

Introduction to Ethics
Philosophy 2320 – 004
Fall 2009
M,W,F 10:00-10:50
Eng/Phil 153

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Office Hours: T,TH 10:00-11:00

Course Syllabus¹

“We do not investigate virtue in order to know what it is, but in order to become good, since it would not be worthwhile otherwise.”
– Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Course Description

In this course we will learn to think about ethics. Morality is something that many people think about a lot. But philosophers think about ethics in a special way. What most interests philosophers are the theories behind our moral beliefs. Philosophers ask questions like: What reasons do I have for behaving morally? What do ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ mean? In this course we will learn to ask these questions, as well as learn what sorts of answers these questions have.

The class is divided into five units. The first unit is a short introduction to how philosophy is done, and will include a primer on the topics we’ll discuss during the semester. The last unit is a recap of the topics we’ll have discussed, with an emphasis on how these topics relate to each other.

The middle three units will be about the dominant moral theories in the Western philosophical tradition. We will investigate the moral theories of three of philosophy’s most influential ethicists: Aristotle, Kant, and Mill. Each unit will begin by reading the primary texts of these authors, which we will supplement with articles by contemporary philosophers. We will end each unit by reading critiques of these theories.

In each of these units, we will be concerned with answering a specific set of questions. Among these are: Who or what makes an action right or wrong? What is the proper subject of a moral theory? Why should we act morally? In comparing each theory’s answers to these questions, we should develop a more thorough understanding of each theory and of the history of ethics more generally.

Expected Learning Outcomes

- Students will develop critical thinking skills, by, *inter alia*, recognizing and questioning assumptions, and recognizing and producing sound arguments.
- Students will develop their writing skills, by learning to write clear and concise defenses and critiques of philosophical positions.
- Students will develop their reading skills, by engaging with difficult texts from a variety of times and cultures.
- Students will become familiar with the history behind the ideas influencing their ethical beliefs and the beliefs of others.
- Students will learn the ethical theories proposed by Aristotle, Mill, and Kant, as well as modern variants thereof.

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Course Requirements

Philosophy is not the sort of thing you can learn passively. Student participation is absolutely requisite for a successful course. This means that all students *must* have completed the day's readings before class, and *must* participate in class discussion. This also means coming to class regularly. Attendance is not part of the total grade, but your grade *will be lower* if you do not have regular attendance.

For most of our sessions I've assigned two sources: a few pages of primary material (where the idea we're discussing was presented for the first time), and a supplementary article or book chapter (available on Blackboard). The point of assigning two readings is that you'll be exposed to the original work *and* to a modern update. The primary texts are difficult, both because of the ideas involved and because of cultural and linguistic differences. It's important to read these sources, but because they're difficult to understand, having a contemporary presentation of the idea will make it easier to comprehend. Between the readings, discussion, and lecture, you should be able to find one way of thinking about things that makes sense to you.

Methods of Assessment and Grading

Weekly quizzes will be used to demonstrate knowledge of the material covered in the readings. The questions will be mostly short answer questions, like: What does Aristotle mean by X? What is an example of X in Kant's theory? What is the difference between X and Y in Mill? The combined total for the 10 quizzes will count for 30% of the total grade.

Exams will be used to demonstrate an ability to philosophize, by thinking critically and expressing those thoughts clearly in writing. I will distribute possible exam topics in advance; you choose one and write a two to five page paper on it. We will discuss my expectations before the first exam is distributed. Each of three exams will count for 15% of the total grade, for a total of 45%.

The final exam will be only slightly different than regular exams. I will provide the topics a few weeks before finals are due; choose one and write a five to eight page paper. More details will be provided in class as the final exam draws nigh. The final exam will count for 15% of the total grade.

There will also be a 10% participation grade. Come to class and talk and you'll get the points (see *Course Requirements*). Fail to do either of these things and you won't get the points. Three unexcused absences will be allowed without penalty; each additional absence will deduct 1% from your participation grade.

There will be extra credit available, in the following forms only:

- 1) Those who request extra credit opportunities will be given an article in ethics by a prominent contemporary philosopher. Write a one page summary and critique of the article. What is the author's main point? What argument does the author use to make that point? Do you find that argument persuasive?
- 2) During the semester there will be several invited speakers giving lectures on philosophical topics. Attend the lecture and write a one page summary and critique.

Grades are distributed according to the following rubric:

- A = 90-100: *exceeds* expectations with regard to material and execution
- B = 80-89 : *meets* expectations with regard to material and execution
- C = 70-79 : *fails* to meet expectations with regard to either material *or* execution
- D = 60-69 : *fails* to meet expectations with regard to *both* material *and* execution
- F = ≤ 59 : assignment not completed; prompt not addressed; assignment not submitted

Reading Assignments

Texts

- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*
- Mill, J.S. *Utilitarianism*

Articles and Excerpts (On Blackboard)

- Woods, Michael (1982), *Aristotle's Eudemian Ethics, Books I, II, and VII* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Irwin, T.H. (1999) "Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon" in *Aristotle's Ethics: Critical Essays*, Nancy Sherman (ed.) (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 1-34
- Hursthouse, Rosalind (1999) *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford UP)
- Swanton, Christine (2001) "A Virtue Ethical Account of Right Action", *Ethics* 112: 32-52
- Williams, Bernard (1995) "Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts", in *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, Robert Heineman (ed.), (Boulder, CO: Westview Press), 13-23
- Broadie, Sarah (1991) *Ethics with Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford UP)
- Annas, Julia (1995) *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford UP)
- Louden, Robert (1984) "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21: 227-236
- Solomon, David (1988) "Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13:428-441
- Johnson, Robert (2009) "Good Will and the Moral Worth of Acting from Duty" in *The Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics*, Thomas E. Hill Jr (ed), (Oxford:Wiley-Blackwell), 19-52
- Baron, Marcia (1995) *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP)
- Korsgaard, Christine (1999) "Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant" *The Journal of Ethics* 3:1-29
- Wood, Allen (2008) *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP)
- Hill, Thomas (1980), "Humanity as an End in Itself", *Ethics* 91: 84-99
- Foot, Philippa (1972) "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" *The Philosophical Review* 81:305-316 (Available on JSTOR)
- Bennett, Jonathan (1974) "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn", *Philosophy* 49:123-134
- Donner, Wendy (2006) "Mill's Theory of Value" in *The Blackwell Guide to Mill's Utilitarianism*, Henry West (ed.), (Oxford:Wiley-Blackwell), 117-138
- Feagin, Susan (1983) "Mill and Edwards on the Higher Pleasures", *Philosophy* 58:244-252
- Pettit, Phillip (1984), "Satisficing Consequentialism", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 58:165-176
- Sidgwick, Henry, (1981:1907) *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett)
- Rawls, John (1955) "Two Concepts of Rules", *The Philosophical Review* 64:3-32
- Singer, Peter (2001) *Animal Liberation* (New York: Harper Perennial)
- Parfit, Derek (1984) *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Nozick, Robert (1974) *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell)
- Driver, Julia (2006) "Virtue Theory" in *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*, James Dreier (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), 113-123
- Shaller, Walter (1990) "Are Virtues No More than Duties to Obey Moral Rules?" *Philosophia* 20:195-207
- Railton, Peter (1988), "How Thinking about Character and Utilitarianism Might Lead to Rethinking the Character of Utilitarianism" in *Facts, Values, and Norms: Essays toward a Morality of Consequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), 226-248

Blackboard

We'll be using Blackboard for this course. The URL is:

<http://reatta.tosm.ttu.edu/webct/logon/6079933159001>

There will be two important functions on Blackboard for our purposes. First, most of our reading assignments are posted as pdf's on Blackboard. Second, you will turn in your exams on Blackboard. Please access the course website and make sure everything works as soon as possible.

Additional Comments

Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me as soon as possible so that accommodations can be made. Students should present appropriate verification from AccessTECH in the Student Counseling Center.

Students committing an incident of cheating, plagiarism, or other failures of academic integrity are in violation of class policy and university policy, and will be treated accordingly. *No such behavior will be tolerated.* Any student violating these policies will receive a failing grade for the course and will be referred to the office of the student's Dean for further disciplinary action. Please ask me if you have *any* questions about what counts as violating academic integrity. Ignorance is not an excuse.

The university's policy may be found at:

<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentjudicialprograms/AcademicIntegrity.htm>

See also the university's statement of ethical principles, "Do the Right Thing" at

<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/communications/ethics.php>

Projected Schedule

<u>Unit 1: Introduction</u>	<u>Reading Assignments</u>	<u>Exam</u>
Aug 27- Syllabus	Ethics Pre-test	
Aug 31- Virtue Ethics	SEP: "Virtue Ethics"	
Sept 2 - Deontology	SEP: "Deontological Ethics"	
Sept 4 - Consequentialism	SEP: "Consequentialism"	Quiz 1
<u>Unit 2: Virtue Ethics</u>	<u>Reading Assignments</u>	<u>Exam</u>
Sept 9 – Supreme Good	-NE Bk. 1 §1-5; Irwin (1999) §1-4, 10	
Sept 11- Eudaimonia	-NE Bk. 1 §7-11,13 Annas (1993), p. 364-376	Quiz 2
Sept. 14- Human Function	-EE Bk 2,§1, NE Bk. 1§7 Hursthouse (1991) p. 202-205, 217-226	
Sept 16 – Doctrine of the Mean	-NE Bk 2, §8-9 Swanton (2001) p.32-45	
Sept 18 – The Virtues	-Williams (1995)	Quiz 3
Sept 21 – Happiness	-NE Bk 10 §6-9 Broadie (1991) Ch 7.5	
Sept 23 – The Best Life	-EE Bk. 8 Broadie (1991) Ch 7.4	
Sept 25 – Happiness continued	Broadie (1991) Ch. 7.7	Quiz 4
Sept 28 – Critique	-Louden (1984)	
Sept 30 – Critique	-Solomon (1988)	
Oct. 5 – Review		Exam 1
<u>Unit 3: Deontology</u>	<u>Reading Assignments</u>	<u>Exam</u>
Oct 5 – The Good Will	- <i>Groundwork</i> I.4:393-396 Johnson (2009) §1-5	
Oct 7 – Duty and Inclination	- <i>Groundwork</i> I.4:397-399 Johnson (2009) §6-7, 9	
Oct 9 – Autonomy	- <i>Groundwork</i> I.4:400-405 Baron (1995) Ch. 2.5	Quiz 5
Oct. 14 – Free Will	- <i>Groundwork</i> II 4:440-445 Korsgaard (1999) §1, 3-5, 7-8	
Oct. 16 – Normativity	- <i>Groundwork</i> II. 4:446-455	Quiz 6
Oct. 19 – Imperatives	- <i>Groundwork</i> II. 4:413-420 Wood (2008) Ch. 4	
Oct. 21 – Imperatives (cont)	- <i>Groundwork</i> II. 4:421-430 Hill (1990), §1-3, 5	Quiz 7
Oct. 23 – Imperatives (cont)	- <i>Groundwork</i> . II. 4:430-439	
Oct. 26 – Critique	-Foot (1972)	
Oct. 28 – Critique	-Bennet (1974)	
Oct. 30 – Review		Exam 2
<u>Unit 4: Consequentialism</u>	<u>Reading Assignments</u>	<u>Exam</u>
Nov. 2 – Hedonism	<i>Utilitarianism</i> Ch. 2 Donner (2006)	
Nov. 4 – Higher and Lower Pleasures	Feagin (1983)	
Nov. 6 – Maximization	Pettit (1984)	Quiz 8
Nov. 9 – Aggregate vs. Individual	Sidgwick (1907) IV.1	
Nov. 11 – Act vs. Rule	Rawls (1955) §3	
Nov. 13 – Who counts?	Singer (1990), p. 1-24	Quiz 9
Nov. 16 – Critique	Parfit (1984) p. 381-390	
Nov. 18 – Critique	Nozick (1974) p. 42-45	
Nov. 20 – Review		Exam 3
<u>Unit 5: Review</u>	<u>Reading Assignments</u>	<u>Exam</u>
Nov. 30 – Virtue Ethics reconsidered	Driver (2006)	
Dec. 2 – Deontology reconsidered	Schaller (1990)	
Dec. 4 – Consequentialism reconsidered	Railton (1988) §1-2,5-7	
Dec. 7, 9 – Review		

Supplemental Resources

Below are philosophy-themed podcasts relevant to the material we'll be covering in class. Several of these podcasts are interviews by quite famous and influential contemporary philosophers. Philosophy, as you will find out is hard, so the more numerous and varied your exposure to the material is, the better your understanding will be. These podcasts are given only a supplemental: they *cannot* be used as replacements for the reading. If you have problems with the individual links, you can find the sites' RSS feeds at <http://www.philclassics.libsyn.com/rss> and <http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/rss>. In addition to these resources, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) has helpful articles on just about every issue in philosophy, written by leading scholars in their respective fields. These articles can be found at <http://plato.stanford.edu>. I would recommend consulting this website if you have trouble with the readings.

Unit 1

Craig on What is Philosophy?

http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=233178

Unit 2

The Classics: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

http://www.philclassics.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=214956#

Irwin on Aristotle's Ethics

http://cdn3.libsyn.com/philosophybites/Terence_Irwin.mp3?nvb=20090505024920&nva=20090506025920&t=085e6a299e4a881d6460f

Burnyeat on Aristotle on Happiness

<http://cdn2.libsyn.com/philosophybites/BurnyeatMixSes.MP3?nvb=20090507202204&nva=20090508203204&t=0dff73aa00a29c0bb740a>

Crisp on Virtue

http://cdn4.libsyn.com/philosophybites/Roger_Crisp_on_the_Virtues.mp3?nvb=20090505025544&nva=20090506030544&t=0454d2571474bbb790892

Unit 3

The Classics: Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

http://www.philclassics.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=261737#

Pink on Free Will

<http://cdn1.libsyn.com/philosophybites/PinkMixSes.mp3?nvb=20090507203007&nva=20090508204007&t=03689687fda82ff94089e>

Unit 4

The Classics: Mill's *Utilitarianism*

http://www.philclassics.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=329602#

Crisp On Utilitarianism

http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=235693

Hurka on Pleasure

http://cdn2.libsyn.com/philosophybites/Thomas_Hurka_on_Pleasure.MP3?nvb=20090505024906&nva=20090506025906&t=0b9ea1f6fb094168d0059

Hooker on Consequentialism

http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=251955