

Philosophy 120

Introduction to Ethics

Fall 2001

Mon, Wed 11.30 - 12.20
Sections to be arranged

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Teaching Assistants:

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What is at stake in being a moral person? In this course, we will consider systematic attempts to understand what morality requires of us, and what motive, if any, we have to recognize and comply with such requirements. It is often thought that one must be willing to make significant sacrifices for the sake of morality. What is the nature of this moral “must”, and how should we understand the relationship between moral concerns and human happiness in general? We will focus on the three main traditions that dominate the contemporary discussion: utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and Aristotelean ethics. For each of these three approaches, we will study one major work: Mill’s *Utilitarianism*, Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and excerpts from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, even though in particular Kant’s text provides us with considerable exegetical difficulties that require (and merit) a lot of attention, we will not exclusively be concerned with interpreting traditional philosophical texts; rather, we will also emphasize the relevance of the views discussed here for our lives. Thus we will also discuss a range of applications. So the course is designed as an introduction to a central area of philosophy both by introducing three major philosophical works and by assessing the views and their applications independently of these texts. No previous class in or exposure to philosophy is expected. Required is an open mind and the willingness to engage with possibly difficult philosophical ideas, whether or not one tends to agree with them.

Course Requirements

One midterm paper (6-8 pages), one final paper (6-8 pages), and a final exam. A selection of essay topics will be distributed in advance for each assignment (including the exam). The midterm paper

will count 25%, the final paper 35%, the final exam 30%, and section attendance/participation 10%. Students are required to attend both the lectures and the sections. Negligence in attendance of sections will count towards the grade. The exam will be largely based on the lectures (and thus negligence in attendance of lectures will also tend to count towards the grade).

Required Reading

Alan Ryan (ed.), *John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham: Utilitarianism and Other Essays*
 David Ross (ed.), Aristotle: *The Nicomachean Ethics*
 An edition of Kant's *Groundwork*

These books are available for purchase at Bookhaven, York Street. Which edition of Kant's *Groundwork* we will use depends on availability; the book should become available towards the end of September.

There is also a reader, available for purchase at Tyco.

Schedule

Wed, Sept 5	Introduction
	Utilitarianism: Mill and the Principle of Utility
Mon, Sept 10	Utilitarianism: What it is <i>Bentham, Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i>
	Wed, Sept 12 Utilitarianism, continued <i>Smart, in Reader</i>
Mon, Sept 17	Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> <i>Mill, chapters 1, 2, and 3</i>
Wed, Sept 19	Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> , continued <i>Mill, chapters 4 and 5</i>
Mon, Sept 24	Objections to Utilitarianism <i>Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?"; Rawls, "Classical Utilitarianism" and "Some Related Contrasts", all in Reader</i>
Wed, Sep 26	Applications: Animals, Poverty <i>Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"; Singer, excerpts from 'Animal Liberation'; Hare, "Why I am only a Demi-Vegetarian"; all in Reader</i>
Mon, Oct 1	Applications: Sanctity of Life <i>Singer, excerpts from 'Rethinking Life and Death', in Reader</i>
	Kant and the Categorical Imperative
Wed, Oct 3	Kant's <i>Groundwork</i> <i>Kant, Groundwork, Preface and section I</i>

- Mon, Oct 8 Kant, *Groundwork*
Kant, Groundwork, section II, 19-36; recommended: Korsgaard, "Kant's Formula of Universal Law", in Reader
- Wed, Oct 10 Kant's *Groundwork*
Kant, Groundwork, section II, 37-51;
- Mon, Oct 15 Kant's *Groundwork*
Kant, Groundwork, section III
- Wed, Oct 17 Applications: Snobbery
Hill, "Social Snobbery and Human Dignity"; Shklar, "What's Wrong with Snobbery?", both in Reader

Fri, Oct 19 – Midterm papers due

- Mon, Oct 22 Applications: Punishment
Honderich, "Retribution"; Hill, "Kant on Punishment", both in Reader
- Wed, Oct 24 Applications: Rights and Poverty
Feinberg, "Voluntary Euthanasia and the Inalienable Right to Life"; O'Neil, "Lifeboat Earth"; Trusted, "Rich and Poor", all in Reader

Intermezzo: The Nature of Ethics

- Mon, Oct 29 Are there Knowable Moral Facts?
Moore/Stewart, "Are there Knowable Moral Facts"?, Frankena, "The concept of Morality", both in Reader
- Wed, Oct 31 Varieties of Moral Skepticism
Moore, Stewart, "Varieties of Scepticism", Smith, "What is the Moral Problem?", Harman, Moral Relativism Defended", all in Reader
- Mon, Nov 5 The Idea of Objectivity
Moore, Stewart, "The Idea of Objectivity", Mackie, excerpts from 'Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong'
- Wed, Nov 7 Nietzsche's Challenge
Nietzsche, first treatise in 'Genealogy of Morality', in Reader

Aristotle and the Virtues

- Mon, Nov 12 Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
NE, Books I and II; recommended: Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics", in Reader
- Wed, Nov 14 Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
NE, Book III

break

Mon, Nov 26 Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
NE, Books VI and VII; recommended: Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good", in Reader

Wed, Nov 28 Applications of Virtue Ethics: Abortion
Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion"; recommended: Hursthouse, "Applying Virtue Ethics", both in Reader

Mon, Dec 3 Applications of Virtue Ethics: Euthanasia
Foot, "Euthanasia", in Reader

Wed, Dec.5 Conclusion

Final paper deadline and final exam to be arranged