

PHI 391: History of Ethics

Spring 2022

Lectures: MoWe 3:45 p.m. - 5:05 p.m., School of Management 301
Professor: Christopher Noble
535 Hall of Languages
e-mail: cinoble@syr.edu
Office hours: Mondays, 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will study the foundational texts of several major ethical theories (Contractarianism, Moral Sense Theory, Deontology, Consequentialism, Virtue Ethics) together with some more recent adaptations and criticisms of these theories. Among the questions we will discuss are: What sorts of actions are morally good or bad, and what principles determine the moral value of actions? What justifications can be offered for an ethical theory, and how do we decide between competing theories? How demanding should an ethical theory be, and should it allow for partiality to ourselves or loved ones? Are ethical truths universal or do they depend on our historical or political circumstances?

GOALS

You will learn to how to read texts drawn from a variety of historical periods, and how to identify, evaluate, and construct philosophical arguments. You will also become better acquainted with a variety of historical approaches to thinking about ethics.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The required texts for this course are:

Aristotle (trans. T. Irwin), *Nicomachean Ethics* (Hackett, 2019), ISBN-13: 978-1624668159

Kant, Immanuel (trans. M. Gregor and J. Timmermann), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge, 2012), ISBN-13: 978-1107401068

Mill, J. S. (ed. G. Sher), *Utilitarianism* (Hackett, 2002), ISBN-13: 978-0872206052

All other course readings will be made available as PDFs on Blackboard.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

Paper #1 (4-5 pages)	20%	Due Week 5 (Friday, 02/25)
Paper #2 (4-5 pages)	20%	Due Week 9 (Friday, 04/01)
Paper #3 (4-5 pages)	20%	Due Week 13 (Friday, 04/29)
Final Exam	20%	Self-scheduled (by Thursday, 05/12)
Attendance and Participation	20%	

Papers: This is your chance to engage critically with a topic discussed in course lectures. Papers should be 4-5 pages in length double-spaced with standard margins at a font size roughly corresponding to Times New Roman 12 point. Paper topics will be distributed approximately two weeks before papers are due.

Papers are to be submitted through the plagiarism-detection program Turnitin. You will be able to upload your

papers to Turnitin via a link under 'Assignments' on the course's Blackboard page.

Final Exam: The exam will consist of short answer and two or three essay questions. Exam essay questions will be selected from a list of study questions made available in advance on the course's Blackboard webpage. Though the

final exam is not ‘comprehensive’, some essay questions may require you to discuss material from before the midterm.

Class Preparation: Reading assignments should be completed prior to class. Many of the readings for this course are dense and very challenging. Give yourself plenty of time.

Attendance and Participation policy: Regular attendance at course lectures and participation in class discussions is expected. Poor attendance will result in a significant reduction in the ‘Attendance and Participation’ component of your course grade.

Late submissions and extensions: Writing assignments submitted after the deadline will be subject to a deduction of 1/3 letter grade on the first day (e.g. from B+ to B), and an additional 1/3 letter grade on each subsequent day. Requests for extensions may be granted on a case-by-case, but should be made well in advance of the deadline.

Grades: The following grading scale will be used for the course: A = 93.0 or higher, A- = 92.9-90.0, B+ = 89.9-87.0, B = 86.9-83.0, B- = 82.9-80.0, C+ = 79.9-77.0, C = 76.9-73.0, C- = 72.9-70.0, D = 69.9-60.0, F = 59.9 or lower.

Grades will be rounded up or down to the nearest tenth of a percent. You can check the Blackboard “Grade Center” to track your course grade. All grades on assignments as well as the course grade are final and not subject to revision, except in cases of computational errors.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

COVID-19 Safety: Please be aware of Syracuse University’s COVID and Masking Alert Framework (<https://news.syr.edu/blog/2021/08/13/covid-19-campus-update-dynamic-covid-alert-and-masking-framework/>), and follow its guidance about mask wearing on campus and in the classroom. The current COVID alert level may be found here: <https://www.syracuse.edu/staysafe/>

Academic Integrity: The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy will be strictly enforced. The Syracuse policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work submitted in exams and assignments. ***Serious sanctions including course failure and academic probation can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.*** For more information and the complete University policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

Laptops: Laptops (and other electronic devices) may only be used in class with prior approval from me. While there are a number of legitimate uses for laptops in the classroom, and I am open to allowing their use on a case-by-case basis, they have proven to be a significant distraction for some students. If you would like permission to use a laptop or a similar device, please contact me. Students who have requested to use laptops in class may be required to submit samples of their lecture notes.

Special Accommodations: If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located at 804 University Avenue, Room 309, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue “Accommodation Authorization Letters” to students as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: This following schedule is tentative and is subject to revision. Please consult this course’s Blackboard page for the most up-to-date version.

Week 1

Jan. 24: Course Introduction

I. Contractarianism

Jan. 26: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651], chs. 6, 13 [15 p.]

Week 2

Jan. 31: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651], chs. 14-18 (selections) [12 p.]

II. Moral Sense Theory

Feb. 2: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1738-40] (excerpts)

Week 3

Feb. 7: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1738-40] (excerpts)

III. Kantian Deontology

Feb. 9: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [1785], Section I [11 p.]

Mar. 23: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [1785], Section II, 4: 406-424 [16 p.]

Week 4

Feb. 14: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [1785], Section II, 4: 425-445 [18 p.]

Feb. 16: Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropic Motives" [1797] [3 p.]
Christine M. Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil" [1986] [25 p.]

Week 5

Feb. 21: Onora O'Neill, "Between Consenting Adults" [1985] [26 p.]

IV. Utilitarianism

Feb. 23: Jeremy Bentham, *An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation* [1780],
I.i-iii, IV.i-viii, XVII.iv [7 p.]
J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* [1861], ch. I-II [25 p.]

Week 6

Feb. 28: J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* [1861], ch. III-IV [15 p.]

Mar. 2: J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* [1861], ch. V [23 p.]

Week 7

Mar. 7: Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from the Omelas" [1973] [7 p.]
R. M. Hare, "What is Wrong with Slavery" [1979] [19 p.]

Mar. 9: Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" [1973], excerpt (p. 93-117) [24 p.]
Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, "The Experience Machine" [1974] [6 p.]

SPRING BREAK (Sunday, Mar. 13-Sunday, Mar. 20)

.....

IIIa and IVa. Kantian Deontology vs. Utilitarianism

Week 8

- Mar. 21: Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" [1972]
Onora O'Neill, "Kantian Approaches to Some Famine Relief Problems" [1980]

V. Virtue Ethics

- Mar. 23: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.1-5, 7-8, 13 [11 p.]

Week 9

- Mar. 28: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1-7, III.2-4, IV.3 [17 p.]
- Mar. 30: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.2-4, X.6-8

Week 10

- Apr. 4: G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy" [1958]
Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories" [1976]
- Apr. 6: Rosalind Hursthouse, "Normative Virtue Ethics" [1998]
William Frankena, "A Critique of Virtue-Based Ethical Systems" [1989]

VI. Nietzsche's Criticism of Morality

Week 11

- Apr. 11: Plato, *Gorgias* 482c-484c [3 p.]
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality* [1887], Preface and First Essay [32 p.]
- Apr. 13: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* [1886] (2, 56, 62, 186-189, 197, 201-203, 211, 212, 225, 230, 257-261, 270, 287, 293), and *The Gay Science* [1882] (290, 301, 304, 338)

VII. Two Metaethical Views: Intuitionism and Non-Cognitivism

Week 12

- Apr. 18: G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* [1903], 'The Open-Question Argument'
- Apr. 20: A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* [1932], 'Emotivism'

VIII. Post-Kantian Deontology

Week 13

Apr. 25: W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* [1930], “What makes right actions right?”

Apr. 27: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* [1971], p. 11-21, 60-3, 136-140

IX. What is the Scope of Ethics?

Week 14

May 2: Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints” [1983]

May 4: Closing Discussion