

## **Philosophy 1030-81: Ethics**

**Summer 2014  
MW 6-8:50pm  
Elmwood Campus**

Course overview: This course is a rigorous introduction to ethics (a.k.a. “moral philosophy”). When I say that this course is “rigorous” I do not mean that it is unusually difficult or demanding on your time. I mean, instead, that as we confront tough moral questions we will take care to think logically. This is not a course on *why* people believe the things that they do about ethics, nor is it a course on the *history* of ethical thought. It is still less an opportunity for us to express our *emotions* about hot-button ethical issues. It is, instead, a sober investigation into morality through the use of human reason. You will not learn what to think about particular ethical dilemmas in this course. But you will, I hope, learn *how* to think about ethics.

Over 11 lectures and their associated readings we will consider a number of topics in the three branches of ethics: *metaethics*, *normative ethics*, and *applied ethics*. Metaethics is the study of moral concepts and statements. It addresses questions like: What does it mean to say that something is *good*? Or that an action is *wrong*? Are moral principles like laws of nature, applying to all people, in all places, at all times? Or are these principles relative to culture? Could morality be just a mirage?

Normative ethics, which we will consider in more detail than the other two branches, attempts to answer the question “what is the right thing to do?” by positing fundamental ethical principles. While each normative theory seems to capture something important about right conduct, each theory, too, has its limitations.

Applied ethics is the analysis of particular, real-world ethical dilemmas. We will put our normative theories to use as we discuss the permissibility of abortion, our ethical responsibilities to the poor, the justice (or injustice) of war, and other issues.

Throughout all of this, and with a special focus at the end of the course, we will reflect on what constitutes a good life and how we can pursue happiness in a morally upstanding way.

Instructor: Thomas Mulligan  


Office hours: By appointment. I understand that many of you have demanding professional and personal obligations and so I will do my best to meet at your convenience. If it is difficult to arrange in-person meetings, we can communicate over e-mail or with Skype.

Learning objectives:

(1) Think critically about ethics. Understand what differentiates good arguments from bad ones, and develop an ability to form your own clear and effective arguments.

(2) Gain a conceptual understanding of the field of ethics, to include its major theories, figures, and problems, thus obtaining a foundation for more advanced study.

(3) Improve your writing.

(4) Reflect on the relevance of ethics to everyday life and gain an appreciation for the complexity and intellectual depth of moral dilemmas.

Attendance policy: Attendance at lectures is required. Given that this is an intensive, six week long course, it is important that you be present for each lecture. An absence taken for a good reason (*e.g.* a medical appointment) will not be penalized—but please do clear these with me beforehand.

Grading: Your grade is based on two papers and class participation:

(1) The first, shorter paper is due on 8 June and is worth 20% of your grade. The second, slightly longer paper is due on 25 June and is worth 50% of your grade. These papers should be submitted to me via e-mail. I will return them to you with my comments.

(2) Class participation is worth 30% of your grade. Class participation consists in regularly attending class (*cf.* the attendance policy, above) and asking questions/making interesting comments, especially with regard to the assigned reading.

(3) I reserve the right to elevate individual students' grades up a notch (*e.g.* from B- to B) for effort and improvement over the course.

Guidance for writing papers: Some excellent advice on writing philosophy papers is given by Jim Pryor, here: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html> .

Keys to success in this course: There are two. (1) Do the reading. I will generally assign a short reading for our Wednesday sessions, and a longer reading for our Monday sessions (for which you have more time to prepare). (2) Come to class and participate. We will all get more out of the course if you ask questions, propose your own ideas, and weigh in when you think something seems especially interesting (or dubious). If you do (1) and (2), then you will write good papers and get a good grade.

Academic honesty: All students should be aware of their responsibilities under the Code of Academic Conduct. I take violations of academic honesty seriously. Any evidence of dishonesty will be brought to the attention of the Honor Board for investigation and adjudication.

Changes to syllabus: I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus at any time. This will probably happen in the case of the reading schedule, but it also extends to the grading policy. Any changes will be announced in class or via e-mail.

Reading schedule (these readings will be posted to the course's Blackboard page):

- Monday, May 19: FIRST CLASS (no reading)
- Wednesday, May 21: “The Subject-Matter of Ethics”, by G. E. Moore. From his *Principia Ethica*.
- Monday, May 26: MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY
- Wednesday, May 28: Excerpts from Plato's *Republic*.  
“Ethical Egoism”, by James Rachels. From his *Elements of Moral Philosophy*.
- Monday, June 2: Excerpts from Bentham's *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.  
Excerpts from Mill's *Utilitarianism*.
- Wednesday, June 4: Excerpts from Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.
- Monday, June 9: Excerpts from Hobbes' *Leviathan*.  
“Contractualism and Utilitarianism”, by T. M. Scanlon.
- Wednesday, June 11: Excerpts from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- Monday, June 16: “Why Abortion is Immoral”, by Don Marquis.  
“A Defense of Abortion”, by Judith Jarvis Thomson.
- Wednesday, June 18: “What's Wrong with Torture?”, by David Sussman.
- Monday, June 23: Excerpts from Sidgwick's *The Method of Ethics*.  
Excerpts from Epictetus' *Enchiridion*.  
Excerpts from the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius.