

PHL 275: Introduction to Ethics

Instructor: Eric Mathison

Description

This course is an introduction to some of the major ethical problems (and some proposed solutions) that have concerned philosophers for thousands of years. These include the following: What makes acts right or wrong? How do we tell right from wrong? What makes a life go best? What am I required to do for others? Why should I be moral? We will also consider some specific practical issues, such as the ethics of eating meat, famine relief, and abortion. This course will also provide an introduction to philosophy, including evaluating arguments and communicating one's thoughts clearly and logically.

Requirements

At its core, philosophy consists of considering questions, thinking about possible solutions, and communicating one's ideas to others. This course is concerned with *your* ideas regarding the issues we will consider, not merely your ability to communicate what others have written. Experience suggests that this is different from many other subjects.

Some students find this refreshing. There is no need, e.g., to spend long hours in the library (or on the internet) reading books and articles so that your papers have lengthy bibliographies. In fact, you are strongly discouraged from consulting material outside of the course.

In contrast to lots of research, your main requirement for this course is easy to describe: you need to spend lots of time *thinking*. Doing well in this course requires demonstration that you have put considerable effort into the topics we will be considering. Philosophy progresses by communicating ideas to other philosophers, so once you have thought about these questions, the next step is to communicate your thoughts in a clear way. This is the purpose of the papers and tutorial participation.

Grading

For the summary assignment, you will be asked to summarize a reading in about 600 of your own words. The essay should be around 1,500 words, which is approximately 4–5

pages. Please use standard formatting: 1 inch (2.54cm) margins with 12-point, Times New Roman (or another suitable serif) font. You are strongly discouraged from consulting non-course material for the paper. Additional information on submitting the assignments will be provided in tutorial. 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 mostly of 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.

Summary Assignment (Due at the end of the second week)	15%
Essay (Due at the end of the fifth week)	40%
Final Exam	35%
Tutorial Participation	10%

Reading Schedule

Week 1: Egoism and Relativism

- Joel Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism," from *Reason and Responsibility*.
- James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism," from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*.
- Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended," *The Philosophical Review* 84:1 (1975): 3–22.
- Plato, *Euthypro*.

Week 2: Consequentialism and Its Critics

- John Stuart Mill, "What Utilitarianism Is" from *Utilitarianism*.
- Shelly Kagan, "Consequentialism," from *Normative Ethics*, pp. 59–69.
- Bernard Williams, "Consequentialism and Integrity," from *Utilitarianism: For and Against*.

Week 3: Deontology and Its Detractors

- Immanuel Kant, "The Categorical Imperative".
- Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, chapter 9.
- Phillipa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect," *Oxford Review* 5 (1967): 5–15.

- James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 292 (1975): 78–80.

Week 4: Value Theory

- Jeremy Bentham, excerpts from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.
- Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine,” from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.
- Derek Parfit, “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best?” from *Reasons and Persons*, 494–499.
- Aldous Huxley, “The Right to be Unhappy,” Chapter 17 of *Brave New World*.

Week 5: Animal Ethics and Famine Relief

- Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, chapter 1.
- Peter Carruthers, “Against the Moral Standing of Animals”.
- Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1:1 (1972): 229–243.
- John Arthur, “World Hunger and Moral Obligation: The Case Against Singer,” from *Exploring Philosophy*.

Week 6: Abortion

- Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defence of Abortion,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1:1 (1971): 47–66.
- Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral,” *Why Abortion is Immoral* 86:4 (1989): 183–202.