

Updated March 9, 2017

Philosophy 10
Introduction to Ethics
Spring 2017
Lectures TTH 10-10:50
ICC Auditorium

Professor

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Office hours: Tuesdays 11-12:30 and by appointment

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Your teaching assistant will let you know about office hours and locations.

Discussion sections

01. Friday 11-11:50. Maguire 104. (DN)

02. Thursday 4-4:50. ICC 211A. (JF)

03. Friday 1-1:50. Maguire 103. (DN)

04. Thursday 5-5:50. ICC 206A. (JF)

05. Thursday 6-6:50. ICC 217B. (AG)

06. Friday 9-9:50. Car Barn 306. (KS)

07. Friday 10-10:50. Maguire 104. (KS)

08. Friday 11-11:50. Car Barn 306. (DR)
09. Thursday 5-5:50. ICC 205B. (AG)
10. Tuesday 6-6:50. Car Barn 306. (DR)

Required texts

Moral Philosophy: A Reader, 4th edition, edited by Louis P. Pojman and Peter Tramel (Hackett, 2009).

Other readings are on Canvas>Files or online.

Course description and aims

This course has several purposes. One is to ask, and try to answer, some age-old ethical questions. Are people fundamentally self-interested? What makes them capable of performing evil acts? Heroic acts? Why should a person act morally? Does morality require a religious foundation? (Or, as Nietzsche put it, is everything permitted if God is dead?) Is there a universal morality that applies across cultures or is morality “relative”?

Another purpose is to learn about some of the traditional philosophical approaches to ethics. We will read some of the great philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill, who articulated theories and ideas that continue to inform thinking about moral problems today. We will also read the work of some contemporary philosophers.

Third, we’ll investigate some contemporary moral problems facing us as individuals and as members of societies. Topics include punishment, the death penalty, and the criminal justice system; the rationales and appropriate limits to freedom of expression; our responsibilities for alleviating suffering and poverty; and the moral status of nonhuman animals.

The most important aim of the course is to improve your skills in reading, writing, and thinking about hard problems not fully solvable by quantitative or other well-understood methods.

Course requirements, policies, and expectations

- **Three papers during the semester: the first two about 1000-1200 words, the third about 1800-2000 words.** You will get detailed instructions when the first paper is due. Paper assignments will generally be distributed about two weeks before the due date.
- **Quizzes, unannounced, approximately weekly, given at the beginning of class.** These should be easy to do well on if you've done the reading beforehand and come to class. The two lowest grades on the quizzes will be dropped. You will need a laptop or other electronic device to take the quiz, but I will ask you to put it away afterwards.
- **Regular attendance and participation.** Attendance and participation in discussion sections is important for the quality of the class.
- **Approximate grade value of assignments:** quizzes 25%; first paper 15%; second paper 20%; third paper 30%; attendance and participation 10%.
- You'll notice that there are not usually many pages assigned. But most of the texts must be read more slowly and carefully than those you may have in other courses; it will often be helpful to read them more than once.
- **Use of laptops, phones, and electronic devices is not permitted in class except at the beginning of class to take quizzes.**
- **Extensions and late papers:** if you need an extension on an assignment please request it at least 24 hours in advance of the due date. Assignments turned in late without permission will be penalized. Back up your work frequently.

- Please arrive in class on time and stay till the end; observe common courtesies, such as not chatting in class. Please don't go out and come in during class if you can help it.
- I encourage you to come to office hours or make an appointment to talk with me or your TA; we welcome the opportunity to get to know you better outside of class. If you're having problems that interfere with your performance in the course or are otherwise making your life difficult, please let me know.
- **Check Canvas and your email regularly** for announcements and updated assignments. Make sure the email address we have (and Canvas has) for you is working.

Plagiarism and academic integrity

Cheating is wrong and will not be tolerated. The rise of the Internet as a research tool has engendered some confusion about what constitutes plagiarism and the legitimate uses of other people's work. We will discuss these matters with you further before assignments are due. Please read about Georgetown's [honor system](#) and in particular "[What Is Plagiarism?](#)"

Accommodations for students with disabilities

Students with disabilities should inform me at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate accommodations can be made.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Readings are in the Pojman and Tramel anthology unless otherwise indicated. "i" and "ii" refer to column numbers. "C" refers to readings on Canvas. Note the links to some texts (which may not show up in the printed version of the syllabus). Readings are organized by topic in Canvas; topics are arranged in the order we discuss them. You may also find

“Further Readings” sections for some topics, for those who are interested in knowing more. If you are writing a paper on the topic in question, we will encourage you to read those selections too.

Some changes in the readings or schedule, including additional readings, are likely, depending on the interests of students and teachers as well as novel questions that may arise in the course of the class. We may speed up (slightly) or fall (slightly) behind. Check Canvas and your email regularly for updates! Expect regular announcements from me and possibly from your TA.

Class 1. Th 1/12. Introduction.

Class 2. T 1/17. Challenges to ethics (I): egoism.

Plato, “Why Should I Be Moral?” (60-8)

Ayn Rand, “A Defense of Ethical Egoism” (79-85)

Class 3. Th 1/19. Ethical egoism.

James Rachels, “A Critique of Ethical Egoism” (86-93)

Immanuel Kant, “The Supreme Principle of Morality: the Categorical Imperative” (224-5)

Class 4. T 1/24. Psychological egoism.

Listen: Radiolab, [“I Need a Hero”](#) (about 15 minutes)

Judith Lichtenberg, “Altruism” (C)

Class 5. Th 1/26. What is the good life?

Jeremy Bentham, “Classical Hedonism” (120-2)

Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine” (141-2)

Derek Parfit, “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best?” (148-55)

Class 6. T 1/31. What is the good life?, continued.

John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism” (158 to end of 160)

Aristotle, "Virtue Ethics" (301-4; sections I-III)

Class 7. Th 2/2. Ethical theory and practice: punishment and the death penalty.

[Death Row Facts](#) (read and browse some of these pages)

Immanuel Kant, "The Right of Punishment" (C)

Ernest van den Haag, "In Defense of the Death Penalty: A Practical and Moral Analysis" (C)

Class 8. T 2/7. Punishment and the death penalty, continued.

Jeffrey Reiman, "Justice, Civilization, and the Death Penalty" (C)

Class 9. Th 2/9. Punishment, continued.

Stephen Nathanson, "The Problem of Unjust Deserts" (C)

FIRST PAPER DUE SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 11:59 P.M.

Class 10. T 2/16. Utilitarianism.

Mill, "Utilitarianism" (161i-162i)

Christopher Bennett, "What Utilitarianism Is" (C), 63-72

Class 11. Th 2/16. Utilitarianism, criticized.

Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" (C)

Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" (175-178i)

Class 12. T 2/21. Finish utilitarianism. Begin the deontological perspective.

Immanuel Kant, "The Foundations of Ethics" (219ii, First Section, to 225ii)

Class 13. Th 2/23. The deontological perspective, continued.

Kant, "The Foundations of Ethics" (225ii, Second Section, to 234i)

Class 14. T 2/28. The deontological perspective.

Class 15. 3/2. Virtue ethics. Forgiveness, mercy, repentance.

Aristotle, "Virtue Ethics" (304-11, section IV to end)

Listen: Radiolab, "[Dear Hector](#)"

Charles Griswold, "On Forgiveness" (C)

No class week of March 6: spring break.

Class 16. T 3/14. Challenges to ethics (II): does morality depend on religion?

Plato, "The Euthyphro Problem" (359-60).

Allen Stairs and Christopher Bernard, "God and Morality" (C), sections 1, 2, and 7 (1-6, 17-22).

Class 17. Th 3/16. The foundations of freedom of expression.

John Stuart Mill, "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion" (C)

[National Socialist Party of America v. Village of Skokie](#) (1978)

[Texas v. Johnson](#) (1989)

Class 18. T 3/21. Limits to freedom of expression?

Judith Lichtenberg, Notes on freedom of expression (C)

Timothy Garton Ash, "Safe Spaces Are Not the Only Threat to Free Speech" (C)

Eric Heinze, "10 Arguments for—and Against—'No-Platforming'" (C)

Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh, "Don't Ban No-Platforming" (C)

Class 19. Th 3/23. Challenges to ethics (III): relativism.

Ruth Benedict, "Cultural Relativism" (33-7)

James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (C)

Two views of female circumcision (C)

SECOND PAPER DUE, SUNDAY, MARCH 26, 11:59 P.M.

Class 20. T 3/28. Relativism, truth, and universal human rights

James Nickel, "Making Sense of Human Rights" (C)

Class 21. Th 3/30. Responsibility and obedience.

The Milgram experiments (C).

Listen: Radiolab, [“The Bad Show”](#) (first segment, about 20 minutes)

[The Stanford prison experiments](#)

Class 22. T 4/4. Obedience and disobedience.

[Lt. William Calley and the My Lai Massacre](#) (1968)

Drazen Erdemovic and Srebrenica (C, 863-8)

Class 23. Th 4/6. Obedience and disobedience.

Martin Luther King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (C)

Samantha Love, “‘I just don’t, it’s illegal’: Is There a Moral Obligation to Obey the Law?”

Class 24. T 4/11. Catch up.

Thursday, 4/13: no class, Easter break.

Class 25. T 4/18. Global poverty: what (if anything) is to be done, and why?

Peter Singer, “The Life You Can Save” (C)

Class 26. Th 4/20. Global poverty, continued.

Thomas Pogge, “World Poverty and Human Rights” (C)

Mathias Risse, “Do We Owe the Poor Assistance or Rectification?: Response to Pogge” (C)

Pogge, “Baselines for Determining Harm: Reply to Risse (C)

(Note: all three readings are in the same PDF.)

Class 27. T 4/25. Ethics and the nonhuman world: do animals have rights?

Kant, “Duties Toward Animals and Spirits” (C)

David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster” (C)

Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights” (C)

Class 28. Th 4/27. Ethics and the nonhuman world: animals.

Michael Pollan, "An Animal's Place" (C)

Peter Carruthers, "Against the Moral Standing of Animals" (C)

Mary Anne Warren, "Difficulties with the Strong Animal Rights Position" (C)

FINAL PAPER DUE DURING THE EXAM PERIOD (due date to be announced).