

PHIL 160 – Introduction to Ethics, Fall 2015

MWF 8-8:50 Caldwell 105

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Office Hours: MW 9-10 or by appointment.

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Course Description

This course serves as an introduction to philosophical approaches to moral reasoning. This course will cover topics in both moral theory and applied ethics. For example, we will discuss questions like “What is moral goodness?” as well as “How should we treat animals?” while we read classic and contemporary works of moral philosophy.

The plan for the course is as follows. First, we will consider whether approaching ethics from a philosophical perspective is worthwhile in the first place. We will consider whether morality can originate only from one’s religious commitments or whether morality is relative to one’s culture. Then, we will consider four major moral theories: Utilitarianism, Kantianism, Virtue Ethics, and Care Ethics. On alternate weeks, we will read articles from contemporary moral philosophers that illustrate how these theories are applied to real-world issues. These articles will concern topics such as animal welfare, abortion, the duty to respect one’s self, and global poverty. The readings for the final weeks of the class will be determined by student interest.

Course Goals

The goals of this course are:

- To help you think as clearly as possible about complex ethical issues with the goal of making your own ethical views as consistent, informed, and reasonable as possible.
- To expose you to canonical texts from the history of ethical thought as well as influential articles from contemporary mainstream ethical discourse. You will engage with theoretical texts tackling deep philosophical questions about the nature and origin of our values as well as contemporary texts presenting informed, insightful discussions of particular moral issues.
- To develop your ability to understand how and why someone might reasonably disagree with you about an ethical issue.
- To develop the ability to dissect and assess the merits of complex arguments, regardless of whether or not you agree with the conclusion of those arguments.

Achieving these Goals

- I will aim to make this course as discussion-based as possible: we will spend one day a week in small discussion groups. I encourage students to share their ethical views without fear of incrimination or intimidation. If a student would like to explore a view they disagree with or want to keep their own view anonymous, I encourage them to present hypothetical arguments for hypothetical positions. We can also discuss your thoughts during office hours, if you would prefer.
- Though we will of course discuss the merits of different views on different ethical issues, our first question will be “Why would someone believe that? What’s the most reasonable argument they could give?” Your first paper assignment will ask you to defend a view you *disagree* with to practice the art of charitable communication.
- We will read brief selections from a number of classical texts. I will present brief lectures on the more difficult texts when necessary. You are not expected to understand any of the texts after a single reading: I encourage you to read each text once per class meeting and perhaps even one additional time.
- I will ask you to write short reading responses each week and will grade based on how thoughtful your questions and comments are. I encourage you to take notes on additional questions and comments you have to discuss in class.
- You will submit both of your papers to your peers for a guided review. The goal here is not to be merely critical of your peers’ work: you want to work together to improve your work as much as possible before submitting it.

Assignments and Grading

Weekly Reading Responses (10 pts.)

I will post a question about the readings for every week. Your answer to that question should be no more than 300 words. Each question will be given a full point if the answer indicates thoughtful reflection on the readings, otherwise a half point. You may stop answering questions once you receive 10 points.

Critical Paper (10 pts.)

Your first paper will be a 5-7-page paper that presents and then criticizes *your own* arguments for an ethical position. You may choose any ethical position that you endorse, though it may be easier to choose one about which you’re mostly on the fence. You are encouraged to research arguments from the opposing side and cite them in your paper. I encourage you to use secondary sources when writing this paper: the best papers will be empirically-informed in addition to being well-argued.

Critical Paper Rewrite (20 pts.)

Everyone will be required to rewrite their first paper. I will give brief comments on the first draft and we will conduct a peer review session. The rewrite should start from scratch and may require drastic changes to content and/or presentation.

Defense Paper (20 pts.)

Your final paper will be a 5-7-page paper that defends a position on a particular ethical issue or case against reasonable criticism. You are encouraged to research arguments from the opposing side. I encourage you to use secondary sources when writing this paper: the best papers will be empirically-informed in addition to being well-argued.

Midterm exam (20 pts.)

The goal of the midterm exam is to give you feedback about the depth of your comprehension of the course readings. The format of the exam will be true/false and multiple-choice. You are welcome to use your notes: the exam will not test retention.

Final exam (20 pts.)

The in-class final exam will cover all of the material that we have discussed in the course so far. The format of the exam will be true/false and multiple-choice. You are welcome to use your notes: the exam will not test retention.

Course Grade Guide

A: 94-100 B+: 87-89 B-: 80-83 C: 74-76 D+: 67-69 F: 0-59

A-: 90-93 B: 84-86 C+: 77-79 C-: 70-73 D: 60-69

Course Policies

- Our classroom will be a technology-free classroom with the exception of e-readers/tablets in airplane mode if one prefers not to print out the readings.
- Discussions will be respectful. No one wants to feel uncomfortable or unsafe in a classroom. Any comment or action that discriminates or harasses on the grounds of sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, or any physical characteristics will not be tolerated. If you feel disrespected in any way during the class, please contact me immediately.
- Attendance is mandatory.
- The University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. In the first instance please visit their website <http://accessibility.unc.edu>, call 919-962-8300 or email accessibility@unc.edu.

Course Schedule

Week

1. Argument Boot Camp – see the “Rhetological Fallacies” document

8/19 – Introduction to the Course

8/21 – Good and Bad Arguments

2. Genesis 22, Plato - Euthyphro

3. Rachels – “Why Morality is not Relative”

4. Mill – Selections from *Utilitarianism*

9/7 – No Class

5. Peter Singer – “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

6. Kant – Selections from *Groundwork on the Metaphysics of Morals*

Supplemental Reading: Velleman – “A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics”

9/25 – Brainstorming Discussion Section

7. Thomas Hill – “Servility and Self-respect”

10/2 - First Critical Paper Due

8. Aristotle – Selections from the *Nichomachean Ethics*

10/9 – Midterm Exam

9. Paper Workshopping

10/12 - Peer Review Session

10/14 – Paper Workshopping

10/16 – Fall Break, No Class

10. Rosalind Hursthouse – “Virtue Theory and Abortion”

Critical Paper Rewrite Due

11. Stephanie Collins – “The Core of Care Ethics”

12. Cora Diamond – “Eating Meat and Eating People”

13. Susan Wolf – “Moral Saints”

11/13 – Defense Paper Discussion Section

14. Philippa Foot – “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”

11/20 – Defense Paper Peer Review Session

15/16. Interesting Cases

11/23 – Trolley Problem

11/30 – Designer Babies

12/2 – Visually-impaired Parents Selecting for Visually-impaired Child Case / Review for Final Exam

Defense Paper Due

Final – 12/4, 8 AM - Caldwell 105