

PHI 192.5: INTRO TO MORAL THEORY

FALL 2021

Location: 214 HL
Time: T-Th 6:30–750pm
Instructor: Augie Faller
Office: HL 529
Office Hours: W 3-4pm on Zoom
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This course introduces and explores some of the big questions about the content, scope, and nature of morality. We will start with various first-order ethical theories, which offer criteria of right action—*i.e.*, what one ought to do, morally speaking. These will include Consequentialist, Kantian, and Virtue Ethical approaches.

We will then consider the question of why one should be moral, as opposed to merely doing what one wants, or trying to advance one’s own interests. We will also discuss whether and in what way morality might be objective, or relative to particular times and places, or more thoroughly subjective. Finally, we will examine some of the more abstract questions about the nature of morality which traditionally fall under the heading of ‘meta-ethics.’ Interspersed with these theoretical ethical issues will be more concrete ethical questions about what to do as individuals, and how the social world should operate.

Ethics is close to home—it concerns the sort of life we should be leading, the ways we should relate to one another, and the sort of society and even world we should be trying to create. Please come to class prepared for the discussion.

Learning Objectives

- Develop your capacity to clearly reconstruct complex, sometimes obscure arguments in a way that balances charity with fidelity to the substance of the original text.
- Learn to discern the underlying, rational structure of arguments, particularly with regard to identifying chains of logical dependence, areas of vulnerability, and effective modes of response.

- Learn how to manage controversies, bracket irrelevant issues, mount focused objections, and practice writing in a way that avoids over-promising, under-delivering, and generally demonstrates a high degree of control.

Course Policies

Plagiarism: Any work you submit must be wholly your own. If you are unsure whether something you've done might count as plagiarism, please consult one of your instructors.

This class will use the plagiarism detection and prevention system **Turnitin**. You will have the option to submit your papers to Turnitin to check that all sources you use have been properly acknowledged and cited before you submit the paper to me. I will also submit all papers you write for this class to Turnitin, which compares submitted documents against documents on the Internet and against student papers submitted to Turnitin at SU and at other colleges and universities. I will take your knowledge of the subject matter of this course and your writing level and style into account in interpreting the originality report. Keep in mind that all papers you submit for this class will become part of the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

Deadlines: I grant all reasonable requests for extensions so long as you (i) notify me *before* the work is due, and (ii) propose a new deadline. Otherwise, late submissions will be penalized at a rate of one third letter grade per 48-hour period that it is late.

Students with a Disability

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit their website at <https://disabilityresources.syr.edu>. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

Assessment

Some of the assignments for this course will be graded on completion. A complete assignment must:

1. Respond to the prompt (i.e., you can't submit a paper on the wrong topic, it must be close to the minimum page count, etc).
2. Demonstrate some understanding of the reading (i.e., you can't just ignore what we have been reading and discussing in class).
3. For in-class quizzes, a "complete" will be given to quizzes earning over 50%.

Papers: 40%

- Paper One (2 pages), worth 15%, due 9/15, graded on completion.
- Paper Two (4-5 pages), worth 25%, due 12/13.

Midterm Exam: 30%

- There will be a midterm exam given in class on 10/19.

Class Participation: 30%

- There will be various in-class assignments and quizzes graded on completion.

Readings

All readings will be available on Blackboard. Readings marked "EER" can be found in the following text, which will also be available through the library reserves.

- Ethics: Essential Readings in Moral Philosophy*, ed. George Sher

Calendar

(Complete the readings before class)

I. Utilitarianism

- August 31: Introduction to course
 - Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Introduction
- September 2: Hedonic Utilitarianism
 - John Stuart Mill, selections from *Utilitarianism* EER

- Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (short story)
- September 7: Rule Utilitarianism/Consequentialism
 - N. K. Jemisin, “The Ones Who Stay and Fight” (short story)
 - John Rawls, “Classic Utilitarianism” EER
 - Brad Hooker, “Rule-Consequentialism” EER
- September 9: Criticism of Consequentialism
 - Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality” EER
- September 14: Criticism of Consequentialism
 - Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism” EER
- September 16: The Repugnant Conclusion
 - Derek Parfit, “Over-Population and the Quality of Life”
- September 21: Applications
 - Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” EER
 - Banerjee & Duflo, “More than 1 Billion People are Hungry in the World: But What if the Experts are Wrong?”

Paper 1 due Friday, September 15th

II. Kantian Ethics

- September 23: Kantian Ethics I
 - Immanuel Kant, selections from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* EER
 - Optional overview: Russ Shafer-Landau
- September 28: Kantian Ethics II
 - Christine M. Korsgaard, “The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil” EER
 - Rae Langton, “Duty and Desolation” EER
- September 30: Applications
 - Onora O’Neill, “Between Consenting Adults” EER

III. Virtue Ethics

- October 5: Aristotle and Virtue Ethics
 - Aristotle, “The Nature of Moral Virtue” EER
 - Martha Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach” EER
- October 7: Virtue Ethics II
 - John Doris, “A Situationist Theory of Character” EER
- October 12: Virtue Ethics III
 - Rachana Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character”
- October 14: Review day
 - We will review the material up to this point.
- October 19: **Midterm in class**
 - Midterm exam will be in class.

IV. Metaethics

- October 21: Metaethics I
 - J.L. Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values” EER
- October 26: Metaethics II
 - G.E. Moore, “Goodness as Simple and Indefinable” EER
 - A.J. Ayer, “The Emotive Theory of Ethics” EER
- October 28: Metaethics III
 - David Enoch, “Why I’m an Objectivist about Ethics”
 - Kate Manne, “Locating Morality: Moral Imperatives as Bodily Imperatives”

V. Why be Moral?

- November 2: Why be Moral? I
 - Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System. . .” EER
- November 4: Why be Moral? II
 - Christine Korsgaard, “The Authority of Norms”

VI. Moral Responsibility, Emotions, and Freedom

- November 9: Moral Responsibility and Freedom I
 - P. F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment”
- November 11: Moral Responsibility and Freedom II
 - Gary Watson, “Responsibility and the Limits of Freedom”
- November 16: Anger, Protest, and Self-Respect
 - Bernard R. Boxill, “Self-Respect and Protest”
 - Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism”
- November 18: Moral Blame, Shame, and Social Change
 - Kwame Anthony Appiah, Selections from *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*
 - Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapter 7
- November 23 & 25
 - Thanksgiving break
- November 30: Explanations and Morality
 - Gilbert Harman, “Ethics and Observation” EER
 - Nicholas Sturgeon, “Moral Explanations” EER
- December 2: Ethics of Death I
 - Epicurus, “Letter to Menoecus”
 - Lucretius, selection from Book 3 of *On the Nature of Things*
- December 7: Ethics of Death II
 - Philip Larkin, “Aubade”
 - Thomas Nagel, “Death”
- December 9: Ethics of Death III
 - Ben Bradley, “When Is Death Bad for the One Who Dies?”

Paper 2 due Monday, December 13th