

Introduction to Ethics
Philosophy 2320 – 004
Spring 2010
M,W,F 11:00-11:50
Eng/Phil 153

Jerry Green
jerry.green@ttu.edu
Office: Phil 257
(806)742.0373/333
Office Hours: T,TH 11:00-12:00

Course Syllabus

“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 and Purpose Statement

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 sorts of things are good and bad, and why? What reasons do I have for behaving morally? What do ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ mean? Is there really any such thing? 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 four units. The first three units will cover 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. The first three weeks of each unit will be devoted to understanding the conceptual pieces that each philosopher uses to construct his overall theory. The fourth week of each unit will cover criticisms of the theory. The fourth unit will address some issues that the first three units take for granted, namely the existence of moral facts or properties. We will end the class by asking what reasons we have for believing in the existence of morality at all. Is morality real? If not, can we still explain (and justify) moral behavior?

In each of these units, we will be concerned with answering a specific set of questions. There will be three central questions that we seek to answer for each unit:

- (1) What are we?
- (2) What should we do?
- (3) How does the answer to (1) influence the answer to (2)?

But to answer these questions, we will have to ask many others. 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.

This course satisfies the Texas Tech University core curriculum requirement in humanities. The objective of the humanities in a core curriculum is to expand the student’s knowledge of the human condition and human cultures, especially in relation to behaviors, ideas, and values (*sic*) expressed in works of human imagination and thought. Through study in disciplines such as literature and philosophy, students will engage in critical analysis and develop an appreciation of the humanities as fundamental to the health and survival of any society. **Students graduating from Texas Tech University should be able to: think critically, demonstrate an understanding of the possibility of multiple interpretations, cultural contexts, and values.**

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, and will be introduced to contemporary metaethical theories.

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 counted as part of the participation grade, and I am fairly hard-lined about it. When you also take into account the impact that absences have on your other grades (i.e., quiz and exam scores), absences can really hurt your grade. I have two rules: (1) If you don't bring the reading with you to class, you'll be counted absent; (2) If you're caught texting, IM-ing, emailing, tweeting, or surfing the web during class, you'll be counted absent.

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. All the assigned readings are available on Blackboard, but I expect to you print them out so you can take notes on the reading and bring them to class. 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 at least one way of thinking about things that makes sense to you.

Assessment Methods 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 combined 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 (Limit 5), in the following forms only:

- 1) I've posted several suggested readings for each unit on Blackboard. 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 an occasional 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

Primary Readings

- Mill, J.S. *Utilitarianism*
- Smart, J.C.C. (1973) "An outline of a system of utilitarian ethics", in *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, J.C.C. Smart & Bernard Williams, Cambridge: Cambridge UP
- Fuchs, Alan (2006), "Mill's Theory of Morally Correct Action", in *The Blackwell Guide to Mill's Utilitarianism*, Henry West (ed), Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 139-157
- Nozick, Robert (1974) *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell)
- Parfit, Derek (1984) *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*
- Bennett, Jonathan (1974) "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn", *Philosophy* 49:123-134
- Langton, Rae (1992), "Duty and Desolation", *Philosophy* 67: 481-505
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics, Eudemian Ethics*
- Loudon, 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
- Steven, C.L. (1944), "The Nature of Ethical Disagreement", in *Ethics and Language* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press
- Mackie, J.L. (1977), *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*: New York: Penguin
- Harman, Gilbert (1977) *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford UP
- Midgley, Mary (1981), "Trying Out One's New Sword", reprinted in Russ Shafer-Landau (2010), *The Ethical Life*, Oxford: Oxford UP

Secondary Readings

- Joseph Ellin (1994) *Morality and the Meaning of Life*, New York: Harcourt Brace
- Schneewind, J.B. (1992), "Autonomy, obligation, and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy", in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, Paul Geyer (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge UP, pp. 309-341
- Korsgaard, Christine (1998), "Introduction", in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Immanuel Kant & Mary Gregor (ed), Cambridge: Cambridge UP, pp. vii-xxx
- Hursthouse, Rosalind (1999), *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford UP
- Rachels, James (1995), *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed., New York: McGraw-Hill
- Annas, Julia (1995), *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford: Oxford UP
- Shafer-Landau, Russ (2010), *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford UP

Projected Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Primary Reading</u>	<u>Secondary Reading</u>	<u>Suggested Reading</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
1.13	Introduction	Syllabus			
1.15					Ethics Pre-Test
<u>Unit 1 - Utilitarianism</u>					
1.18	NO CLASS –MLK DAY				
1.20	Hedonism	Mill Ch. II.1-8	Ellin, pp. 250-54	Donner, pp. 117-128	
1.22				Feagin	Quiz 1
1.25	Consequentialism	Mill II.9-10, 18-19	Ellin, pp. 227-236	Smart, pp. 30-57	
1.27		Smart, pp. 12-28			
1.29					Quiz 2
2.1	Act-U and Rule-U	Fuchs, pp. 139-144	Ellin, pp. 241-250	Hooker	
2.3		Fuchs, pp. 144-147		Smart, pp. 9-12	
2.5					Quiz 3
2.8	Critique	Nozick	Ellin, pp. 236-41	Williams (1973)	
2.20		Parfit	Ellin, pp. 254-58	Mill, Ch. II.11-24	
2.12	Review				Exam 1
<u>Unit 2 - Deontology</u>					
2.15	Autonomy	Kant, pp.52-59	Schneewind, pp. 309-18	Baron	
2.17		Kant, pp. 7-14, 47-51	Korsgaard, pp. xxv-xxx	Johnson	
2.19					Quiz 4
2.22	The Good Will	Kant, pp. 14-18, 43-44	Schneewind, pp. 308-321	Wood	
2.24		Kant, pp. 24-26, 39-31	Korsgaard, pp. ix-xv	Kosgaard (1999) §III-V, VII	
2.26					Quiz 5
3.1	Categorical Imperative	Kant, pp. 31-36	Korsgaard, pp. xv-xxv	Hill	
3.3		Kant, pp. 37-39			
3.5		Kant, pp. 39-43, 45-46			Quiz 6
3.8	Critique	Bennett			
3.10		Rae, pp. 481-501			
3.12	Review				Exam 2
3.15-19 NO CLASS- SPRING BREAK					
<u>Unit 3 – Virtue Ethics</u>					
3.22	Human Function	NE I.7, EE II.1	Hursthouse (1999)	Hursthouse (2007)	
3.24		NE II.1, II.6			
3.26					Quiz 7
3.29	Virtuous Actions	NE II.6-9, EE II.2-3	Rachels, pp.159-175	Williams (1995)	
3.31		NE III.10-12, IV.1		Swanton	
4.2					Quiz 8
4.5	NO CLASS- BREAK FOR NO REASON				
4.7	Virtuous Agents	NE VII.1-6	Annas, pp. 47-52	Annas, pp. 52-70	
4.9				Hursthouse (1984)	Quiz 9
4.12	Critique	Louden		Hursthouse (1995)	
4.14		Solomon		Annas (2004)	
4.16	Review				Exam 3
<u>Unit 4 - Metaethics</u>					
4.19	Against Realism	Stevenson	Shafer-Landue, Ch. 21.6	Sayre-McCord	
4.21		Mackie, Ch. 19	Shafer-Landau, Ch. 21.10	Blackburn	
4.23		Harman, Ch. 1			Quiz 10
4.26	Against Anti-Realism	Midgley	Shafer-Landau, pp. 276-288	Railton	
4.28			Shafer-Landau, Ch. 20		
4.30					Ethics Post-Test
5.3	Full Review				
5.5	NO CLASS – INDIVIDUAL STUDY DAY				
5.7	FINAL – 7:30-10:00 AM, ENG 153				Final Exam

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>

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 when you have trouble with the readings.

Craig on What is Philosophy?

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

Unit 1

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

Unit 2

Hornsby on Human Agency

http://cdn4.libsyn.com/philosophybites/Jennifer_Hornsby_on_Human_Agency.mp3?nvb=20100112194309&nva=20100113195309&t=01ae75610fdda7a29a09e

Unit 3

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 4

Blackburn on Moral Relativism

http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=249620