

Introduction to Ethics (80-130)

Summer 2013

MTWRF 12:00-1:20PM, Doherty Hall 4303

Instructor: Daniel Malinsky

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INTRODUCTION:

This class is an introduction to ethical thought (also known as “moral philosophy”). In particular, we will consider the kind of questions that have been contemplated by academic philosophers, political decision-makers (or their advisors), and engaged citizens throughout the history of Western civilization. “How ought I live?” “What ought I do in the face of conflict?” “What kind of policies or rules should we endorse as a community, or enforce with government power?” “Can actions or practices be objectively judged as either Right or Wrong? Can such judgements be common across cultures?” “How are morals like conventions?” We will try to combine an examination of the most popular, common, and enduring theories in ethics with consideration of what the field of ethics *ought* to be about, how it *ought* to proceed, and how such theories could be fruitfully applied to controversial problems in our society, such as controversies surrounding abortion, poverty, and war. We will engage with complicated academic texts (most of which less than 50 years old) as starting points for discussion of broad issues in moral philosophy. By the end of this course you should be able to articulate your own thoughts on these issues clearly and persuasively. More generally, we will develop our abilities to read critically, evaluate claims, and construct good arguments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There will be reading assigned for every class meeting. It is MANDATORY that you complete this reading in full before the meeting of the class. In addition, I will post online a rather simple, straightforward comprehension question for each reading. These questions should be answered in about 3 to 5 sentences: not an essay, but a response which is sufficient to show that you have done the reading and thought about it. These are due (by email) two hours before each class meeting, i.e., at 10am every weekday. Each of these responses will be graded on a 3-point scale: 0 points if you fail to hand in a response; 1 point if you hand in a response which shows little effort or thought; and 3 points if you hand in a complete response to the question (need not be totally correct!) which demonstrates that you thought about it carefully. This is to ensure that every member of the class is adequately prepared to participate in class discussion.

There will be two writing assignments. The first, which will be due shortly after “Week 3” in the schedule, will be an analysis of one of the assigned readings. This should be 700-900 words (about 2-3 pages, double-spaced). The second, which will be due on August 9th (after the last day of classes), will be a longer paper in which you make your own argument concerning a topic we have discussed in class. This should be 1400-1600 words (about 5-6 pages, double-spaced). A rough outline of this final paper will be due approximately a week before the final draft. The outline itself will not be graded, but the grade of the final paper will be reduced by a full letter grade if the outline is not received on time. Detailed instructions for these assignments will be handed out in class.

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Daily reading responses: 20%

Class participation and attendance: 20%

First writing assignment (analysis): 25%

Second writing assignment (argument): 35%

POLICIES:

Missing class and late assignments

I recognize that occasional problems associated with illness, family emergencies, job interviews, other professors, etc. will inevitably lead to legitimate conflicts over your time. If you expect that you will be unable to turn in an assignment on time, or must be absent from a class meeting, please notify me (either in class or via email) in advance and we can agree on a reasonable accommodation. Otherwise, your grade will be penalized.

Cheating and Plagiarism

It is the responsibility of each student to be aware of the university policies on academic integrity, including the policies on cheating and plagiarism. This information is available at <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Cheating.html> and in the section on “University Policies” in the most recent edition of *The Word: Undergraduate Student Handbook*. We will have a discussion in class on what constitutes plagiarism, but if you have any questions please ask for guidance before handing in your paper.

Students who cheat or plagiarize face serious sanctions at both the course level, and the university level. At the course level, faculty at Carnegie Mellon University has significant discretion to determine the sanctions that are appropriate to individual cases of cheating and plagiarism. Within the Philosophy Department, it is customary to give plagiarized assignments a failing grade and, where appropriate, to fail students for the course. Additionally, a letter is sent to the Dean of Students indicating that the student in question has submitted plagiarized material and received a course-level sanction. Plagiarism is also a violation of the community standards

of Carnegie Mellon University. As such, allegations of plagiarism may be brought before a University Academic Review Board, which will determine whether a violation of community standards has taken place and level additional sanctions if appropriate. Although this body also has significant discretion over the sanctions that it levels, plagiarism can result in academic probation, suspension, and even expulsion. *(This section and the previous one are based on text provided by S. Wellen.)*

READING SCHEDULE: *(all readings will be available online on Blackboard)*

WEEK 1 (Relativism, Subjectivism, and Egoism)

(7/2) James Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”

(7/3) David Hume, “Morality as Based on Sentiment”

(7/5) James Rachels, “Egoism and Moral Skepticism”

WEEK 2 (Consequentialism)

(7/8) Jeremy Bentham, excerpt from “An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation” & John Stuart Mill, excerpt from “Utilitarianism”

(7/9) John Harsanyi “A Theory of Prudential Values And A Rule Utilitarian Theory of Morality”

(7/10) R. M. Hare, “What is wrong with slavery?”

(7/11) Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

(7/12) Julia Driver, “Consequentialism and Feminist Ethics”

WEEK 3 (Deontology)

(7/15) Immanuel Kant, excerpt from “Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals”, & Onora O’Neill, “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics”

(7/16) Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”

(7/17) Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem”

(7/18) Shelly Kagan, excerpt from “Normative Ethics”

(7/19) Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”

WEEK 4 (Virtue)

(7/22) Aristotle, excerpt from “Nichomachean Ethics”

(7/23) Alasdair MacIntyre, excerpts from “After Virtue”

(7/24) Martha Nussbaum, “Non-relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach”

(7/25) Jean Grimshaw, “The Idea of a Female Ethic”

(7/26) Martha Nussbaum, “Capabilities and Human Rights”

WEEK 5 (Pluralism & Conventionalism)

(7/29) Charles Taylor, “The Diversity of Goods”

(7/30) Susan Wolf, “Two Levels of Pluralism”

(7/31) Amy Gutmann, “The Challenge of Multiculturalism in Political Ethics”

(8/1) David Gautier, “Morality and Advantage”

(8/2) Edna Ullmann-Margalit, excerpts from “The Emergence of Norms”

WEEK 6 (Special topics)

(8/5) Michael Walzer, “Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands”

(8/6) Thomas Nagel, “War and Massacre”

(8/7) TBA

(8/8) No Class: work on your final paper due (8/9)!