

PHIL 340, Ethical Theory

Instructor: Lane DesAutels
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Tu 12:00-2:00 (and by appointment)
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Course description: In this class, we will explore several of the main issues within ethical theory. We begin by examining questions like: what is ethics? What is ethical relativism and how does it differ from ethical objectivism? And what is the nature of value? We follow these discussions by a preliminary treatment of several of the traditional theories in ethics: utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, and contract theory. Finally, we explore several significant challenges to ethical thought: the fact/value problem, moral skepticism, error theory, the role of religion, sociobiology, and the questions about free will and moral responsibility.

Course Requirements:

- (1) One 2 page writing exercise (topic to be announced). Late papers are accepted but 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted for every 24 hours that the paper is late.
- (2) One 5 page paper on a topic of the student's choice. Students will submit both a rough draft and a final draft. The final paper grade will be an average of the two; a detailed assignment sheet to be provided. Again, late papers will be deducted 1/3 of a letter grade for every day they are late.
- (3) 10 quizzes based on assigned reading. These will typically be true/false, multiple-choice, or fill in the blank questions. Quizzes may be given during lecture or discussion sections. Quizzes may not be made up. The student's two lowest quiz grades will be dropped in calculating his/her final grade.
- (4) A midterm examination and a cumulative final examination.
- (5) Class attendance and meaningful class participation, based in part on assigned reading, is expected.

Grading: Final grade calculation: 15% for quizzes; 10% for writing exercise; 20% for midterm; 20% for final exam; 10% for class participation; 25% for final paper.

Absences: University policy excuses the absences of students for illness (of one's self or one's dependent), religious observances, participation in University activities at the request of university authorities, and compelling circumstances beyond the student's control. Students must *request the excuse in writing and supply appropriate documentation*, e.g., medical documentation to the TA. Students with written, excused absences are entitled to a makeup midterm exam (but not a makeup quiz) at a time mutually convenient for the instructor/TA and student.

Canvas space for the course: The course will use the Canvas web space to post assigned readings and other course materials. Go to elms.umd.edu [note: no www at beginning]. Sign on with your usual directory ID and password. If you are not familiar with Canvas, there are various tutorials available at the ELMS site.

Classroom Etiquette: Please arrive on time and leave only after the class is over. Please do not talk to your neighbor during class. Turn off and put away all cell phones and message devices. Laptops may NOT be used during lecture (unless proper DSS documentation is provided).

Accommodations: If a student has a documented disability and wishes to discuss academic accommodations with the instructor, please contact the instructor and the TA in writing (email is OK) as soon as possible. If a student is a member of a religious group that will require accommodations in the academic calendar, please send email to both the instructor and the TA within the first three weeks of class to indicate what the conflict is and what accommodation is requested.

Honesty: Honesty on the part of students is presumed. The University has approved a **Code of Academic Integrity** (<http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html>), administered by the Student Honor Council, which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, facilitating academic dishonesty, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. Plagiarism policy: all quotations taken from other authors, including from the internet, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well.

Students may get help with the grammar and structure of their writing, such as at the **Writing Center** (see <http://www.english.umd.edu/writingcenter> or call 301-405-3785 for appt.). However, students may not get unacknowledged help with the content of their work. Please contact the TA with any questions about what is acceptable or unacceptable outside help.

Assigned Readings: All assigned readings will be uploaded onto ELMS by at least one week prior to when they are assigned. There is no required textbook for this class.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments (subject to change)

Major grading events are indicated by: (***)

9/4, Introduction

No assigned readings

9/9, Socratic Morality

- Required reading:
 - o “The Crito”, Plato

9/11, Ethical Relativism vs. Ethical Objectivism

- Required reading:
 - o “Custom is King”, Herodotus,
 - o “Objectivism: Natural Law”, Aquinas

9/16, Ethical Relativism vs. Ethical Objectivism Continued

- Required reading:
 - o “A Defense of Ethical Relativism”, Ruth Benedict,
 - o “A Critique of Ethical Relativism”, Louis Pojman

9/18, Value

- Required reading:
 - o “Classical Hedonism”, Jeremy Bentham,
 - o “The Experience Machine”, Robert Nozick

9/23, Value Continued

- Required reading:
 - o “Value and the Origin of Right and Wrong”, Richard Taylor,
 - o “The Transvaluation of Values”, Friedrich Nietzsche

9/25, Utilitarianism

- Required reading:
 - o “Utilitarianism”, J. S. Mill,
 - o “Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism”, J. J. C. Smart

*****September 27th: 2 page writing exercise due at the beginning of discussion sections**

9/30, Rule Utilitarianism

- Required reading:
 - o “Against Utilitarianism”, Bernard Williams,
 - o “Rule-Utilitarianism”, John Hospers

10/2, Applying Utilitarianism

- Required reading:

- “Side Constraints”, Robert Nozick,
- “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, Peter Singer

10/7, **Trolley Problems**

- Required reading:
 - “Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem”, Judith Jarvis Thomson

10/9, **Deontology**

- Required reading:
 - “The Foundation for the Metaphysics of Morals”, Immanuel Kant

10/14, **Deontology Continued**

- Required reading:
 - “What Makes Right Acts Right?”, W. D. Ross,
 - “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”, Philippa Foot

10/16, **Virtue**

- Required reading:
 - “The Ethics of Virtue”, Aristotle

10/21, **Midterm exam review**

***October 23rd: Midterm exam

10/28, **Virtue Continued: Moral Saints**

- Required reading:
 - “Moral Saints”, Susan Wolf,
 - “In Defense of Moral Saints”, Louis Pojman

10/30, **Contract**

- Required reading:
 - “The Leviathan” (excerpt), Thomas Hobbes

11/4, **Contractarianism vs. Contractualism**

- Required reading:
 - “Why Contractarianism?”, David Gauthier,
 - “Liberal Contractualism: Justice as Fairness”, John Rawls

11/6, **Fact/Value Problem**

- Required reading:
 - “On Reason and the Emotions: The Fact/Value Distinction”, David Hume,
 - “Non-Naturalism”, G. E. Moore

11/11, **Emotivism**

- Required reading:
 - “Emotivism”, A. J. Ayer,

- “Prescriptivism: The Structure of Ethics and Morals”, R. M. Hare

11/13, Error Theory

- Required reading:
 - “The Subjectivity of Values”, J. L. Mackie

*****November 15th: First draft of 5 page paper due at beginning of discussion sections**

11/18, Realism

- Required reading:
 - “A Defense of Moral Realism”, Michael Smith
 - “Moral Explanations”, Nicholas Sturgeon

11/20, Nihilism

- Required reading:
 - “Moral Nihilism”, Gilbert Harman

11/25, Religion

- Required reading:
 - “Religion and the Queerness of Morality”, George Mavrodes
 - “Ethics Without God”, Kai Nielson

11/27, Sociobiology

- Required reading:
 - “Ethics and the Decent of Man”, Charles Darwin,
 - “Sociobiology and Ethics”, E. O. Wilson

12/2, Expressivism

- Required reading:
 - “Wise Choices, Apt Feelings” (exeprt), Alan Gibbard

12/4, Free Will and Responsibility

- Required reading:
 - “The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility”, Galen Strawson,
 - “Free Will, Determinism, and Moral Responsibility: A Response to Galen Strawson”, Louis Pojman

12/9, Environmental Ethics: A Critique

- Required Reading:
 - “Prospects for Environmental Ethics”, Elliot Sober

12/11, Final Exam Review

*****December 13th: Final draft of 5 page paper due by 11:59pm**

*****December 18th: 1:30-3:30pm, Final Examination in lecture classroom**

No change in time allowed