

Ethics, PHIL V3701 [Preliminary]

Time

T-R 11:40-12:55

Location

TBA

Teaching assistants

TBA

Course description

The course offers an introduction to and survey of ethical theory. We focus on four types of theory: utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, virtue ethics, and Humean ethics. We approach these theories with a view to metaethical questions about reasons, desire, and value; and with a view to normative questions about the right and the good.

Readings

It is essential to do the readings prior to the class for which they are assigned. Please note that the class, while introductory, is rather ambitious. Many of our readings are so-called classics: they have had and continue to have tremendous influence, and require careful study.

Sections

You are required to attend a section. In-class participation and participation in the discussions in your section count for 10% of your grade.

Outlines/Analyses of the main argument

The best way to read carefully is to make yourself an excerpt of the core argument in an article/part of a book. You should address the following aspects of a text: What is the main question? What is the main thesis? What are the premises? What is the structure of the argument? In order to practice this kind of analytical reading, you must submit 6 one-page outlines, each of them covering either one article or chapter/part of a book. You must submit at least 1 outline before or on September 12; and at least 3 outlines in September. Ideally, you continue to make these outlines for the purposes of preparing for class, even after you submitted 6 outlines. The outlines count for 25% of the total grade.

Midterm exams (in-class)

The midterm exam counts for 30% of the grade.

Papers

One 4-page paper and one 6-page paper. Both papers are response-papers. For each paper, choose one of our readings and engage with it. Provide a precise analysis of the argument. Based on this analysis, you should pick one aspect that interests you specifically, and discuss it in detail. You should address one of the readings already discussed in class. You must email your TA one week prior to the due date, stating clearly which reading you plan to address, and what question/argument interests you. The paper must be submitted in-class. The 4-page paper counts for 15%, the 6-page paper for 20% of the grade.

Readings and Topics

Almost all readings will be available online through Butler Library, either via Courseworks or via JSTOR (log in with your UNI). Three books are ordered at BookCulture: Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (OUP); Kant, *Groundwork* (CUP); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (tr. Ross, rev. Ackrill and Urmson, OUP).

I. Introduction: Some Meta-Ethical Questions

Week 1

09/03: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.6: “good is said in many ways.”

09/05: G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, §§ 5-13. <http://fair-use.org/g-e-moore/principia-ethica>

Week 2

09/10: Judith Jarvis Thompson, *Normativity* pp.1-12

09/12: How to write an outline. You must submit at least one outline prior to this class. It is important that you already have a sense of the difficulties one encounters in aiming to write a good outline, so that you can make optimum use of this class meeting. After this class, you can decide whether you want us to disregard the first outline you submitted. In this case, you still have 6 outlines to submit.

II. Utilitarianism

Week 3

09/17: Mill, *Utilitarianism*.

09/19: Hedonism. Selections from Plato, *Protagoras* (351b-358d) on a pleasure/pain calculus. Epicurus on “pleasure is the good.”

Week 4

09/24: Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism.”

09/26: Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* vol. 13 (1984), 134-171.

III. Kant

Week 5

10/01: Kant, *Groundwork*, Introduction (combined with selections from Kant’s *First Critique*).

10/03: Kant, *Groundwork*, Section I

Week 6

10/08: Kant, *Groundwork* Section II and selections from Kant’s *Second Critique* (on freedom and determinism).

10/10: Christine Korsgaard, “Responsibility and Relationships.”

Week 7

10/15: Kant, *Groundwork* Section III.

10/17: Kant, *Groundwork* Section III. Submit first paper in class

IV. Virtue Ethics

Week 8

10/22: Aristotle, *Politics* I and *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.

10/24: Sarah Broadie, “Happiness, the Supreme End,” chapter 1 in her *Ethics With Aristotle* (OUP 1991).

Week 9

10/29: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II.1-6

10/31: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book X.6-9.

Week 10

11/05: ELECTION DAY

11/07: Myles Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to Be Good.”

Week 11

11/12: Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."

11/14: IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM

V. Humean Themes

Week 12

11/19: David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Moral Principles*, sections 1 and 2

11/21: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Moral Principles*, sections 3 and 5

Week 13

11/26: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Moral Principles*, section 9 and Appendix I

11/28: THANKSGIVING

Week 14

12/03: Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, Book 2, part 3, section 3

12/05: Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons."

Submit second paper in class.