

Introduction to Ethics
PHIL 160 – Spring 2015
Class T, Th 8-9:15 in Caldwell 105

Instructor:

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Office: Caldwell 210D

Office Hours: T 9:30-10:30, W 2:30-3:30 or by appointment

Course description: In this course, we will examine historical and contemporary approaches to ethical questions, or in other words, questions about what we ought to do and what it takes to live a good life. This course will provide an introduction to three major ethical theories (utilitarianism, Kantianism, and virtue ethics), and their respective strategies for trying to answer these questions. We will also consider applications of these theories to contemporary moral issues, including global wealth disparities, animal rights, and abortion. Time permitting, the course will end with a discussion of moral responsibility and related attitudes such as praise and blame, with a focus on whether these attitudes are ever justified given what we know about the ethical dimensions of our lives.

Course requirements:

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| 1) Ten blogs on the course readings on Sakai | 10% |
| 2) Midterm exam | 15% |
| 3) First paper | 20% |
| 4) Final exam | 20% |
| 5) Final paper | 25% |
| 6) Participation | 10% |

Course Website:

This course will have a Sakai site on which I will post the **syllabus, readings and course assignments**. All students enrolled in the course should have access to the Sakai site, but if you have any difficulty with this, please let me know.

The Sakai site will also have **blogs**. You must post a total of 10 blog posts throughout the course of the semester. These posts will be due by the Monday before the Tuesday class meeting at 5pm. For example, for the class meeting on Tuesday, January 13, your blog would have to be posted by January 12 at 5.

Additionally, the Sakai site will also have a **forum**, where you should feel free to post any questions you have about the reading or any issues related to the course that you'd like to discuss with your fellow students. These forum posts will count as a form of participation in the course, and I will reply to them regularly, schedule permitting.

Course Assignments:

Blog posts: The requirements for the blog posts on Sakai are as described above. In terms of content and length, the blog posts should be no more than 200 words (and can be less), and should respond to that week's assigned reading, including a question, a criticism, and something you liked about the reading.

Midterm exam (2/19 during class): The midterm exam will be multiple-choice and focused on your grasp of the reading assignments. More details will be provided closer to the date of the exam.

First paper (3/5 by 5pm): The first paper will focus on two of the three ethical theories we will study: utilitarianism, Kantianism, and virtue ethics, and will require you to see how those theories relate to each other. Your papers should be 4-6 pages.

Final paper (4/24 by 5pm): The final paper will ask you to consider whether moral luck, a phenomenon we will discuss towards the end of the course, undermines certain kinds of moral evaluations (e.g., the evaluation that someone is blameworthy for what they have done). More details will be provided closer to the due date. Your papers should be 6-8 pages.

Final exam (4/28 from 8-11am): The final exam will be a combination of multiple-choice and short essays. This exam will be less focused on reading comprehension and more focused on your ability to understand and write clearly about the ethical theories and objections to them that we have studied.

Participation: One earns a high participation grade in this course by attending class regularly, carefully preparing thoughts on the readings, and speaking in class and/or posting on the Sakai forums. Reading philosophy can be quite difficult, especially if you haven't done much of it before. I recommend taking notes and reading the required texts multiple times.

Electronics policy:

Please bring all assigned readings to class in a non-electronic form.

Electronics will not be allowed in the classroom unless you have accommodations that require them, for which you must provide documentation.

Grading:

I will grade all assignments from this course (aside from the blog posts) blind. What this means is that **you should not include your name anywhere on your course assignments, but rather include your PID as identifying information.** Grading blind is one way of correcting against certain kinds of bias, and ensuring that every student is graded fairly. In addition, I will set out clear expectations for the papers and exams in class. If you have any questions about these policies, please feel free to ask me about them.

Late work policy:

If you need an extension on a paper, you must contact me with at least one day's notice and a medical or comparable excuse (barring very unusual circumstances). Otherwise, late work will be graded down a third of a letter grade for each full day that it is late. In other words, if a paper were due on Monday, you would need to email me by Sunday to receive an extension if one is appropriate. If you didn't contact me or an extension is not appropriate given your circumstances, handing in the paper on Tuesday would bring an A paper down to an A-, etc.

Accommodations:

Any student with a disability or special learning requirement impacting his or her participation in the course should discuss this with me in the first week of class so that reasonable accommodations may be made. An example of a special need would be larger font for handouts.

Honor Code:

The honor code is in effect in this and all other classes at UNC. You are responsible for complying with this code and therefore also for learning its content and for clarifying any questions you may have regarding this content or applicability.

The code is available online here:

<https://studentconduct.unc.edu/sites/studentconduct.unc.edu/files/documents/Instrument.pdf>

Reading assignments:

All readings will be available on Sakai, but you may wish to purchase the recommended texts. They are relatively inexpensive for textbooks and are classic and important texts from the history of philosophy. We will spend one week (i.e., two class sessions) on each reading (with the exception of the week we have the midterm exam). In the first class session, we will focus on clarifying and charitably interpreting what the author is saying, and in the second class session, we will discuss outgrowths or possible criticisms of the views or arguments we are considering.

Week 1 (1/8): Course Introduction

Section One: Consequentialism

Week 2 (1/13 & 15): Peter Singer - "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Week 3 (1/20 & 22): John Stuart Mill - Selections from *Utilitarianism* (Chs 2, 3, 4)

Week 4 (1/27 & 29): Selections from Peter Railton - "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality" (134-9, 146-8, 160-2), Handout posted on Sakai

Section Two: Kantianism

Week 5 (2/3 & 2/5): David Velleman: "A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics"

Week 6 (2/10 & 2/12): Selections from Immanuel Kant - *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (pages posted on Sakai)

Week 7 (2/17): Selections from Christine Korsgaard - "Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals" (1-10, 22-37)

Midterm Exam: 2/19 during class

Section Three: Virtue Ethics

Week 8 (2/24 & 2/26): Selections from Aristotle - *Nicomachean Ethics* (Skim I.1-I.6, I.8-I.12, Read carefully I.7, I.13, II.1-4)

Week 9 (3/3 & 3/5): Selections from Martha Nussbaum - "Non-relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach" (32-36, 48-51)

Week 10 (3/17 & 3/19): Rosalind Hursthouse - "Virtue Theory and Abortion"

Paper 1 due 3/5 by 5pm

Section Four: Moral Luck and Ethical Judgment

Week 11 (3/24 & 3/26): Thomas Nagel - "Moral Luck"

Week 12 (3/31 & 4/2): Susan Wolf - "The Moral of Moral Luck"

Week 13 (4/7 & 4/9): Cheshire Calhoun - "Responsibility and Reproach"

Week 14 (4/14 & 4/16): Ryan Preston-Roedder - "Faith in Humanity" - class meeting includes Q&A session with Prof. Preston-Roedder

Week 15 (4/21 & 4/24): Course wrap up, evaluations, and final exam review

Final Paper due 4/24 by 5pm

Final Exam Tuesday 4/28 8-11am

NB: This syllabus is not a contract. I reserve the right to make changes to the course readings and assignments as appropriate. I will notify you well in advance in the event that this is needed.