

Introduction to Ethics  
Philosophy 2320 – 001  
Summer '09  
M,T,W,Th,F 10:00-11:50  
Eng/Phil 163

Jerry Green  
(806)742.0373/324  
jerry.green@ttu.edu  
Phil 262  
T, TH 12:00-1:00

## Course Syllabus<sup>1</sup>

*“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 much of the time. 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 will be an introduction to philosophy generally and to ethics specifically. We will discuss how philosophers do what they do. We will then discuss some of the fundamental questions in ethics. Is there only one set of right and wrong? More than one? Zero? What makes that set (or sets) the right one?

The next four units will be about the dominant moral theories in the Western philosophical tradition. We will investigate the moral theories of four of philosophy’s most influential ethicists: Aristotle, Mill, Kant, and Hume. Each unit has two parts. The first part will be historical, where we read the primary texts that originally proposed specific theories. The second part will be more analytical. Here we will read contemporary discussions of moral theories, both for and against, with the aim of developing a more critical and sophisticated view of each theory.

In each of these last few units, we will be concerned with answering a specific set of questions. Among these are: Why should we do what is morally right to do? Who or what makes something moral? What are moral disagreements about? What is the proper subject of a moral theory? 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. The odds of getting a good grade in the class without full participation are approximately 3,720 to 1. 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.

The reading assignments are deliberately quite short. The point is to spend less time reading the texts and more time engaging with them, by asking questions, finding flaws, etc. That said, we will be reading some difficult texts, because of the ideas involved, the cultural differences between us and the authors, and because of translation issues. Improving your ability to read difficult texts will be immeasurably valuable, in college and beyond. I would recommend reading the week's material during the weekend before we cover it, then reading it again at least once before each class. Despite the brevity of the selections, you *will* need to read them more than once. They're harder than they look.

### 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 quizzes will count for 15% of the total grade.

Exams will be used to demonstrate an ability to philosophize, by thinking critically and expressing those thoughts clearly in writing. Exams will take the form of short essays written in class. We will spend some time covering my expectations before the first exam is distributed. Each exam will count for 15% of the total grade, for a total of 60%.

The final exam will be slightly different than regular exams. Assignments will be distributed at least one week before the final exam session, but the exam itself will take place in class. 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. Since summer session classes are so compressed, each day is worth proportionally more than a day of class during the regular school year. Consistent attendance and participation is critical.

There will be extra credit available, in the following form. Those who request extra credit opportunities will be given an important article in ethics by a 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?

Limit of 5 per student (1 per section). No other form of extra credit will be available: Don't Ask.

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

## Texts

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) – <http://plato.stanford.edu>
- Plato. *Euthyphro*, *Republic* (excerpts)
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* (excerpts)
- Kant, Immanuel. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (excerpts)
- Mill, J.S. *Utilitarianism* (excerpts)
- Hume, David. *A Treatise on Human Nature* (excerpts)
- Hursthouse, Rosalind (2007) “Are Virtues the Proper Starting Point for Morality” in *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*, James Drier (ed), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 99-112
- Louden, Robert (1984) “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics”, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21: 227-236
- Pettit, Philip (1991) “Consequentialism”, in *A Companion to Ethics*, Peter Singer (ed) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 230-240
- Williams, Bernard (1971) “A Critique of Utilitarianism” in Smart, J.J.C., and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 77-150
- Korsgaard, Christine (1999) “Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant” *The Journal of Ethics* 3:1-29
- Foot, Philippa (1972) “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives” *The Philosophical Review* 81:305-316
- Blackburn, Simon (1988) “How to be an Ethical Antirealist” reprinted in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, S. Darwall, A. Gibbard, P. Railton (eds), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 167-178
- Railton, Peter (1986) “Moral Realism” *The Philosophical Review* 95:163-207

## 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

### Week 1 : Introduction

May 27- Syllabus, Moral Realism  
May 28- Moral Relativism, Moral Skepticism

May 29- **Quiz 1**

Plato: Euthyphro Problem, Form of The Good

### Reading Assignments

SEP: Moral Realism §1-4  
SEP: Moral Relativism §1-2, 6-7  
Moral Skepticism §3

*Euthyphro* 5d-11b;  
*Republic* 505b-509c; 514a-520a

### Week 2: Aristotle and Virtue Ethics

June 1- The Good Life and Human Function  
June 2- The Virtues  
June 3- **Quiz 2**  
Contemporary Virtue Ethics: For  
June 4- Contemporary Virtue Ethics: Against  
June 5- Review, **Exam 1**

*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I.i-v, vii-x,  
*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II

Hursthouse (2007)  
Louden (1984)

### Week 3: Kant and Deontology

June 8- Autonomy, Duty vs. Inclination  
June 9- The Categorical Imperative(s)  
June 10- **Quiz 3**  
Contemporary Deontology: For  
June 11- Contemporary Deontology: Against  
June 12 - Review, **Exam 2**

*Groundwork*, 1st Section [393-406]  
*Groundwork*, 2nd Section [413-440]

Korsgaard (1999) §1, 3-5, 7-8  
Foot (1972)

### Week 4: Mill and Consequentialism

June 15- Hedonism and Happiness  
June 16- Utilitarianism, Act and Rule  
June 17- **Quiz 4**  
Contemporary Consequentialism: For  
June 18- Contemporary Consequentialism: Against  
June 19 - Review, **Exam 3**

*Utilitarianism*, Ch. 1 & 2  
*Utilitarianism*, Ch. 3 & 4

Pettit (1991)  
Williams (1973), § 1-5

### Week 5: Hume and Sentimentalism

June 22 – Reason and the Passions  
June 23 – Moral Sentiments  
June 24- **Quiz 5**  
Contemporary Sentimentalism: For  
June 25 - Contemporary Sentimentalism: Against  
June 26 – No Class  
June 27 – **Exam 4 (Final)** - 8:00-10:30 AM (I'm sorry. It wasn't my idea)

*Treatise*, Bk. III, Pt. I, Sect. I  
*Treatise*, Bk .III, Pt. I, Sect. II; Pt. II, Sect. III

Blackburn (1988)  
Railton (1986), §I-III

## 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.

### Week 1

Craig on What is Philosophy?

[http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=233178](http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=233178)

Blackburn on Moral Relativism

[http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=249620](http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=249620)

Blackburn on Plato's Cave

[http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=221242](http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=221242)

### Week 2

The Classics: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

[http://www.philclassics.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=214956#](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](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](http://cdn4.libsyn.com/philosophybites/Roger_Crisp_on_the_Virtues.mp3?nvb=20090505025544&nva=20090506030544&t=0454d2571474bbb790892)

### Week 3

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

[http://www.philclassics.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=261737#](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>

### Week 4

The Classics: Mill's *Utilitarianism*

[http://www.philclassics.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=329602#](http://www.philclassics.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=329602#)

Crisp On Utilitarianism

[http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=235693](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](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](http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=251955)

### Week 5

Hume – Essays, Moral and Political

<http://www.learnoutloud.com/podcasts/TPP-050409.mp3>

Savulescu on the 'Yuk' Factor

[http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=440864#](http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=440864#)

Millican on Hume's Significance

[http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=328061](http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=328061)