

PHL 275: Introduction to Ethics

Syllabus

Course Information

Instructor

Instructor: Jeremy Davis
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Office Hours: TBA

Course Description

This course is an introductory survey to the methods and topics of philosophical ethics. We will begin with some challenges to the idea that there are objective, universal facts about morality,

Course Texts

Shafer-Landau, Russ (ed.), *The Ethical Life*, 3rd edition

Evaluation

Argument Analysis (20%)

This is a very short essay (400-500 words) in which you will explain the structure of a particular argument and briefly assess it. The task is to show that you understand how to read an argument, identify its premises, and assess its soundness. (N.B. This assignment is due early in the term, so students unfamiliar with how to approach this assignment are advised to contact the instructor or TA as early as possible.)

1800-Word Essay (35%)

This essay will involve answering one of several prompts (to be distributed a few weeks prior) concerning one of the topics on the syllabus. For each question, students will be required to implement one of the 'extra' readings (listed on the syllabus) for that topic. The goal here is to show that you can encounter an argument on your own, incorporate it into a larger philosophical discussion, and assess it accordingly.

Final Exam (35%)

The final exam will be made up of a mix of short answer and essay questions, and will cover material from the entire semester. A very schematic study guide will be provided to students in advance of the exam to aid their study.

Tutorials (10%)

Your tutorial mark will be determined by both your attendance and participation. Participation involves active contributions to discussion, guided by careful preparation.

Course Policies

Email

All emails about course business should be directed to the course instructor, rather than the TAs. Emails will be answered within two business days. Emails should either concern administrative matters about which you are unclear, or else very brief philosophical questions. Longer philosophical discussions or questions ought to be addressed in class, in office hours, either with the instructor or your TA, or in tutorials.

Technology

You are not permitted to use your cell phones during lecture or tutorials. This is very distracting to your fellow students as well as to your instructor and TAs. You are strongly discouraged from using your laptop in lecture and tutorials. In my view, the value on balance of using a laptop during lecture is typically outweighed by the disvalue of the potential (and often actual) distraction that it causes. (Note that this is not a blanket prohibition on computers. I realize that many students will, for one reason or another, require the use of a computer during lecture. Any students who misuse technology during lecture or tutorials may be asked to leave, or marks may be deducted.)

Deadlines, Lateness, Extensions, etc.

Papers are due at midnight, and must be submitted through Blackboard. Late assignments will not be accepted, unless arrangements have been made with the instructor prior to the submission deadline.

In order to secure an extension, the student must provide documentation of illness or unforeseen conflict that precludes submission by the deadline. Please note that having other assignments or a busy work schedule do not qualify as unforeseen conflicts.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to submit only your own work. Students caught plagiarizing will fail the assignment, and further university sanctions may also be applied. If you are unfamiliar with the guidelines surrounding academic integrity, you are advised to visit: www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity, or ask the instructor or TA for further information.

Course Schedule

Part I: Introduction

This section of the course will introduce some of the basic questions of philosophical ethics. We will also discuss the methodology of *doing* ethics, as well as some of the basic distinctions and terms that are frequently employed in discussions of philosophical ethics.

Class 1: What We're Talking About When We Talk About Ethics

1. S. Kagan, "What Normative Ethics Is, What Normative Ethics Isn't"

Part II: Problems & Challenges

Many have challenged the very idea that there *is* such a thing as right and wrong, good and bad, and so on, while others have questioned whether what we call 'ethics' is really anything above and beyond mere self-interest. This section of the course will consider those arguments.

Class 2: Psychological Egoism & Relativism

1. Plato, "Ring of Gyges"
2. J. Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism"
3. J. Prinz, "Morality is a Culturally Conditioned Response"
4. B. Williams, "Interlude: Relativism"

Class 3: Expressivism & Error Theory

1. D. Hume, "Morality and Natural Sentiment"
2. J. Prinz, "The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgments"
3. J.L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values"

Part III: What is 'good'?

This section of the course looks at what sorts of things are good. The main question to be considered here is, in virtue of what is something good? Is it good when it confers pleasure, or when it satisfies certain desires we have?

Class 4: Hedonism

1. J.S. Mill, "Hedonism"
2. R. Nozick, "The Experience Machine"
3. D. Parfit, "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best?"

Class 5: Other Theories (Desire Satisfaction, Objective List)

1. C. Heathwood, "Faring Well and Getting What You Want"
2. J. Kazez, "Necessities"

Part IV: What is 'right'?

This section looks at some first-order normative ethical theories, which answer the question, "What ought we to do?" In other words, we are concerned here with what constitutes right action or right behaviour. Is something right when it maximizes utility? Or perhaps when it is done with certain motives?

Class 6: Utilitarianism

1. J.S. Mill, "Utilitarianism"
2. R.M. Hare, "A Utilitarian Approach to Ethics"
3. B. Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism"
4. *Extra: J. Glover, "The Solzhenitsyn Principle"*

Class 7: Deontology

1. W.D. Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right?"
2. I. Kant, "The Categorical Imperative"
3. *Extra: S. Wolf, "Moral Saints"*

Class 8: Virtue Ethics

1. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics"
2. Foot, "Natural Goodness"

Part V: Applications

In the final section of the course, we consider some applications of the normative ethical theories we have thus far considered. We will look at our obligations to the distant poor, whether it is morally permissible to end one's life via assisted death, and the morality of war.

Class 9: Famine Relief

1. P. Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
2. A. Srinivasan, "..." (LROB)
3. J. Narveson, "Feeding the Hungry"/G. Cullity, "Asking Too Much"

Class 10: Euthanasia

1. J. Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia"
2. B. Steinbock, "Intentional Termination of Life"
3. R. Dworkin, "Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers' Brief"

Class 11: War

1. T. Nagel, "War and Massacre"
2. J. Lichtenberg, "War, Innocence, and the Doctrine of Double Effect"

Class 12: Review

****Final Exam—Date TBA (see A&S Exam Schedule)*