

Philosophy 105 F: Introduction to Ethics
Dr. Erica L. Neely
Spring 2007

Place and Time: 317 Gregory Hall, MWF 2-2:50 p.m.
Email address: elneely@uiuc.edu
Office Location and Hours: 105 I Gregory Hall; MW 12-12:45 p.m. and by appointment.
See note about office at end of syllabus
Office Phone: 333-4677
Text: *Moral Philosophy: A Reader* (Third Edition), ed. Louis P. Pojman

This class fulfills a general education requirement in historical and philosophical perspectives.

Note: I am DRES and ESL friendly. If you need accommodation or are having trouble keeping up in class because of language-issues, please drop me an email or come to see me. I'm happy to help.

Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this course is to provide students with a basic foundation in ethics. We examine fundamental theoretical issues in ethics (such as whether there are any objective moral principles) and consider various types of ethical theory, ranging from utilitarianism to virtue theory. Although there is a large theoretical component to this class, we will also be examining ethical dilemmas in real life; in addition to reading articles in applied ethics, students are encouraged to consider how to apply the theories to other real life ethical issues that interest them.

This course consists of three units. In the first unit we consider basic theoretical questions involving relativism, egoism, and hedonism. Are there universally valid moral principles, or are moral standards always relative to a particular individual or culture? Does morality sometimes require people to act against their own self-interest? And, if so, why should I be moral? Why should I not simply pretend to be moral and profit from those who abide by the rules? What are the central values in ethical theory? Is there more to “the good life” than simply pleasure? These kinds of questions help us determine the basic shape of our moral beliefs, although there are many ways to fill in the details.

In the second unit we turn to two important types of ethical theories: utilitarianism and deontological theories. Utilitarianism seeks to provide the greatest good for the greatest number; actions are deemed good to the extent that they cause happiness or pleasure for people. Deontological theories take duty as the central virtue; an act is moral if doing it is our duty – it does not matter whether the outcome makes people happy. These theories are generally associated with John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, respectively, but we will see other versions them as well, generally arising in response to criticism.

The third unit covers the last of the big three ethical theories, namely virtue theory. In virtue theory, ethical actions spring from ethical people – as such, the development of good or virtuous character is critical. Perhaps the most famous virtue theorist was Aristotle, but again we will consider modern versions as well. We will also examine the role which God and religion play in ethics, particularly focusing on whether moral standards depend on God for their validity or whether they are autonomous – would even God be subject to them? We will also consider whether secular ethics can provide sufficient reason for living a moral life.

Assignments and Grading

Three Exams (non-cumulative):	25% each
Homework:	10% total
Participation:	15%

Exams – Exams are non-cumulative, consisting of a mixture of short-answer and essay questions. You are responsible for the information in your textbook, as well as that brought up in lecture and in your discussion section. With the exception of the final exam, all exams take place at the usual class hour and location. **The final exam is on Wednesday, May 9th from 1:30-4:30 p.m. in the usual classroom.**

Homework – You will notice that there are three homework assignments marked on your schedule, labeled TT1-TT3 these are the Three Things assignments and together form the homework portion of your grade. **Note that homework is due at the beginning of class.** Late assignments will not be accepted except in extraordinary circumstances; if you know that you will be absent on a day homework is due, please make arrangements to have a classmate hand it in or leave it in my mailbox.

The TTs are essentially mini-response papers about the reading; full guidelines are given on the next page. They are graded check-plus, check, check-minus; this works out roughly to A+, B+, C+. Please note that a check-minus is still much better than receiving a zero for not doing the assignment, so I recommend completing all the TTs, even if you are confused by the readings. (In fact, that's part of the purpose of the TTs, as you'll see from the guidelines.)

Participation – An important part of any philosophy course is discussion; this is the only good way to ensure you understand the ideas we are covering. While class attendance is not mandatory, it is hard to participate if you are not there. Similarly, attendance alone is not sufficient – you need to contribute to the class discussions and small-group assignments; some of these assignments are noted on your schedule. **Note that if you are shy about speaking in whole-class discussions you may share your thoughts with me through email or after class.**

Other info – I grade on the plus/minus scale, but please note that it is not possible to receive an A in this class without completing the homework assignments and participating in your discussion section. The course as a whole is not curved, but individual assignments will be – that means if I'm totally incomprehensible on a subject to everyone, you won't suffer. (Of course, it doesn't help if I'm only incomprehensible to you...) This is the grade scale for the class:

100-98	97-94	93-91	90-88	87-84	83-81	80-78	77-74	73-71	70-68	67-64	63-61	60-0
A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F

If something extraordinary prevents you from attending an exam or turning an assignment in on time, please contact me as soon as possible; I will make reasonable accommodations. Please note that while attendance is not required you are responsible for keeping track of assignments and exam dates; you are also responsible for any material covered in class.

The Three Things Assignments

This course is fairly reading-intensive and you need to stay on top of it in order to do well. Furthermore, in order to understand philosophy you have to read actively – you can't just skim through it. Instead, you have to think about what the author is saying and question whether it is correct. Although we will do a certain amount of this, both in lecture and in the discussion sections, you still will need to do some of it on your own. This is where the Three Things assignments come in.

If you look at how the assignments are spread out, you'll see that they tend to occur about halfway through each unit. Your job in these assignments is to write three things about the reading to show me what your thoughts on it are. Of course, it's not quite that simple – there are some guidelines you need to follow. So what are they?

1. You need to provide three things on the readings we have been covering – i.e., the readings in the first half of the unit – each about a page (or a couple of very long paragraphs); this should end up around 800-900 words total, although don't worry overly much about it.
2. You cannot write all of them on the same article; you must cover at least two of the readings, although you are encouraged to look at multiple readings or themes which span several readings.
3. These need to be your own work – feel free to talk your thoughts over with your classmates, but you each need to write your own (different) homework reflections.
4. These are graded check-minus, check, check-plus. (This works out roughly to A+, B+, C+.) So you shouldn't write primarily with grades in mind; that's not what I'm looking for. Whether I agree with what you say doesn't matter; what matters is whether you're seriously thinking about the reading.
5. So, more specifically, what *am* I looking for?
 - *Your* thoughts. **I don't need you to tell me what the book says.** I've already read it. I want *your* reaction.
 - Your *arguments* – but they have to be actual arguments. Don't just tell me “Oh this article sucks” or “This author is completely wrong.” **Tell me *why* it sucks or is wrong.**
 - **Don't be afraid to admit you're confused.** You don't have to have all the answers – it's perfectly acceptable to talk about some puzzle you're having trying to understand the reading. Do you think the author contradicts herself? Are you not sure how this relates to something else we've talked about? Write it down! Just make sure it's clear that you're thinking about it, not that you got confused and gave up.
 - **Feel free to tie what you're reading to earlier articles or outside information.** Do you think the author's argument implies something abhorrent (for instance, that killing people is fine)? Tell me about it! Does it tie into something else you're studying (in history, political science, or whatever)? Tell me about it! This is your chance to let me know what you're thinking.
 - I will not be grading you on your writing style, but you should **make sure that your homework is legible**, coherent (I need to be able to follow your arguments), and at least fairly grammatical.
 - **Remember to provide citations for any quotations – do not plagiarize!**

Day-by-Day Reading and Homework Assignments

Note that readings in italics are out of order – they come from the Applied Ethics section (Chapter IX).

January

W 1/17 Introduction

Unit One: Relativism, Egoism, and Hedonism

F 1/19 Introduction: xi-xvi

1. What is Right Conduct? (Plato): 1-18

M 1/22 2. Custom is King (Herodotus): 19-20

3. Natural Law (Thomas Aquinas): 21-32

W 1/24 No new readings

F 1/26 4. A Defense of Ethical Relativism (Ruth Benedict): 33-37

5. A Defense of Ethical Objectivism (Louis P. Pojman): 38-52

M 1/29 6. Why Should I Be Moral? (Plato): 53-61

W 1/31 7. Egoism as the Beginning of Morality (Thomas Hobbes): 62-71

February

F 2/2 8. A Defense of Ethical Egoism (Ayn Rand): 72-78

M 2/5 9. A Critique of Ethical Egoism (James Rachels): 79-86

TT1 Due

W 2/7 10. Sociobiology, Egoism, and Reciprocity (Howard Kahane): 87-103

F 2/9 **No Class**

M 2/12 11. The Good and the Allegory of the Cave (Plato): 104-112

12. Classical Hedonism (Jeremy Bentham): 113-115

W 2/14 13. Beyond Good and Evil (Friedrich Nietzsche): 116-123

14. The Experience Machine (Robert Nozick): 124-125

F 2/16 15. Value Pluralism (W.D. Ross): 126-130

16. What Makes Someone's Life Go Best? (Derek Parfit): 131-138

M 2/19 Review

W **2/21 Exam 1**

Unit Two: Utilitarianism and Deontological Theories

F 2/23 17. Utilitarianism (John Stuart Mill): 139-146

M 2/26 18. Against Moral Conservatism (Kai Nielsen): 147-156

W 2/28 19. Rule-Utilitarianism (John Hospers): 157-167

March

F	3/2	36. <i>Lifeboat Ethics: The Case against Helping the Poor</i> (Garrett Hardin): 334-343
M	3/5	20. A Critique of Utilitarianism (Bernard Williams): 168-178
W	3/7	37. <i>Famine, Affluence, and Morality</i> (Peter Singer): 344-352
F	3/9	21. Eleven Objections to Utilitarianism (Sterling Harwood): 179-192
M	3/12	No new readings TT2 Due
W	3/14	22. The Foundations of Ethics (Immanuel Kant): 193-213
F	3/16	No new readings
M	3/19	Spring Break
W	3/21	Spring Break
F	3/23	Spring Break
M	3/26	No Class
W	3/28	23. An Examination of Kantian Ethics (Fred Feldman): 214-228
F	3/30	38. <i>Abortion is Morally Wrong</i> (John T. Noonan Jr.): 353-357

April

M	4/2	24. What Makes Right Acts Right? (W.D. Ross): 229-238
W	4/4	25. A Reconciliation of Ethical Theories (William Frankena): 239-246
F	4/6	39. <i>The Personhood Argument in Favor of Abortion</i> (Mary Anne Warren): 358-362
M	4/9	Review
W	4/11	Exam 2

Unit Three: Virtue Ethics and the Place of God in Ethics

F	4/13	26. Virtue Ethics (Aristotle): 247-259 27. Virtue and the Moral Life (Bernard Mayo): 260-263
M	4/16	28. A Critique of Virtue-Based Ethics (William Frankena): 264-270 29. The Nature of the Virtues (Alisdair MacIntyre): 271-286
W	4/18	30. The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn (Jonathan Bennett): 287-295
F	4/20	31. Moral Minimalism and the Development of Moral Character (David L. Norton): 296-307 40. <i>The Moral Equivalent of War</i> (William James): 363-370
M	4/23	41. <i>Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands</i> (Michael Walzer): 371-382 TT3 Due
W	4/25	32. The Euthyphro Problem (Plato): 308-312 33. A Free Man's Worship (Bertrand Russell): 313-317 34. Religion and the Queerness of Morality (George Mavrodes): 318-326
F	4/27	No new readings
M	4/30	35. Ethics Without Religion (Kai Nielsen): 327-333
W	5/2	Review
W	5/9	Final Exam, 1:30-4:30 p.m.

Important Dates

M	2/5	TT1 Due
F	2/9	No Class
W	2/21	Exam 1
M	3/12	TT2 Due
M	3/19	Spring Break
W	3/21	Spring Break
F	3/23	Spring Break
M	3/26	No Class
W	4/11	Exam 2
M	4/23	TT3 Due
W	5/9	Final Exam, 1:30-4:30 p.m.

Important Notes about My Office and Office Hours

- My office is under construction and I am currently in a temporary office (105 I). It is somewhat complicated to reach, since you need to enter either through the Philosophy Department main office (105) or through the Departmental lounge (107) and wend your way through the chaos to find me. **Unfortunately, the main office closes for lunch from 12-1, which means if you are coming to office hours you must enter through 107.**
- I am rarely in my office outside of office hours. You are better off trying to reach me by email than by phone.
- I am happy to make appointments to see people if they are unable to make my office hours. However, if you have to miss an appointment, please let me know in advance if possible. (Even if you call my office at the last minute, it is better than nothing.)