Philosophy 121
Ethics
Fall 2015

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Office Hours: Tuesday 11:15-12:15,
Thursday 8:30-9:20 and by appointment.

Course Description:
You will be introduced in this course to the philosophical (and academic)
discipline of ethics. 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 most of our focus
will be on questions in metaethics and normative moral theory.

Readings:
All of the readings on the syllabus are from the required textbook, Cahn &
Markie, Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues, 5th ed., but I may
supplement these with readings available on the web as we go along.

Requirements and Grading:

1. Reactions to Readings (10%):
There are twenty-six 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 author’s 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 (75%)**:  
   There will be three papers tentatively due on October 6, November 12, and December 10. The first paper will constitute 20% of your final grade, the second 25%, and the third 30%.
   
   a) The first paper should be between 5 and 7 pages and will be written in two drafts. The first draft of the 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.
   
   b) The second paper (also 5-7 pages) may be rewritten and resubmitted up until one week after it is returned 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–).
   
   c) The third paper (7-10 pages) 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 the first day they are late and an additional grade for each additional 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 three papers must be completed.

3. **Take-Home Exam (15%)**:  
   There will be a take-home final exam due by 3:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 17. It will be based on the topics covered during the last two or three weeks of the semester. *Late exams will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on Monday, December 21, 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 6—First Paper
- November 12—Second Paper
- December 10—Third Paper
- December 17—Take-Home Final Exam
Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings

I. Introduction Sept. 3

II. Example of a Substantive Moral Argument--Abortion Sept. 8
Warren, 828-38 Sept. 10
Marquis, 838-48

III. Normative Moral Theory

A. Utilitarianism (Consequentialism) Sept. 15
Singer, 873-80
Bentham, 353-61

Mill, Ch. I-IV, 362-83 Sept. 17
  • Focus primarily on Chapter II

Williams, 657-73 Sept. 22

Mill, Ch. V, 383-96 Sept. 24
Brandt, 639-56

B. Kantian Ethics (Deontology) Sept. 29
Singer, “All Animals are Equal” (PDF will be provided)
Regan, 893-900

Kant, 313-22 Oct. 1

Kant, 322-41 Oct. 6
First Paper is due

Kant, 341-52 Oct. 8

Herman, 592-606 Oct. 13

Hume, 276-85 Oct. 15
Foot, 606-12

C. Virtue Theory Oct. 20
Anscombe, 527-39
Hursthouse, 849-62

Aristotle, Books I & II, 124-140 Oct. 27

Nussbaum, 755-74 Oct. 29
D. Contractarianism
   Hobbes, Chapters XI, XIII, & IV 238-42
   Rawls, 551-73
   Nov. 3
   Nov. 5

E. Another Substantive Moral Argument
   Topic and reading to be determined
   Nov. 10

IV. Can Morality be Objective and/or Universal (Metaethics)

A. Relativism
   Rachels, 747-54
   *Second Paper is Due*
   Nov. 12

B. Naturalism and Intuitionism
   Moore, 459-65
   Nov. 17

C. Expressivism (aka Noncognitivism)
   Ayer, 485-91
   *Recommended: Stevenson, 491-501*
   Nov. 19

D. Error Theory
   Mackie, 540-50
   Nov. 24

E. Moral Properties and Explanation
   Harman, 684-94
   Dec. 1
   Sturgeon, 695-710
   Dec. 3

V. Challenges to Morality
   Plato, 65-72
   Feinberg, 584-91
   Dec. 8
   Wolf, 790-802
   Dec. 10

   *Third Paper Due*
   Dec. 10

   *Take-home Exam Due*
   Dec. 17 at 3:30 p.m.