

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	
Warren, 828-38	Sept. 8
Marquis, 838-48	Sept. 10
III. Normative Moral Theory	
A. Utilitarianism (Consequentialism)	
Singer, 873-80	
Bentham, 353-61	Sept. 15
Mill, Ch. I-IV, 362-83	
• Focus primarily on Chapter II	Sept. 17
Williams, 657-73	Sept. 22
Mill, Ch. V, 383-96	
Brandt , 639-56	Sept. 24
B. Kantian Ethics (Deontology)	
Singer, "All Animals are Equal" (PDF will be provided)	
Regan, 893-900	Sept. 29
Kant, 313-22	Oct. 1
Kant, 322-41	
<i>First Paper is due</i>	Oct. 6
Kant, 341-52	Oct. 8
Herman, 592-606	Oct.13
Hume, 276-85	
Foot, 606-12	Oct. 15
C. Virtue Theory	
Anscombe,527-39	
Hursthouse, 849-62	Oct. 20
Aristotle, Books I & II, 124-140	Oct. 27
Nussbaum, 755-74	Oct. 29

D. Contractarianism	
Hobbes, Chapters XI, XIII, & IV 238-42	Nov. 3
Rawls, 551-73	Nov 5
E. Another Substantive Moral Argumen	
Topic and reading to be determined	Nov. 10
IV. Can Morality be Objective and/or Universal (Metaethics)	
A. Relativism	
Rachels, 747-54	
<i>Second Paper is Due</i>	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
<i>Third Paper Due</i>	Dec. 10
<i>Take-home Exam Due</i>	Dec. 17 at 3:30 p.m.