

Philosophy 1300L: Introduction to Ethics

Autumn 2014 • Tu/Th, 9:10–10:05 AM • McPherson Lab 2015

Recitation Sections Fri 9:10–10:05 AM or 10:20–11:15 AM

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Course Description

What is the right thing to do? What makes an action right or wrong? And why think there really is any right or wrong, anyway?

Ethical theories attempt to provide systematic answers to these questions. In this course we will look at some of the most important and interesting philosophical attempts to answer them. The philosophers we read answer these questions in wildly different ways.

You might notice that the three questions I've just posed are quite different. The first is a question about what moral principles we should in fact follow; the other two are questions about the status or grounding of those moral principles. The first is, in a sense, more immediately and practically relevant: you might walk out the door and, right away, apply one of the moral principles we learn in class. I hope to convince you that the second and third questions are of equal practical importance: it matters whether morality has a good foundation or not, and it matters what that foundation is.

Course Goals

This is a philosophy course. As such, it has two primary goals: to introduce you to an exciting ongoing discussion about some topics of immense human significance, and to develop your skill at participating in that ongoing discussion. You will be asked both to show understanding of the material and to undertake some philosophical argument yourself.

Don't worry, that's not as hard as it sounds.¹ In fact, it's a lot of fun. It can also be very useful: many of the courses that you take in the remainder of your university career will require that you

¹ For one, it doesn't require that you write in anything like the style of the philosophers we will read. When the time comes, I will give you some specific guidance for writing philosophy papers.

produce the sort of clear, direct, argumentative writing that is emphasized in a philosophy class. And both during and beyond your college career, you'll be better off if you're able to formulate clear arguments for your views and critically analyze the way that other people argue for their views.

Some advice about the readings: many of these readings are difficult and complex. Don't be daunted! In philosophy we compensate for this difficulty by assigning fewer pages of reading than you will find assigned in many other courses. And, of course, *come to class*. Lectures will identify and expand upon the most important threads in each reading, while recitation sections will guide you as you begin doing philosophy yourself.

Texts

Please use only the editions and translations listed below. If acquiring any of these is difficult or unreasonably expensive, please contact me.

Plato, *Republic*, Translated by G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992)

David Hume, *Hume's Ethical Writings*, edited by Alasdair MacIntyre (University of Notre Dame Press, 1979)

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, revised edition, edited by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 2nd Edition edited by George Sher (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001)

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by David Ross and Lesley Brown (Oxford World's Classics: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Additional readings available via class website.

Grading

- 10% Attendance and participation in section (including section reading quizzes)
- 10% 1–2 pp. Argument Analysis
Assigned 9/11; due 9/18.
- 25% First 3–5 pp. paper
Topics handed out 10/2; due 10/16.
- 25% Second 3–5 pp. paper
Topics handed out 11/6; due 11/20.
- 30% Final exam (12/12, 10–11:45 AM)
Review topics handed out 12/2.

Papers should be turned in at the beginning of class on the due date. Absent an approved excuse, late papers will be penalized at a rate of 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., from a B+ to a B) per day late.

Don't plagiarize. Look at the definition of academic misconduct at <http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/csc/> to be certain that you know what this means. Two specific points to keep in mind: (a) you must cite *any* source of ideas or material that you use in your work, whether it is a book, or a website, or a friend who took intro to ethics last year; and (b) you must cite a source *regardless of whether you quote from it directly, summarize it, or just draw on its ideas*. (The one exception: in assignments completed for this class, you don't need to cite lectures, handouts, or discussions from this class.) We report all cases of apparent plagiarism to the proper authorities for further investigation.

Schedule of Readings

- 8/28 Introduction: course mechanics, course overview. *Normative* questions distinguished from *metaethical* questions.
no readings
- 9/2 Plato's *Republic*: What is justice? Why is it good?
begin *Republic* Book II 357a1–363e2 (marginal Stephanus numbers)
- 9/4 Glaucon's challenge, continued
finish *Republic* II.357a1–363e2
- 9/9 Plato's answer to Glaucon: the parts of the soul
begin *Republic* IV.434d1–445e1
- 9/11 Plato's answer continued: the virtues of the soul; justice
finish *Republic* IV.434d1–445e1
Argument analysis assigned
- 9/16 Wrap-up of Plato and introduction to Hume
re-read as necessary; begin Hume
- 9/18 Hume's account of motivation
A Treatise of Human Nature 2.3.3: "Of the Influencing Motives of the Will"
Argument analysis due
- 9/23 Hume's challenge
begin *THN* 3.1.1–2: "Moral Distinctions not derived from Reason" and "Moral Distinctions derived from a moral sense"

- 9/25 Hume wrap-up
finish *THN* 3.1.1–2; re-read as necessary
- 9/30 A modern response to Hume
Philippa Foot, “Moral Arguments” (on course website) pp. 102–109 (begin at “I think it will be agreed that...”)
- 10/2 Kant introduced.
begin *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: Preface
First paper topics handed out
- 10/7 Kant!
begin *GW* Section I
- 10/9 Kant!!
finish *GW* Section I (start in on Section II if you have a chance)
- 10/14 Kant’s normative ethics: the formulas
begin *GW* section II
- 10/16 Kant’s normative ethics, continued
keep working on *GW* section II
First paper due
- 10/21 Kant continued
finish *GW* section II
- 10/23 Kant wrap-up
re-read as necessary
- 10/28 Utilitarianism
Bentham, selections from *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*: ch. I (pp. 1–7) and ch. IV (pp. 29–32) (on course website)
- 10/30 Utilitarianism developed: Mill
Mill, *Utilitarianism* pp. 6–11
- 11/4 Mill continued: answering objections
Utilitarianism pp. 12–26
- 11/6 Rule-utilitarianism as an alternative?
no readings
Second paper topics handed out

- 11/11 Veterans Day: no class
- 11/13 A modern critique of utilitarianism
Selections from Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (on course website)
- 11/18 Aristotle introduced: a different conception of ethics
begin *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I (focus especially on chs. 1–5, 7, 8, and 13)
- 11/20 The Function Argument
finish *NE* Book I
Second paper due
- 11/25 The virtues of character and the doctrine of the mean
NE II.5–9, III.6–7
- 11/27 Thanksgiving: no class
- 12/2 The doctrine of the mean and the virtues of intellect
NE VI.1–2, 5, 12–13
Final exam review questions handed out
- 12/4 The content of eudaimonia
NE X.6–8
- 12/9 Wrap-up, review
no reading

*******This syllabus is subject to revision.*******