

Ethics, PHIL V3701 [preliminary syllabus – still subject to change]

Course description: The course offers an introduction to and survey of ethical theory. We focus on three types of theory in normative ethics (utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics), as well as on some central topics in meta-ethics (reasons, values, rational motivation).

Reading: 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. We cover a lot of ground, and difficult material. Many of our readings are so-called classics: they have had and continue to have tremendous influence, and require careful study. Preparation for class is time-consuming.

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 the kind of analytical reading that goes into writing this kind of excerpt, you must submit 12 one-page outlines, each of them covering either one article or chapter/part of a book. You must submit at least 5 outlines in September. Ideally, you continue to make these outlines for the purposes of preparing for class, even after you submitted 12 outlines. The outlines count for 30% of the total grade.

Papers: Two papers (6 double-spaced pages each). The papers are response-papers to individual readings. This kind of paper builds on the work that goes into writing an outline. 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. It is up to you which readings you want to address.

The first paper must be submitted by mid-October. It counts for 15% of the grade.

The second paper must be submitted by mid-November. It counts for 20% of the grade.

Final exam: The final exam counts for 25% of the total grade.

Outline of Readings and Topics

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

Introduction: Some Meta-Ethical Questions

Week 1

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

Utilitarianism

Week 2

Mill, *Utilitarianism*.

Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Part I, 1-49).

Week 3

Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism."

Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality," *Philosophy and Public*

Affairs vol. 13 (1984), 134-171.

Week 4

Tim Scanlon, selections from *What We Owe to Each Other* on aggregative reasoning (229-241).

Tim Scanlon, "Contractualism and Utilitarianism," in eds. A. Sen and B. Williams, *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (1982).

Kant

Week 5

Kant, *Groundwork*, Introduction and Section I.

Kant, selections from the *First Critique*.

Week 6

Kant, *Groundwork* Section II.

Kant, selections from the *Second Critique* (on freedom and determinism).

Christine Korsgaard, "Responsibility and Relationships."

Week 7

Kant, *Groundwork* Section III.

Virtue Ethics

Week 8

Aristotle, *Politics* I.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.7 and 13.

Week 9

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II.1-6.

Gilbert Harman, "The Nonexistence of Character Traits."

Bernard Williams, "Utilitarianism and Moral Self-Indulgence."

Values, Desires, and Reasons

Week 9

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.

David Velleman, "The Guise of the Good."

Week 10

Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (selections).

Bernard Williams, "External and Internal Reasons."

Week 11

Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, Chapter VIII "Value," 138-163; and Chapter IX, "Ethics," 164-188.

Week 12

Tim Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, Chapter 2 "Values."

Harry Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About."

Week 13

Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 5-20.