

Ethics 125-01

Fall 2011

PROFESSOR

Martin Gunderson

Office: Old Main 112

Office Hours: Wednesday, Friday 1:10-2:10, Monday 4:40-5:40, and
by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Moral beliefs and moral arguments are ubiquitous. All of us have significant moral commitments, though they are sometimes not explicitly stated. In addition, many of us wrestle with moral puzzles and dilemmas that are difficult to resolve. This course considers whether it is possible to give solid justifications for our moral beliefs and to answer moral questions in a reasoned way. The view that it is not possible to do this is moral skepticism, and the course can be viewed, in part, as an attempt to overcome moral skepticism. We will also ask whether there are moral principles or values that apply universally. This will involve examining arguments for and against different sorts of moral relativism. Along the way we take up a variety of specific moral issues including abortion, famine relief, animal rights and euthanasia. We will also consider works in the history of moral philosophy by Aristotle, Kant, Bentham and Mill.

TEXT

Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, eds., *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, 4th edition. (With the exception of Vaughn's book, the readings listed below are from Cahn and Markie.)

Lewis Vaughn, *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays* (Oxford University Press 2006).

CLASS SCHEDULE

9-7: Introduction

9-9: Approaches to Ethics

Thomson, "The Trolley Problem" (Sec. 59)
Vaughn, Chapters 1-4 [No need to brief this reading]

9-12: Writing Philosophy [No need to brief readings]

Vaughn, Chapters 5-8
Gunderson, "Writing Philosophy"

9-14: Doing and Allowing

Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia," (Sec. 48)
Foot, "'Killing and Letting Die,'" (Sec. 49)

9-16: No Class: Gunderson is out of Town

9-19: Rights and Duties

Feinberg, "The Nature and Value of Rights" (Sec. 33)

9-21: Rights and Animals

Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights," (Sec. 52)
Cohen, "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research"
(Sec. 53)

9-23: The Duty to Relieve Suffering

Singer, "Famine and Affluence" (Sec. 50)
Arthur, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code" (Sec. 51)

9-26: Utilitarianism

Brandt, "Some Merits of One Form of Rule Utilitarianism" (Sec. 31)

9-28: Mill's Hedonism

Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 1 and 2 (Sec. 12)

9-30: Mill's Sanction Theory

Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 3 and 4 (Sec. 12)

10-3: Mill on Justice

Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 5 (Sec. 12)

10-5: Bentham's Hedonism

Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*,
Selections (Sec. 11)

10-7: Critique of Utilitarianism

Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" (Sec. 32)

10-10: Kantian Ethics

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface and Section I
(Sec. 10)

10-12: Kant's Categorical Imperative

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section II (Sec. 10)

10-14: Kant's Categorical Imperative Continued

Onora O'Neill, "Consistency in Action," (Sec. 29)

10-17: Kant on the Concept of Freedom

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface and Section
III (Sec. 10)

10-19: Critique of Kantian Ethics

Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" (Sec. 28)

10-21: Mid-Term Test

10-24: Aristotle on the Highest Good

Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I, (Sec. 2)

FIRST PAPER DUE

10-26: Aristotle on Moral Virtue

Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book II (Sec. 2)

10-28: NO CLASS (FALL BREAK)

10-31: Aristotle on Voluntary Action

Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book III (Sec. 2)

11-2: Aristotle on Courage

Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book III (Sec. 2)

11-4: Discussion of Virtues Continued

11-7: Aristotle on Pleasure

Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics*, Books VII and X (Sec. 2)

11-9: Aristotle on Friendship

Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics*, Books VIII and IX (Sec. 2)

11-11: A Recent Aristotelian Approach

Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach"
(Sec. 40)

11-14: Virtue Ethics and Duty

Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion" (Sec. 47)

11-16: Moral Relativism and Skepticism

Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism," (Sec. 39)

11-18: Moral Skepticism

Mackie, "Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong," (Sec. 24)

11-21: Skepticism and Moral Facts

Harman, "The Nature of Morality," selection (Sec. 34)

SECOND PAPER DUE

11-23: Naturalism and Moral Facts

Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations" (Sec. 35)

11-25: NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING BREAK)

11-28: Abortion: Defense of Choice

Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," (Sec. 44)

11-30: Abortion: Defense of Choice

Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," (Sec. 45)

12-2: Abortion: Defense of Fetal Life

Marquis, "An Argument that Abortion Is Wrong," (Sec. 46)

12-5: Environmental Ethics

Sober, "Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism" (Sec. 54)

12-7: Environmental Ethics Continued

12-9: The Meaning of Life

Richard Taylor, "The Meaning of Life," (Sec. 61)

12-12: Second Test

ASSIGNMENTS and GRADES

First Test 10% of Grade

Second Test 10% of Grade

Reading Briefs

10% of Grade

Reading briefs must be turned in at or before the start of class. The brief should state a major issue addressed by the reading and the thesis of the reading that addresses that issue. Note that the reading may address several theses. Choose the one you think is most important. The brief should also note the main reasons given in support of the thesis. The briefs can be very short. They are not mini-papers and should never be more than a page. The briefs will be graded "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory." The ultimate letter grade depends on the percentage of possible briefs satisfactorily completed.

First Paper

(Due 10-24)

30% of Grade

The papers can be on any topic related to ethics, broadly construed. The papers should be about 6-8 pages long, but cannot exceed 3,000 words. All papers will be graded on organization, mechanics such as grammar, and clarity, as well as content.

Second Paper

(Due 11-21)

30% of Grade

Revised Paper

(Due 12-15)

10% of Grade

One of your earlier papers should be revised in light of my comments. Include a cover memo saying how you revised your paper. The grade for the revised paper will be based primarily on the quality of your revisions. Thus, a paper that initially received an "A" may receive a lower grade as a revised paper.

Class Participation

Class participation can affect your final grade by one grade point. Thus, a student who earns a "B" on written work could receive a "B+" or a "B-" depending on class participation. To receive a positive grade for class participation you must make regular contributions that reflect knowledge of the assigned reading. In addition, your comments should advance the class discussion. It is important that your comments in class not dominate or stifle the discussion. I will also call on students from time to time.

SOME POLICIES

Students who want an incomplete must petition for the incomplete in writing. The petition must include an incomplete form with your signature and suggested dates for completion of the work.

Grades for papers will be reduced by one grade point for each day they are late.

I am committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please meet with the Associate Dean of Students, Lisa Landreman, who will serve as the coordinator for services for students with disabilities. It is important to meet with her at the beginning of the semester to ensure that your accommodations are approved and in place to begin the semester successfully. The Associate Dean can be reached in the Office of Student Affairs, 119 Weyerhaeuser, by phone at 651-696-6220, or email llandrem@macalester.edu.