



**Ethics**  
SPRING 2010

PHIL 125  
MWF 9:40-10:40

Professor Diane Michelfelder  
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Office hours: Wed. 3:30-4:30, Friday 10:45-11:45  
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### **Course Description**

In this course we are going to immerse ourselves in reading and reflecting about moral philosophy, the branch of philosophy that concerns itself with human reasoning, doing, and being in relationship to matters of good and evil, right and wrong. We will begin by considering the debate over moral relativism: Can moral judgments be right or wrong independent of individual or cultural perspectives? We will go on to take a close examination of three approaches to normative ethical theory that have played a key role in the development of ethics within the Western philosophical tradition: virtue-based ethics (as represented by Aristotle), consequentialism (as represented by Bentham and Mill), and deontological ethics (as represented by Kant). As we explore these theories, our aperture for reflection will expand beyond the history of moral philosophy to include contemporary responses to and criticisms of these theories. In the last part of the class, we will expand this aperture even further to look at how well these three theoretical approaches can offer guidance in dealing with a select few, but nonetheless pressing, problems of contemporary life. For Spring 2010, these problems will include animal rights, the environment, and our obligations to help those who are much less well off than ourselves.

## Learning goals

You'll find the learning goals for this course are organized around three themes: substance, skills, and self-awareness.

With respect to substance, this course is designed to help you acquire a critical understanding of: (a) the three major traditions within normative ethical theory: virtue ethics, consequentialism, and deontological ethics; (b) the relationship of these views to concepts of the good life; and (c) the promise and challenges of depending on these traditions to inform ethical decision-making on contemporary issues.

The design of this course is also intended to give you a way of developing key skills associated with philosophy in particular and the liberal arts in general. By the end of this semester, you should be better able to read, analyze, and evaluate difficult philosophical writing with an inquisitive and thoughtful mind. Because this course is approved to satisfy Macalester's graduation writing requirement, you will also be able to practice and improve your ability to construct your own philosophical positions and express and defend them in written form.

Self-awareness as a philosophical learning goal has its roots in Socrates' dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living." I hope this course will expand your own capacities for (a) moral reasoning; (b) ethical action (as per the college's *Statement of Purpose and Belief*) (c) understanding the assumptions and predispositions you bring to the consideration of ethical questions; and (d) respecting well-reasoned ethical views, even when these views may be at odds with the ones you share.

## Required Texts

Most reading selections will be taken from the textbook: **Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues, 4th edition**, edited by Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie, Oxford University Press, 2006. Other reading selections will be put on e-reserve in the library.

## Academic Integrity

In reviewing your work, I will adhere to the College's *Academic Integrity Policy* as published in the *Student Handbook*.

Through the gift of your attention, you also help support the integrity of the academic environment. For your own sake and for the sake of others when we are in class together please refrain from texting, tweeting, and the like.

## Coursework

For this course, you will be asked to produce a set of ten brief (1-2 page) response papers, as well as to write three longer philosophical papers. There will also be a midterm and a final exam. The final will not be comprehensive.

Your response papers will be the “R” in a “Q&R” format, where the “Q” is a question that emerges in class as a result of our discussing the assigned reading. The focus of these papers will vary depending on the question that emerges. You may be asked to clarify a point raised in class, explain an argument, or develop an argument of your own. The purpose of these papers is to give you practice in philosophical thinking and writing. Papers must be submitted electronically and will be due before the beginning of the next class period. In order to receive full credit for this part of the course, you must submit ten papers that receive a “satisfactory” evaluation. *Late response papers will not be accepted.*

Each of the longer papers will ask you to present and defend your own view related to an issue connected to one of the readings for the course. Topics for the first two papers, 6-8 pages long, will be drawn from our readings in ethical theory. The third paper, 8-10 pages long, will be connected to the “contemporary problems” readings on the syllabus. Guidelines for how to write these papers, as well as a list of suggested topics, will be distributed in class.

I will return your first paper to you with comments but without a grade. My comments will address how well you develop the philosophical content of your paper as well as how well you present this content in written form. You will then need to revise your paper and turn in a second draft. Based on the comments you receive on your second and third paper, you may elect to revise and resubmit these papers to improve your grade. If you choose to revise and submit your second and/or third paper, the second draft will be due no later than one week after the paper is returned to you.

*Unexcused first paper first and second drafts, and unexcused second and third papers, will be accepted up to one week after the due date, but you will lose half a grade (e.g. A- to B+) on the first day your paper is later, and every two days thereafter. Unexcused second and third papers may also not be resubmitted for an improved grade.*

Late papers will be accepted without penalty if (a) you let me know in advance your paper will be late; and (b) you have a reason that is acceptable and confirmed in writing, either from a physician, Health Services, or the Dean of Students’ Office.

The midterm and the final will comprise short-answer and essay questions. The final will be held during finals week at the time listed in the college’s exam schedule.

## Coursework evaluation

Your final grade for this class will be based on the following percentages:

Set of response papers	10%
First paper	20%
Second paper	20%
Third paper	20%
Midterm	15%
Final	15%

I encourage you to participate in class through raising questions, taking part in discussions, etc. In this context, it is not how often you speak but what you say that matters. Class participation can improve or detract from your grade by one-half (eg from A- to A or B+).

## Schedule of Topics, Readings, Exams, and Paper Due Dates

**Please come to each class meeting prepared to talk about the reading assignment for that particular day. This schedule may change at the discretion of the instructor.**

### Week One

25 January Welcome and orientation to the course

27 January What questions keep ethicists up at night?

29 January **Moral Relativism**

Richard Brandt, "Ethical Relativism," (on e-reserve)

### Week Two

1 February James Rachels, "The Challenges of Cultural Relativism," pp.696-705

3 February Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Escape from Positivism," from *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (on e-reserve)  
Gordon Graham, "Tolerance, Pluralism, and Relativism" (on e-reserve)

5 February No class meeting today—I will be giving a talk at Lafayette College

### Week Three

#### **Virtue ethics: Aristotle**

8 February Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, pp. 124-134

10 February Senior Philosophy Day  
Along with students in other philosophy classes, today

we celebrate the life of the mind by attending presentations by our graduating majors of their capstone papers. We will meet at the regularly scheduled class time in the Harmon Room.

12 February Aristotle, Books II, III, V, pp. 134-151

**Week Four**

15 February Aristotle, Books VI & VII, pp.151-161

17 February Aristotle, Book VIII & IX, pp.161-169

19 February Aristotle, Book X, pp.169-177

**First Paper Due**

**Week Five Contemporary interpretations of virtue ethics**

22 February Marcia Baron, "Varieties of Ethics of Virtue" (on e-reserve)

24 February Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion," pp.797-810

26 February Martha Nussbaum, "Non-relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," pp. 704-723

**Week Six Deontological ethics: Kant**

1 March Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface & Section I, pp. 280-289

3 March Kant, Section II, pp.289-308

5 March Kant, above reading, continued  
Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," p.556-561

**Week Seven**

8 March Kant, Section III, pp.308-318

10 March Onora O'Neill, "Consistency in Action," pp.562-579

12 March **MIDTERM**

**Week Eight**

15 March Spring Break

17 March No class this week

19 March Spring Break

<b>Week Nine</b>	<b>Consequentialist or utilitarian ethics: Bentham and Mill</b>
22 March	Jeremy Bentham, <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> , pp.319-327
24 March	John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Chapters I-IV, pp. 327-348
26 March	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Chapter V, pp. 348-361 <b>Second Paper Due</b>
<b>Week Ten</b>	<b>Contemporary reflections on utilitarianism</b>
29 March	John Rawls, "A Theory of Justice," pp.515-530
31 March	Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," pp. 606-621
2 April	Good Friday—no class meeting
<b>Week Eleven</b>	<b>Contemporary moral problems: animal rights</b>
5 April	Joel Feinberg, "The Nature and Value of Rights," pp.622-632
7 April	Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights," pp.841-848 Carl Cohen, "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research," pp.849-855
9 April	Peter Singer, "Not for Humans Only" (on e-reserve)
<b>Week Twelve</b>	<b>Contemporary moral problems: the environment and climate change</b>
12 April	No class meeting-- I will be at the ETICA and ETHICOMP meetings at the University of Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain <b>Readings for this week:</b>  Laura Westra, "Virtue Ethics as Foundational for a Global Ethic," (on e-reserve) Mitchell Thomashow, "A Place-Based Perceptual Ecology," from <i>Bringing the Biosphere Home</i> (on e-reserve) Simon Dietz, Cameron Hepburn, and Nicholas Stern, "Economics, ethics, and climate change" (on e-reserve)
14 April	No class meeting
16 April	No class meeting
18 April	Make-up class meeting 1-4 pm location TBA
<b>Week Thirteen</b>	<b>Contemporary moral problems: feeding the poor</b>
19 April	Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," pp. 821-828

- 21 April John Arthur, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code," pp.829-840
- 23 April Peter Singer, "One Community," from *One World* (on e-reserve)
- Week Fourteen Challenges to traditional normative theory**
- 26 April Virginia Held, "Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory," pp.724-739
- 28 April Dale Jamieson, "Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming" (on e-reserve)
- 30 April Selection from Wendell Wallach and Collin Allen, *Moral Machines: Teaching Robots Right from Wrong* (on e-reserve)  
**Third paper due**
- Week Fifteen**
- 3 May End of semester course wrap-up
- 6 May **Final exam,** 8:00 AM to 10:00 AM