

PHI 216 – Normative Ethics

Monsoon Semester 2018, New Academic Block TR 001, Tuesday and Thursday 08:30 to 10:00 AM

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Office Hours: Thursday 13:00 to 15:00 in New Academic Block 320 and by appointment

About This Course: Topic and Goals

In this course, we will be investigating normative theories of ethics. These are theories that tell us what is right and wrong, good and bad, virtuous and vicious, required and forbidden, and so on. We will mostly be looking at contemporary work on these topics.

Below are the **goals** for this course. Our class sessions and homework are designed not just to help you learn about philosophy and normative theories of ethics, but also for you to learn how to:

- Identify a philosopher's argument and summarize it in your own words
- Generate questions about, extensions of, and objections to the argument
- Reflect on, refine, and articulate your own views on the various topics we address

Course Content

First, we will learn about the three main normative theories of ethics: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Then, as a class, we will choose which topics to address next. I have put all the readings in a separate document. All readings are available on the course web site at <https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/1375978>.

Please bring the readings to class each day, either printed out or in *easily accessible* electronic form.

Assignments and Grading

There are four kinds of assignments in this class: **weekly reading quizzes**, **weekly discussion posts**, **meta-cognition assignments**, and the **final take-home exam**. Late quizzes or posts will not be accepted except in case of emergency. (Computer issues are not an emergency.) The final will lose 6 points (out of 150) if turned in late, plus another 6 points for every additional 24 hours it is late, unless parts have been turned in early, in which case it will lose 4 points (if one part has been turned in) or 2 points (if two have been turned in).

Weekly Reading Quizzes (10% of your grade) are to help you focus on the important parts of the reading and to get instant feedback on whether you have understood the reading. Quizzes are due by midnight on Monday. There is one quiz per week except week 6 for a total of 12 quizzes. Your lowest 2 quiz scores will be ignored.

Weekly Discussion Posts (30% of your grade) are your opportunity to get practice writing concisely about philosophy. There are two weekly discussion posts due on the discussion board for that week. One is due by midnight Thursday and the other is due by midnight on Monday.

The first post must be 500 words or shorter, and it should summarize a point from one of the readings, then offer a **question**, an **extension of the idea or argument**, or a **critique of the idea or argument**. The one due Monday is 250 words or shorter, and it should be a comment on someone else's post, offering an **answer to their question**, **your own question**, an **extension** to their post, or a **critique** of their post.

There are 25 weekly discussion posts due in total. Posts are graded no credit/half credit/full credit and your lowest 5 scores will be ignored. Posts that exceed the word limit will earn half credit at most.

Meta-Cognition Assignments (15% of your grade) are designed to help you learn how to think critically about your reading and writing skills. Two are focused on reading and one is focused on writing. The reading assignments require you to create a one page outline of an article. You will then compare your outline to other outlines in class and reflect on the differences. The writing assignments require you to reflect on the feedback you have received on your writing and to determine how you can make use of it.

The **Take-Home Final Exam** (30% of your grade) will ask you to summarize points from some of the readings we have done, and then offer **extensions of the idea or argument** or **critiques of the idea or argument**. You may use your discussion posts as a basis for your answers on the final exam. The exam is divided into three parts, one part for each topic. Each part is graded out of 50 points. The exam is due Friday, December 14th but you can turn in any or all of its three parts early.

Early final exam sections will be graded and returned within five days. If you turn in a part any time within a week after the second discussion post for that topic is due, it will get an extra 5 points. So, to get an extra 5 points on part one, you would have to turn it in before Monday, September 24th. To get an extra 5 points on part two, you would have to turn it in before Monday, October 15th. To get an extra 5 points on part three, you would have to turn it in before Monday, November 5th.

Class Participation (15% of your grade) is required. This includes attendance, listening respectfully to me and to your fellow students, and offering thoughtful questions and contributions to the discussion. Using mobile phones or computers for non-academic purposes, browsing the Internet, coming in late, not showing up, or otherwise ignoring people is not respectful and will reduce your participation grade.

Grade Breakdown:

- 10% - Weekly Reading Quizzes** (12, lowest 2 ignored)
- 30% - Weekly Discussion Posts** (25, lowest 5 ignored)
- 15% - Meta-Cognition Assignments** (3)
- 30% - Take-Home Final** (due Dec 14th)
- 15% - Class Participation**

Class Grade Rubric:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 100-97% = A+ | <80-77% = C+ |
| <97-94% = A | <77-74% = C |
| <94-90% = A- | <74-70% = C- |
| <90-87% = B+ | <70-67% = D+ |
| <87-84% = B | <67-64% = D |
| <84-80% = B- | <64-61% = D- |
| | <61-0% = F |

Disabilities

If you have disabilities which require some form of accommodation, contact me ahead of time.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Any time you use **words, phrases, ideas, or anything else** in your writing that you did not think up on your own, you must **cite** your source the best of your ability. Words and phrases from others must be enclosed in quotation marks to show that you did not write them yourself. Failure to cite a source is **plagiarism** and it's not okay. Plagiarism may result in a zero on the assignment or in other point reductions. You should not need to use (or cite) outside sources for this class, but if you do use them, you must cite them. It is perfectly okay to use points made by your classmates in class or on the discussion boards, *as long as you cite them to the best of your ability*. The one exception is that you do not need to cite me for your writing assignments in this class.

Resources

The resources section of my website (<http://dannyweltman.com/resources.html>) has resources on reading, writing, and researching philosophy. These resources include a glossary for unfamiliar words or phrases and the rubric that I use for grading your writing assignments. I encourage you to examine these resources.

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Monsoon Semester 2018 Schedule, List of Readings, and Potential Topics

Topic 1 – Introduction and Morally Judging Others (August 28th and 30th)

In the first week, we will talk about the class in general terms: what is morality? How is class going to work? What are good methods for reading, evaluating, and writing philosophy?

Next we will get an overview of the class. We will learn about the topics we will cover and the topics that we will choose from in the latter part of the class.

Finally, we will turn to our first topic, making moral judgments about other cultures. There is only one discussion post due this week.

Reading Schedule:

Midgley, Mary. "Trying Out One's New Sword." (due August 30th)

Reading Quiz Schedule:

Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword" (due midnight August 29th)

Discussion Post Schedule:

Discussion post due midnight August 30th. No response post due for this topic.

Topic 2 – Consequentialism (September 4th to September 13th)

The first moral theory we will learn about is consequentialism. Consequentialism says that the consequences of our actions are what matter. Good actions are actions that lead to good consequences. Bad actions are actions that lead to bad consequences.

Reading Schedule:

Shafer-Landau, Russ. "Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions."

Pages 117-128 (due September 4th)

Pages 128-132 (due September 6th)

Shafer-Landau, Russ. "Consequentialism: Its Difficulties."

Pages 133-144 (due September 11th)

Pages 144-153 (due September 13th)

Reading Quiz Schedule:

Shafer-Landau, "Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions" 117-128 (due midnight September 3rd)

Shafer-Landau, "Consequentialism: Its Difficulties" 133-144 (due midnight September 10th)

Discussion Post Schedule:

Discussion posts due midnight September 6th and 13th.

Response posts due midnight September 10th and 17th.

Topic 3 – Deontology (September 18th to October 4th)

Deontological theories are focused on the duties that we have to ourselves and to other people, like the duty to keep our promises or the duty to refrain from injuring others without cause. Good actions are actions that are in accordance with duty and bad actions are actions that violate our duties.

Reading Schedule:

McNaughton, David and Piers Rawling. “Deontology.”

Introduction and sections 1-3 and 5.1 (pages 424-433 and 435-437) (due September 18th)

Section 6 (441-454) (due September 20th)

Driver, Julia. “Kantian Ethics.”

Entire article (due September 25th)

O’Neill, Onora. “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics.”

Entire article (due September 27th)

No Reading

Writing Meta-Cognition Assignment (due in class October 4th)

Reading Quiz Schedule:

McNaughton and Rawling, “Deontology” 424-33 and 435-437 (due midnight September 17th)

Driver, “Kantian Ethics” (due midnight September 24th)

Discussion Post Schedule:

Discussion posts due midnight September 20th and 27th.

Response posts due midnight September 24th and October 1st.

Meta-Cognition Assignment #1

Your first meta-cognition assignment is due October 4th in class. It is a writing meta-cognition assignment. Details are available on the assignment on Canvas.

Topic 4 – Virtue Ethics (October 9th to October 25th)

Virtue ethics focuses on what sort of person we should be. It looks at virtues like honesty or charity to explain how we should act and what is good or bad.

Reading Schedule:

Annas, Julia. “Virtue Ethics.”

Entire Article (pages 515-528) (due October 9th)

Driver, Julia. “Virtue Ethics.”

Pages 136-149 (due October 11th)

Metz, Thaddeus. "The Virtues of African Ethics."

Entire article (due October 23rd)

Loy, Hui-chieh. "Classical Confucianism as Virtue Ethics."

Entire article (due October 23rd)

Bilimoria, Purushottama. "Ethics and Virtue in Classical Indian Thinking."

Entire article (due October 23rd)

Nussbaum, Martha. "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach."

Entire article (due October 25th)

Reading Quiz Schedule:

Annas, "Virtue Ethics" (due midnight October 8th)

Metz, Loy, and Bilimoria, three articles (due midnight October 22nd)

Discussion Post Schedule:

Discussion posts due midnight October 11th and 25th.

Response posts due midnight October 15th and October 29th.

The rest of the topics depend on your votes. Here are the topics to choose from:

Advanced Consequentialism

We will read a detailed, sophisticated article addressing some of the most important points in consequentialism.

Railton, Peter. "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality."

Advanced Virtue Ethics

We will some detailed, sophisticated articles addressing some of the most important points in virtue ethics.

Schauber, Nancy. "How Bad Can Good People Be?"

Wilson, Alan. "Avoiding the Conflation of Moral and Intellectual Virtues."

Advanced Deontology

We will read a detailed, sophisticated article addressing some of the most important points in deontology.

Brennan, Samantha. "Moral Lumps."

Brennan, Samantha. "Moderate Deontology and Moral Gaps."

Aristotle

Aristotle is one of the most famous virtue ethicists. We will read selections from his book *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Aristotle. "The Nature of Virtue."

Care Ethics

Care ethics is a theory of ethics proposed by feminist philosophers who are influenced by some psychological research suggesting that there are different ways of thinking about ethics and that traditionally, philosophy has only paid attention to one of these ways.

Gilligan, Carol. "In a Different Voice." Plus introduction by Russ Shafer-Landau.

Noddings, Nell. "An Ethic of Caring."

Communicative Ethics

Communicative ethics is a theory of ethics proposed by Jürgen Habermas. It focuses on the idea of people discussing things with each other in order to reach a solution to ethical issues.

Habermans, Jürgen. Selections from *The Inclusion of the Other*.

Consequentialism Applied

How might a consequentialist approach ethical problems? We will look at one or both of the following topics from a consequentialist point of view: slavery, and duties towards non-human animals.

Singer, Peter. "Speciesism and Moral Status."

Hare, R. M. "What is Wrong with Slavery."

Contractarianism

Contractarianism is a moral theory focused on the idea of what we have reason to agree to. It sees morality as a system that we set up so that we can all secure our own interests.

Scanlon, T.M. "Contractualism and Utilitarianism."

Shafer-Landau, Russ. "The Social Contract Tradition: The Theory and Its Attractions."

Shafer-Landau, Russ. "The Social Contract Tradition: Problems and Prospects."

Deontology Applied

How might a deontologist approach some particular moral issue? We'll look at what Onora O'Neill, a Kantian deontologist, says about famine and about consent.

O'Neill, Onora. "A Kantian Approach to Some Famine Problems."

O'Neill, Onora. "Between Consenting Adults."

Existentialist Ethics

Existentialism is a philosophical theory about the meaning of life, freedom, and humanity. We will look at the classic existentialist text on ethics, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

Part I: Ambiguity and Freedom

Part II: Personal Freedom and Others

Part III: The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity sections 1 and 2

Part III: The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity sections 3 through 5

Feminist Ethics

Feminism has a lot to say about normative ethics. It illuminates topics that it says are missing from traditional ethical theories and suggests new approaches to ethics.

Frye, Marilyn. "Sexism."

Baier, Annette. "The Need for More than Justice."

Walker, Margaret Urban. "Feminist Skepticism, Authority, and Transparency."

Kant

Immanuel Kant offers the most famous deontological ethical theory. We will look at his short introduction to his ethics, the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

Preface and chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3 and concluding remark

Mill

John Stuart Mill is one of the most famous proponents of utilitarianism, which is the most common form of consequentialist ethics.

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*.

Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 3 through 5

Moral Deference

Why should we even care about all these moral theories in the first place? Isn't it kind of weird to think that philosophers are the ones who can tell us what we should do? When it comes to scientific decisions, it makes sense to just ask a scientist what the right answer is, but what about moral decisions?

McGrath, Sarah. "The Puzzle of Pure Moral Deference."

Davia, Cory and Michele Palmira. "Moral Deference and Deference to an Epistemic Peer."

Moral Particularism

Some philosophers think that we can't come up with a single normative theory of ethics to cover every situation. They think that we always need to make our own judgment in each particular situation. This is known as particularism.

Dancy, Jonathan. "An Unprincipled Morality."

Little, Margaret Olivia. "On Knowing the 'Why': Particularism and Moral Theory."

Dworkin, Gerald. "Unprincipled Ethics."

Saints and the Difficulties of Being Moral

Normative theories of ethics tell us what we should do and what kind of person we should be, but what if this is too hard? Would it even be a good thing if we were all good people? Susan Wolf argues that a world in which everyone were very moral would not in fact be a very good place. We will look at her argument and at a response.

Wolf, Susan. "Moral Saints."

Adams, Robert Merrihew. "Saints."

Bernard Williams and Morality

Bernard Williams is a philosopher who thinks that both deontology and consequentialism are bad approaches to ethics. He points out issues that he has with both sorts of theories, and in doing so, illuminates a view of ethics closer to someone like Friedrich Nietzsche, another philosopher who argued against these ethical systems.

Williams, Bernard. "A Critique of Utilitarianism."

Williams, Bernard. "Persons, Characters, and Morality."

Virtue Ethics Applied

What can virtue ethicists say about particular ethical issues? We will look at an explanation of a virtue ethical approach to abortion, which also serves as a defense of the idea of virtue ethics more generally.

Hursthouse, Rosalind. "Virtue Theory and Abortion."

Doing, Allowing, Preventing, and Trolleys

If you can stop something bad from happening, but you let it happen, is this just as bad as doing a bad thing? Is it our job to stop bad things from happening? These are important questions that involve all the moral theories we have looked at, and they also involve the trolley problem, an infamous thought experiment.

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. "Turning the Trolley."

Segev, Re'em. "Should We Prevent Deontological Wrongdoing?"

Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy

Robert Goodin argues that most of the problems with utilitarianism disappear (or even become advantages) if we use it as a way to make decisions about government rather than as a personal moral system. We will look at selections from his book *Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy*.

Goodin, Robert. *Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy*, pp. 8-11, 18-23, and 60-77.