATIVE ETHICS
Normative Ethics studies general theories and principles of ethics that can be applied to practical situations. The 7 ethical theories we will use are **normative theories**, or

normative ethics. When you apply Normative Ethics to cases, you are then doing Applied Ethics.

METAETHICS
Meta-Ethics studies the meaning of ethical concepts, theories, and principles. When you study the meaning of ethical concepts, you question the meaning and the limitations of those concepts. You can even question if there can be a good or complete ethical theory at all.

It is important to realize that **ethics is not a science**. We have no one agreement about which ethical theory fits best. As a branch of philosophy, a highlight of ethical analysis is the use of **logic to make our ethical views clearer in our own minds**, and to **have a strong voice** when we need to communicate important ethical considerations. It is also a way for you to learn to question some of the values you were taught, so that you can make your own informed ethical decisions. **These are the skills this course is meant to provide**.

WHAT ETHICS IS NOT

ETHICS IS CLOSELY RELATED TO LAW
Laws are standards of conduct enforced by power of government

Laws usually reflect many of the moral values of society.
For example, our society values honesty, so fraud is illegal.
Laws give us what a society holds as necessary rules of ethical conduct.
For example, we hold that murder, rape, etc. are wrong. We all believe these actions are intolerable behaviors. We believe that it is necessary to our society that these acts not be allowed, and our laws reflect this belief. The important point here is necessary rules; rules that we feel are ethically essential.
Laws can even change moral values of a society.
> EXAMPLE: only a few decades ago, smoking was allowed everywhere. Nobody thought this was morally wrong. People even smoked in hospitals! But laws were enacted banning smoking, and now we believe smoking in public is a bad thing to do, not just because it is illegal, but because we think it is wrong. Our laws banning smoking changed the way we view this behavior.

LAWS, HOWEVER, ARE NOT ETHICS.
Often, rules of law are a minimum of ethical conduct.
For example, we believe that identity theft is morally wrong but our laws controlling identity theft and protecting those who suffer identity theft are minimal.
Laws rarely go beyond the minimum, especially when laws pertain to business, and most especially when laws pertain to technology.
Technology is cutting edge, always developing much faster than governments can write and pass laws

Technology is always many steps ahead of what lawmakers know about technology. (Lawmakers are not usually tech savvy).

Because of these factors, our laws give us minimum protection from those who use technology unethically.

Of course, spamming and identity theft are 2 very obvious examples of how laws lag behind what we know to be ethical.

Some actions may be legal but unethical
40 years ago in my home state of Louisiana there was a law banning any person with 1/12 African American ancestry from attending so-called white public schools. This ban was legal but unethical.

Some actions may be ethical but illegal.
In the 1920s, one of my cousins, half African American, went to a white school. Everyone in my hometown knew who her dad was (black sharecropper) but she looked white and everyone in my hometown (teachers, etc.) did something illegal. They did not tell authorities about this girl who should be banned. What these townspeople did was very ethical, but illegal. Our laws do not always measure up to what we know in our hearts to be the right thing to do.

ETHICS IS NOT SOCIAL CODE
Here in the Bay Area we live alongside people from every race, country, and religion. We learn tolerance and we value tolerance. We belief that we should try to understand people from other cultures. We should not be too quick to morally judge other cultures. This tolerance is important and ethical, but just because we should not be too quick to judge others, this should not mean that there is no universal ethics, an ethics of all humanity.

ETHICAL RELATIVISM wrongly claims that Ethics is mere social convention or custom.
Ethical Relativism claims that ethical standards are relative to particular societies or cultures.

ETHICS IS NOT MERE SOCIAL CONVENTION OR CUSTOM.
Relativism does not allow for a global human culture.
What we have her in the Bay Area is as close as mankind has gotten to a global human culture. Our understanding and acceptance of all people of the Earth is a great ethical value that we hope will come to everyone. But if ethical relativism is correct, then our belief that we should try to understand everyone is **not** a value the whole world should share. It is merely a value of our culture. The point is that we value tolerance of all cultures, but then must we also agree that a culture that is intolerant is just as moral as a culture that is tolerant? According to relativism, yes, intolerance is just as good as tolerance. But then relativism does not seem to make much sense, for since most cultures do not hold to ethical relativism, then who gets to decide that ethical relativism is correct?

Furthermore, ethical relativism fails to see that indeed there is a global human culture.
There are values that all human societies share, such as protecting children, sanctity of human life, caring about others, and making our world better. These values vary to some degree for different cultures, but they are nonetheless basically held values of all human societies.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE. When I speak of cultures or societies, I am referring to geographical communities, and religious communities. Governments that run geographical communities can be very unethical and can force policies on communities that the people do not agree with.

Relativism does not allow for ethical progress.
For example, a culture that accepts slavery and child prostitution would be okay because it is accepted there. We could not say some things are wrong and need to be changed, because those things are okay as long as they are accepted by a culture.

Relativism does not allow for criticism of your own culture and the ethical practices of your culture.

According to relativism, all of the rebels of the world who change things for the better in their society have no good reason to do so. According to relativism, there is no _better_. According to relativism, there is no criteria for better or worse.

ETHICS IS NOT PROFESSIONAL CODE
Here in the U.S. almost every profession now has a Professional Code of Ethics

Not all rules of a professional code are moral rules
Sometimes the rules in professional codes are just expediencies, designed to turn best profit.
Some rules of professional codes might prove unethical in some circumstances
Medical ethics is a good example here. Physicians Code of Ethics, the oldest code that exists, called the Hippocratic Oath, states:
To please no one will I prescribe a deadly drug nor give advice which may cause his death. Nor will I give a woman a pesary to procure abortion. There is debate whether abortion is ethical when it means saving the life of the mother. Also, deadly drugs can mean helping ease the pain of a dying cancer patient in his last seconds and this might be a circumstance where the code is not always ethical.

So, be aware, **ethics is not the same as laws**, social beliefs, or professional codes. Instead, ethics is the basis for laws, social beliefs, and professional codes. Sometimes the laws, social beliefs & professional codes do not stand up to what we know to be ethical. **We use ethics to argue for changes to laws**, changes to social beliefs, and changes to professional codes. Do not use laws to justify your ethical claims about a case. I mean, do not claim that something is ethical as stated by the Constitution. Do not claim something is ethical because a law says it is. In ethics you are required to prove that the law is ethical by explaining the ethics. You cannot prove the ethics by appealing to a law.

As we apply different ethical theories, some will be clearly a good fit for certain cases, some will not. For the most part, one uses the logic of the theory, applying it to the case. This is fairly objective. Do not assume that casuistry is like normative ethics or metaethics. Applied ethics is not like the rest of philosophy, a field of dispute and relative judgment. Dispute factors in choosing which theory fits best for a case where you compare different theories. Applying one single theory is usually much more straightforward than that. You just need to sound ethical, humane, and not like a business egoist or like any kind of egoist.
But you will often find me recommending you use Justice theory, because Justice theory allows for more distinctions & comparisons than other theories. Indeed, it is the theory of fair comparisons.