

Ethics

Spring 2015

PHIL 2400 Section 01
MWF 1-1:50
Engineering 104

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

Instructor's Office Hours: 2-3 Mondays in Old Main 002K and **by appointment**

Course Description:

In this class, we will examine the three basic ethical theories: Utilitarianism and its more contemporary sister, consequentialism; Kantian ethics; and Aristotelian ethics, often characterized as virtue ethics. The aim is to understand what each of these theories holds forth as good action and how each theory justifies this conception of good action. After reading the central text for each ethical theory, we will consider more recent ethical work by adherents or critics of these basic ethical theories. The goal is to see the ways these theories are still alive and actively shaping our conversations concerning global justice, what sort of lives we want to live, what sorts of limits and responsibilities we have regarding our fellow citizens' actions, and how best to deal with bad luck.

Course Objectives:

1. *Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.* We will be reading three essential texts in the history of ethics and more recent ethical writings that expand upon or critique these fundamental ethical theories. 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.
2. *Learn fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories.* We will be learning about the three basic ethical theories. By the end of the semester, you should know the core commitments that structure each theory, how these theories shape contemporary debates about good action, and how each of the three theories is distinguished from the other two.
3. *Develop a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, personal values.* None of these theories gives us a clear list of what we should do and how we should do it. However, in studying these three basic ethical theories, the aim is to better understand your own conception of good action. What beliefs and values support your commitment to telling the truth, being a good listener to a friend in need, etc.? The point is not to change your mind about what it is good to do, but to better understand why you take these kinds of actions to be good.

Required Texts:

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Reeve (Hackett)
Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Paton (Harper)
Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Hackett)
+ pdfs of all other readings will be available through Canvas

Course Requirements:

Exams: There will be three exams throughout the semester worth 60% of the course grade. The exams will be take-home multiple choice questions and short answer questions. You can work together with your classmates on the exams, although each person needs to submit their own individual exam sheet. Each exam is worth 20% of your grade. The exams are due **at the beginning of class** on the due dates. We will be talking about the exams in class that day. This means late exams will receive 0 total points.

Pop quizzes and Homework Assignments: There will be five pop quizzes worth 15% of the course grade. There will be no make-up quizzes. There will be 15 homework assignments, worth 15% of the course grade. The homework assignments must be printed out and submitted at the beginning of class. Days when a homework assignment is due are marked with an asterisk (*).

The remaining 10% of the course grade will be based on **active class participation**.

Course Schedule:

Week 1

W 1.7: Introduction to Class, Relativism

Aristotle and Virtue Ethics

F 1.9: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I.1-5 *

Week 2

M 1.12: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I.7-13

W 1.14: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II

F 1.16: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III.1-5 *

Week 3

M 1.19: Martin Luther King Jr. Day - No Class

W 1.21: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III.6-12

F 1.23: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V

Week 4

M 1.26: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII.1-10 *

W 1.28: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII.11-14

F 1.30: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII *

Week 5

M 2.2: Nicomachean Ethics, Book IX

W 2.4: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X *

F 2.6: Foot, "Virtues and Vices"

Week 6

M 2.9: Geach, "Good and Evil"

W 2.11: Williams, "Moral Luck"

F 2.13: Williams, "Moral Luck"; **Exam 1 Due**

Kant and Neo-Kantianism

Week 7

M 2.16: President's Day - No Class

T 2.17: (Monday class schedule) *Groundwork*, Preface *

W 2.18: *Groundwork*, First Section

F 2.20: *Groundwork*, First Section *

Week 8

M 2.23: *Groundwork*, Second Section *

W 2.25: *Groundwork*, Second Section

F 2.27: *Groundwork*, Second Section

Week 9

M 3.2: *Groundwork*, Third Section *

W 3.4: *Groundwork*, Third Section

F 3.6: Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (excerpt)

MWF 3.9-13: Spring Break - No Class

Week 10

M 3.16: "What is Enlightenment?" *

W 3.18: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

F 3.20: Nagel, "The Fragmentation of Value"

Week 11

M 3.23: Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"

W 3.25: Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"; **Exam 2 Due**

Utilitarianism and Consequentialism

F 3.27: *Utilitarianism*, Chapter I *

Week 12

M 3.30: *Utilitarianism*, Chapter II *

W 4.1 and F 4.3 - No Class, Instructor out of town

Week 13

M 4.6: *Utilitarianism*, Chapter II

W 4.8: *Utilitarianism*, Chapter III *

F 4.10: *Utilitarianism*, Chapters IV *

Week 14

M 4.13: *Utilitarianism*, Chapter V *

W 4.15: Nozick, The Experience Machine

F 4.17: Singer, "Famine, affluence, and morality"

Week 15

M 4.20: Cohen, "Who is starving whom?"

W 4.22: Williams, A critique of utilitarianism

F 4.24: Williams, A critique of utilitarianism; **Exam 3 Due**