

Introduction to Ethics (Taught and Revised Course)

Course Description

In this course, we will address ethical questions as broad as ‘How should I live?’ and ‘What is the nature of morality?’ but also specific questions such as the following:

- * Does God make things right or wrong?
- * Are there nothing but subjective or relative truths in morality?
- * What is justice?
- * Does it pay to be moral?
- * Is abortion morally permissible?
- * How much should one do to reduce the suffering of distant others?
- * What makes conduct in war moral or not?
- * Is torture ever morally permissible?
- * Are we morally responsible if our actions are determined?
- * What is the moral status, if any, of animals?
- * What is the role of emotion in an ethical life?

To engage with such questions, we will learn about and critically engage with how philosophers have addressed them. Particular attention will be given to three major systematic ethical theories: (i) the virtue theories of Plato and Aristotle; (ii) the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill; and, (iii) Kant’s deontological ethics. Not only will we come to understand what philosophers have already claimed and argued, but we shall moreover engage with them by thinking critically and philosophically about their views and the ethical issues themselves. I hope that this will foster an appreciation for the philosophical study of ethics and cultivate critical thinking skills of general benefit.

Required Texts

Cahn, Steven M., ed. 2011. *Exploring ethics: An introductory anthology*. Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19975-751-0.

Plato. 2002. *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*. Second Edition. Translated by G. M. A. Grube and revised by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company. ISBN: 978-0-87220-633-5.

Assignments

Participation Exercises

There will 20 smaller assignments throughout the semester. Most will be exercises to accompany the reading before class, and these will only be accepted—barring any emergencies—in-class on the day of the assigned reading. Others will be in-class exercises, and hence will also require your presence in class. Each assignment will be equally weighted. They will be graded with the following rubric:

√++ (100% credit)	√+ (85% credit)	√ (65% credit)	0 (0% credit)
Terrific: • responds fully to prompt • explains main points; provides clear & developed ideas	Very good: • responds fully to prompt • identifies major points; unclear or underdeveloped ideas	Needs work: • responds only partially to prompt • fails to identify major points; very unclear; no development of ideas	Failing • Incomplete • Off topic

Task-Papers

There will be five “task-papers”, i.e. papers in which you exercise various tasks that are involved in philosophical thinking. Mastery of each of these tasks will be expected on the final exam, so these papers must be taken seriously. There will be three kinds of task-papers. The first focuses on *conceptual analysis*, testing you to understand, apply, and critically think about Socratic definitions. The second focuses on *reading*, requiring that you summarize difficult philosophical texts and ask critical questions. The third focuses on *reasoning*, requiring that you critically assess philosophical arguments. For each of these three types of paper, I will provide a grading rubric.

Final Exam

Your task during the final exam will be to think philosophically by critically examining a new philosophical text of roughly 1-2 pages in length. You will write an essay in which you perform five tasks, corresponding to skills we have focused on throughout the semester. Namely, you will be asked to do the following:

- 1) identify the main question addressed in the passage and explain its philosophical importance;
- 2) analyze and explain the meaning of key concepts in the passage;
- 3) identify and explain the passage’s main conclusion and argument for that conclusion;
- 4) critically examine that argument and its premises, while considering how the author of the passage might respond to criticisms; and,
- 5) articulate whether you think the argument is good, giving reasons in support of your final assessment.

Earlier assignments in the course will prepare you for the final exam by homing in on the specific skills that will be demanded of you. Additionally, we shall have a mock exam in class the week prior to finals week.

To give you a sense of my expectations for what you should be able to do by the end of the course, I provide my grading rubric for the final exam at the end of the syllabus.

Weighting of Assignments for the Final Grade

After the calculation of the above numerical equivalences, the final grade will be computed on the basis of the following weighting:

15% - Participation Assignments

10% - Reading Task-Paper 1

15% - Reading Task-Paper 2

25% - Final Exam

10% - Conceptual Analysis Task-Paper

10% - Reasoning Task-Paper 1

15% - Reasoning Task-Paper 2

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Please note that this schedule will be revised if needed during the semester. In such a case, I will provide you with a revised schedule. The following is the key for where to find the readings:

- (CW) Available on the course website
- (EE) Cahn's *Exploring Ethics*
- (FD) Plato's *Five Dialogues*

Week 1 *Introduction*

UNIT 1: WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

Skills: Philosophical Questioning and Conceptual Analysis

Socrates and Definitions

Plato, *Euthyphro*, pp. 1-20 (FD)

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS TASK-PAPER DISTRIBUTED

Week 2 *Divine Command Theory*

Plato, *Euthyphro*, pp. 1-20 (FD)

Steven M. Cahn, "God and Morality" (EE)

In-Class Peer Review

DRAFT OF CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS TASK-PAPER DUE

UNIT 2: ETHICAL THEORIES

Skills: Reading Philosophical Texts and Applying Theories

Week 3 *Moral Relativism: Definition and the Cultural Differences Argument*

James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (EE)

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS TASK-PAPER DUE

READING TASK-PAPER #1 DISTRIBUTED

Moral Relativism: Evaluation and Case Study

Yael Tamir, "Hands Off Clitoridectomy" (CW)

Martha Nussbaum, "Double Moral Standards?" (O)

Week 4 *Virtue Ethics*

Aristotle, "The Nature of Virtue" (EE)

READING TASK-PAPER #1 DUE

READING TASK-PAPER #2 ASSIGNED

Week 5 *Utilitarianism*

Shane Gronholz, "[Introduction to Consequentialism](#)"

Jeremy Bentham, Selection from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (CW)

Utilitarianism, continued

John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism: What Utilitarianism Is" (EE)

Week 6

Utilitarianism: Applied to World Hunger

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (EE)

Utilitarianism: Objections

Louis P. Pojman, "Strengths and Weaknesses of Utilitarianism" (EE)

Week 7

Kantian Ethics

Onora O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics" (EE)

Andrew Chapman, "[Introduction to Deontology: Kantian Ethics](#)"

Kantian Ethics, continued

Onora O'Neill, "Kantian Formula of the End in Itself and World Hunger" (CW)

READING TASK-PAPER #2 DUE

Week 8

Evaluating Kantian Ethics

Correspondence between Immanuel Kant and Maria von Herbert (CW)

Virtue Ethics Reconsidered

Rosalind Hursthouse, "Normative Virtue Ethics" (CW)

Week 9

Existentialism

Jean-Paul Sartre, selection from "Existentialism is a Humanism"

Simone de Beauvoir, selection from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

UNIT 3: APPLIED ETHICS

Skills: Identifying and Evaluating Arguments

Week 10

What are Arguments?

Morton, "Sources of Conviction", pp. 35-49 (CW)

REASONING TASK-PAPER #1 ASSIGNED

Week 11

Socrates' Commitment to Justice

Plato, *Crito* (pp. 45-57) (FD)

Unjust Laws and Civil Disobedience

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From Birmingham Jail" (CW)

REASONING TASK-PAPER #1 DUE
REASONING TASK-PAPER #2 ASSIGNED

Week 12 *Torture*
Alan M. Dershowitz, "Should the Ticking Bomb Terrorist Be Tortured? (O)
Henry Shue, "Torture" (EE)
Daniel J. Hill, "Ticking Bombs, Torture, and the Analogy with Self-Defense"
(EE)

Week 13 *Moral Responsibility*
Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (CW)
Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck" (CW)

Week 14 *Animal Rights*
Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights" (EE)
Carl Cohen, "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research" (EE)
REASONING TASK-PAPER #2 DUE

CONCLUSION

Week 15 *Exam Practice*
Wrap-up

FINAL EXAM