

# Social Ethics

Fall 2018

PHIL 1120 Section 01  
TR 12-1:15  
Main 119

Instructor: Erica Holberg ([erica.holberg@usu.edu](mailto:erica.holberg@usu.edu))

Instructor's Office Hours: 1:30-2:30 Tuesdays in Old Main 002K and **by appointment**

## Course Description:

In this class, we will read and discuss foundational texts in the history of ethics. We will see how these ethical theories are at work in shaping our judgments as we consider fourteen different case studies involving contemporary social issues. The class is called Social Ethics, not simply because ethics concerns how we live and act with others, but because this class will be focused on the importance of engaging in and improving at the skill of democratic conversation. Conversation in a democracy involves both making clear, persuasive arguments that reach out to conversation partners of very different backgrounds and values, and, listening carefully to, fairly evaluating, and so critically engaging with arguments made by others. This class provides practice in the skill of democratic conversation as we discuss complex ethical conflicts together.

## Course Objectives:

1. *Develop skills in expressing oneself orally and in writing.* The major goal of this class is to help you become better at making persuasive, rigorous arguments. You will have three opportunities to do this in written form, and the group presentation is the main opportunity to do this orally. However, participation in class discussion is another way to become better at orally presenting claims and evidence for your claims, and for this reason, you cannot do well in this class if you do not participate in class discussions.
2. *Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.* We will be reading essential texts in the history of ethics. Just as importantly, you and your classmates will be putting forward claims about what is right and good in class discussion. The aim is to understand the arguments presented, to be able to evaluate the arguments' strengths and weaknesses, and to understand the assumptions and motivations that underlie the arguments made. Conversation with your classmates and instructor will help develop your skill in analyzing and evaluating arguments.
3. *Develop a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, personal values.* None of the case studies or theories that we will read provides the absolute truth about what we should do and how we should do it. However, in studying these ethical questions and theories, the aim is to better understand your own conception of ethically good action. The point is not to change your mind about what it is good to do, but to better understand your own intuitions about what are right and wrong, or even just better and worse, actions.

## Required Texts:

Course packet (Holberg, PHIL 1120) is available in the bookstore  
+ pdfs of all other readings will be available through Canvas

## Course Requirements:

**Group Presentation:** Each student will be assigned one case study with two or three other classmates. The format for the group presentation will be 15-20 minutes of presentation, followed by 8-10 minutes of questions, commentary, and rebuttal by your other classmates. The group will then have five minutes to confer, and then 8-10 minutes to respond to the concerns voiced by your fellow classmates. All group members need to participate in the initial presentation, and it is a good idea to have all members participate in the ten minute response. After the group presentation, each student must submit a one paragraph evaluation of their own and their fellow group members contributions to the goal of making a clear and persuasive argument. Each student will receive a group grade for the presentation, unless circumstances require otherwise.

The group presentation is worth 25% of your final grade.

**Papers:** There will be three papers due over the course of the semester. One of these papers must be about your assigned case study. This paper should be five pages long, and this paper is worth 20% of your grade. The other two papers should be about two case studies of your choosing. Each of these papers should be two pages long, and each is worth 10% of your grade. For all three of these papers, you should have an introductory paragraph that explains what the problem is that needs to be addressed. Then, in that same introductory paragraph, you need to 'solve' this problem by putting forward a central thesis claim, which should state what you are arguing and why you think this is the right way to view the case study. In your body paragraphs you should explain in more detail the reasons that support your argumentative claim and **address possible counter-arguments**.

**Midterm:** There will be one midterm exam for the course. The midterm will concern the theoretical readings we have read together throughout the semester, and especially the readings from the first five weeks. You cannot prepare for this midterm the night before; these readings are difficult to make sense of at the last minute. On the other hand, if you have been doing the readings as they are assigned and participating in class discussions, you should do fine. The midterm is worth 15% of your grade.

**Homework Assignments:** There will be twenty homework assignments worth 6 points each. This means there are a total of 120 points possible from homework. You must turn in your homework in person in class for full credit. The days when homework is due is marked below with an asterisk (\*). Homework assignments are worth 12% of your grade.

The remaining 8% of the course grade will be based on **active class participation**. One very good way to get a good participation grade is to ask questions and to offer possible rebuttals during the group presentations. Another good way to boost your participation grade is to ask questions about the readings.

## Course Schedule:

### Week 1

T 8.28: Course Introduction

#### Background Theoretical Readings

R 8.30: Kant, *Groundwork*, pp. 61-71 (course packet) \*1

### Week 2

T 9.4: Kant, *Groundwork*, pp. 88-107 (course packet) \*2

R 9.6: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I Chapters 5 and 7, Book II Chapters 1 and 2, Book X Chapters 6 and 7 (course packet) \*3

### Week 3

T 9.11: Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, pp.1008-1011; Matthew 5 (course packet) \*4

R 9.13: Locke, *Second Treatise*, pp. 100-106, 111-113; Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 11-13 (course packet) \*5

### Week 4

T 9.18: Mill, *Utilitarianism*, pp.6-12 (course packet) \*6

R 9.20: Mill, *On Liberty* (The Harm Principle and Chapter 3) \*7

### Week 5

T 9.25: Singer, writings on charity

R 9.27: Review of Theories; Metaethical Questions

#### Case Studies

### Week 6

T 10.2: Reading for Group 1 Case Study \*8

R 10.4: Group 1 Presentation and Reading for Group 2 Case Study \*9

### Week 7

T 10.9: Group 2 Presentation and Reading for Group 3 Case Study \*10

R 10.11: Group 3 Presentation and Reading for Group 4 Case Study \*11

**Week 8**

T 10.16: Group 4 Presentation and Reading for Group 5 Case Study; First Paper Due

R 10.18: No Class - Fall Break

**Week 9**

T 10.23: Group 5 Presentation and Reading for Group 6 Case Study \*12

R 10.25: Group 6 Presentation and Reading for Group 7 Case Study \*13

**Week 10**

T 10.30: Group 7 Presentation and Reading for Group 8 Case Study \*14

R 11.1: Group 8 Presentation and Reading for Group 9 Presentation \*15

**Week 11**

T 11.6: Group 9 Presentation and Reading for Group 10 Presentation;  
Second Paper Due

R 11.8: Group 10 Presentation and Reading for Group 11 Case Study \*16

**Week 12**

T 11.13: Group 11 Presentation and Reading for Group 12 Case Study \*17

R 11.15: Midterm Due

**Week 13**

T 11.20: No Class - Instructor Out of Town

R 11.22: Thanksgiving Break - No Class

**Week 14**

T 11.27: Group 12 Presentation and Reading for Group 13 Case Study \*18

R 11.29: Group 13 Presentation and Reading for Group 14 Case Study \*19

**Week 15**

T 12.4: Reading and Group 14 Presentation \*20

R 12.6: Quick Case Studies and Course Review

**Week 16**

M 12.14: Third Paper Due