

## PHIL 205-13: Ethics

Lecture Hours: MWF 11 – 11:50, Ritter Hall 119

Office Hours: By Appointment, Adorjan Hall, First Floor Lounge

Instructor: Mr. Jeremy Skrzypek

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### Course Description:

This course will be a rigorous introduction to the area of philosophy known as *Ethics* or *Moral Philosophy*. The course will be split into three sections. In the first section we will cover an area of moral philosophy known as *Metaethics*. Here we will analyze questions such as:

*What is ethics?*

*Are there objective moral truths?*

*If there are objective moral truths, how can we know them?*

In the second part of the course we will cover an area of philosophy known as *Ethical Theory*. Here we will analyze questions such as:

*What fundamental principles can I use to guide my actions?*

*What sorts of duties or obligations do I have?*

*How should I live my life? What sort of person should I be?*

In the third part of the course we will cover an area of philosophy known as *Applied Ethics*. Here we will analyze questions such as:

*Do we have a moral obligation to help those in need?*

*Is abortion morally permissible?*

*Are any kinds of sexual acts immoral?*

For a large portion of the course, our approach in investigating these issues will be to read from the texts of some of the most famous ethical philosophers in history: *Jeremy Bentham* and *John Stuart Mill*, *Immanuel Kant*, *Aristotle*, and *Thomas Aquinas*. Although we will be spending a lot of time on how these questions have been addressed historically, the answers we will consider are still relevant for both contemporary philosophy and our lives today. This will become apparent both from our class discussions and the written assignments throughout the course.

### Course Objectives:

Over the course of the semester we will attempt to achieve four main objectives:

(1) *Students will be introduced to, and have at least a basic understanding of, the ethical theories espoused by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas, as well as a familiarity with some of the issues addressed by later philosophers within those traditions.*

(2) *Students will be able to understand and evaluate arguments in philosophical texts pertaining to the ethical theories above, as well as issues in metaethics and applied ethics.*

(3) *Students will learn how to think clearly and creatively when addressing ethical issues and begin to form and defend their own arguments for or against certain ethical views.*

(4) *Students will be able to apply these arguments to real-life situations.*

### Required Texts:

1. John Troyer (editor), *The Classical Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill* (Hackett Publishing: 2003)
2. Immanuel Kant, *Ethical Philosophy*, Second Edition (Hackett: 1995)
3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Second Edition (Hackett: 1999)
4. Thomas Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, Second Edition (Hackett: 2003)
5. Various articles posted on course website (as indicated below with \*)

### Recommended Texts:

1. Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, Fourth Edition (Hackett: 2008)

Note on texts: Students are expected to bring their own copies of the assigned readings to each class. This includes the articles posted on the course website. It is the responsibility of each student to print out these documents ahead of time and bring physical, hard copies to the appropriate classes, as the use of laptops, smartphones, or other electronic devices will not be permitted during class time. If any student has any problems obtaining any of the texts or printing any of the assigned readings, he or she is urged to contact the instructor as soon as possible.

### Assignments:

#### 10% = *Short Deconstructive Essay*

Each student is to write a short essay (roughly 2-3 double-spaced pages) deconstructing and briefly evaluating a “real-life” ethical argument. More details will be given on the day the essay is assigned (see dates below).

#### 25% = *Longer Constructive Essay*

For the longer essay (roughly 4-5 double-spaced pages) each student is to give a synopsis of one of the ethical theories covered in class and explain how someone might argue for a particular ethical conclusion within that framework. He or she will also consider objections to that conclusion from within the same framework and from other competing frameworks. Like the short essay, more details will be given on the day the essay is assigned.

#### 10% = *Silent Debate.*

For this assignment, students will be split up into groups of two. Within these groups, each student will defend, in writing, a position contrary to the position defended by his or her partner on a particular issue in applied ethics. The “debate” will involve an initial argument from each side, a response to the initial argument from each side, and a reply to that response from the original arguer. All of this will be in writing (thus, *silent* debate) and will take place over a few weeks. Students should write a total of about 2-3 pages for this assignment.

#### 20% = *Midterm.*

The midterm exam will cover all of the readings and topics discussed in class up to that point. It will include multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, and an essay question. All students must take the exam on the day it is held unless prior permission is given by me.

#### 20% = *Final Exam.*

The final exam will cover all of the readings and topics discussed in class after the midterm. It will also include multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, and an essay question. All students must take the exam on the day it is held unless prior permission is given by me.

10% = *Three-Minute Throwdowns*.

Periodically throughout the course, certain classes will begin with what I will call a “Three-Minute Throwdown”. At the start of class, students will be asked to write down on a sheet of paper their answers to five quick questions I will ask related to the readings assigned for that date. This should only take about three minutes, and at the end of that three minutes I will collect each student’s answers. A student’s grade in this category will be calculated based on how many correct answers he or she achieved out of the number of questions asked. The questions from each student’s three lowest scoring throwdowns will be dropped. Students will not be told ahead of time which classes will feature these “Throwdowns”, so attending class regularly, arriving on time, and consistently having the assigned readings read for the dates they are due will be essential to one’s success in this aspect of the course.

5% = *Attendance*.

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class (unless a “Throwdown” take its place, should there be one for that day). Each student begins the semester with a perfect score in the attendance category and is allowed to miss up to three classes without any penalty. After three absences, a point will be deducted per day missed. Notice also that continued absences hurt not only one’s grade in the attendance category, but could also do some damage in the “Throwdown” category as well, should he or she miss the days in which those are held. If any student is forced to miss class due to some emergency, he or she is strongly encouraged to contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss the possibility of those absences being excused.

#### Grading:

Although essays, exams, debates, and “Throwdowns” will be weighted differently (based on the figures above), each particular assignment will be graded on a one-hundred point scale as follows:

<b>A</b> = 100 – 93	<b>C+</b> = 79 – 77
<b>A-</b> = 92 – 90	<b>C</b> = 76 – 73
<b>B+</b> = 89 – 87	<b>C-</b> = 72 – 70
<b>B</b> = 86 – 83	<b>D</b> = 69 – 60
<b>B-</b> = 82 – 80	<b>F</b> = <60

*Note on late assignments:* Unless specified otherwise, all essays and assignments are due in hard copy at the end of class on the dates listed below, barring any adjustments in the schedule by me. Any papers not received by the end of class on the date they are due will receive a **TEN POINT deduction** (based on the assignment’s 100-point scale) **PER DAY**. No assignments will be accepted more than five days after they are due.

#### Additional Notes and Policies:

*Cheating/ Plagiarism.* Academic honesty and integrity are vital for your success as a student and my effectiveness as an instructor. As a result, copying, cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise presenting work as your own that was in fact received from another source will not be tolerated. Any confirmed instance of cheating or plagiarizing will be met with at the very least a failing grade on that assignment. As per university policy, penalties could be as grave as a failing

grade in the entire course, academic probation or even dismissal from the university. Please take this issue very seriously.

*Special Needs.* Any student who has a learning or physical disability documented by the university's office of Student Disability Services is encouraged to let me know as soon as possible. I will be happy to make the appropriate accommodations for those that require them.

**[Tentative] Schedule for Readings and Assignments:**

Monday, 1/13: **What is Philosophy? Entrance Survey, Class Introductions and Syllabus Overview**

Wednesday, 1/15: **Metaethics: What is Ethics?** [Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* (Selections)]\*

Friday, 1/17: **Metaethics: Moral Skepticism** [Mackie, "Subjectivity of Values"]\*

Mon, 1/20: **NO CLASS** (MLK Jr. Day)

Wed, 1/22: **Metaethics: Ethical Objectivism** [Rachels, "Subjectivism in Ethics", pp. 1-11; Pojman, "The Case Against Moral Relativism"]\*

Fri, 1/24: *Same topic* continued; **Criteria for Evaluating Ethical Theories and Rules for Argumentation**

Mon, 1/27: **Ethical Theory: Utilitarianism: Bentham** [Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, in *The Classical Utilitarians*, pp. 8-22, 62-71, 92-94]

Wed, 1/29: **Mill** [Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in *The Classical Utilitarians*, pp. 95-122]

Fri, 1/31: *Same topic* continued

Mon, 2/3: *Same topic* continued [Mill, *Utilitarianism*, pp. 122-147]

Wed, 2/5: *Same topic* continued

Fri, 2/7: **Problems for Utilitarianism** [Nozick, "The Experience Machine"]\*

Mon, 2/10: **Ethical Theory: Deontology** [Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Ethical Philosophy*, pp. 1-18]

Wed, 2/12: *Same topic* continued

Fri, 2/14: *Same topic* continued [Kant, *Groundwork*, pp. 19-48]

Mon, 2/17: Same topic continued; Short Essay Assigned

Wed, 2/19: Particular Ethical Conclusions [Kant, "Metaphysics of Virtues" in *Ethical Philosophy*, pp. 77-141]

Fri, 2/21: Same topic continued, Problems for Deontological Ethics

Mon, 2/24: Ethical Theory: Virtue Ethics: Happiness [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B I (pp. 1-18)]

Wed, 2/26: Same topic continued

Fri, 2/28: Virtue [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B II (pp. 18-30)]

Mon, 3/3: Same topic continued; **SHORT ESSAY DUE**

Wed, 3/5: First-Half Summary, Review for Midterm

Fri, 3/7: **MIDTERM EXAM**

Mon, 3/10: **NO CLASS** (Spring Break)

Wed, 3/12: **NO CLASS** (Spring Break)

Fri, 3/14: **NO CLASS** (Spring Break)

Mon, 3/17: Pleasure and Contemplation [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, B X (pp. 153-167)]

Wed, 3/19: Friendship [Aristotle, B VIII (p. 119-129)]

Fri, 3/21: Same topic continued; Problems for Virtue Ethics

Mon, 3/24: Ethical Theory: Natural Law: Happiness, Good Acts and Evil Acts, Virtue [Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Selections #1)\*]

Wed, 3/26: Law in General [Aquinas, *On Law, Morality and Politics*, pp. 10-24, 26-28]

Fri, 3/28: Natural Law [Aquinas, *On Law, Morality and Politics*, pp. 40-51, 76-77]

Mon, 3/31: Same topic continued; Longer Essay Assigned

Wed, 4/2: Particular Ethical Conclusions [Aquinas, *On Law, Morality and Politics*, pp. 130-143, 164-172; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Selections #2)\*]

Fri, 4/4: *Same topic continued*; **Problems for Natural Law Theory**

Mon, 4/7: **Applied Ethics: Social Justice** [Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"]\*

Wed, 4/9: *Same topic continued* [Kekes, "On the Supposed Obligation to Relieve Famine"]\*

Fri, 4/11: *Same topic continued*; [Rand, "The Ethics of Emergencies"]\*; Silent Debate Assigned

Mon, 4/14: **Applied Ethics: Abortion** [Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"]\*

Wed, 4/16: *Same topic continued*

Fri, 4/18: **NO CLASS** (Easter Break)

Mon, 4/21: **NO CLASS** (Easter Break)

Wed, 4/23: *Same topic continued* [Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"]\*; Silent Debate Checkpoint #1

Fri, 4/25: *Same topic continued*; [Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"; Pruss, "I Was Once a Fetus"]\*; LONGER ESSAY DUE

Mon, 4/28: **Applied Ethics: Sexual Ethics** [Corvino, "A Defense of Homosexuality"]\*; Silent Debate Checkpoint #2

Wed, 4/30: *Same topic continued* [Lee and George, "What Sex Can Be"]\*

Fri, 5/2: *Same topic continued*; Silent Debate Checkpoint #3

Mon, 5/5: **Conclusion: Second-Half Summary, Review for Final Exam, Exit Survey, Teaching Evaluations**; SILENT DEBATE DUE

TBA: **Final Exam**