

# PHL C05 H3F: Ethical Theory

Eric Mathison

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## Description

This course will survey the four great ethical theories—contractarianism, deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics—by reading the works of four of history’s greatest philosophers. At the end of the course we will investigate Derek Parfit’s triple theory, which claims that the major theories in their best versions converge on the same answer. Ethical theories explain how we ought to act and why we ought to do so; they answer questions such as ‘What makes an act right or wrong?’ and ‘What makes some state of affairs good or bad?’. Such theories systematize behaviour into foundational principles, which we can use to determine how we ought to act.

Our method of investigation in this course will be to read what each theory’s most famous proponent has written about it. The advantage of this approach is that you are introduced to their ideas by reading what they themselves wrote about it, rather than someone’s interpretation or a more general theoretical overview. The disadvantage of this approach is that reading primary source material is *hard*. We are going to be reading material that spans roughly 2,300 years, and over that time styles, goals, and methods have changed. Be prepared, therefore, to put in the time necessary to wrestle with these texts.

## Grading

Each paper should be around 8 pages (roughly 2,750 words). Papers over 3,000 words won’t be accepted. Please use standard formatting: 1 inch (2.54cm) margins with 12-point, Times New Roman (or another suitable serif) font. Late papers will be penalized one letter point per day (e.g., a paper submitted one day late will go from a B to a B–). The final exam will consist of mostly short-answer questions. Participation means *participating*. Attending class is a necessary condition for getting a good participation grade, but it isn’t sufficient. You must also have done the readings and contribute to the class discussion.

Paper 1 (Due October 19)	35%
Paper 2 (Due November 30)	35%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	10%

## Reading Schedule

You are required to obtain a copy of *The Nicomachean Ethics*, *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and *The Leviathan*, all of which are available at a reasonable cost through various means. The other readings will be posted on Blackboard.

### Week 1: Introduction

Introduction

### Week 2: Virtue Ethics

- Aristotle, NE: Books 1, 2, 3

### Week 3: Virtue Ethics

- Aristotle, NE: Books 4, 10

### Week 4: Deontology

- Kant, GMM: Parts 1 and 2

### Week 5: Deontology

- Kant, GMM: Part 3

### Week 6: Contractarianism

- Hobbes, LEV: Part One: 13, 14, 15

### Week 7: Contractarianism

- Hobbes, LEV: Part Two: 17, 18, 19, 20, 21

### Week 8: Utilitarianism

- Sidgwick, ME: 1.1, 1.8, 1.9, 3.1

**Week 9: Utilitarianism**

- Sidgwick, ME: 3.4, 3.14, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4

**Week 10: The Triple Theory**

- Parfit, OWM: Part One: 13, 15 (50, 51, 52)

**Week 11: The Triple Theory**

- Parfit, OWM: Part One: 16, 17