

Ethics

Fall 2021

Professor

Eric Sampson
Email: sampson@rhodes.edu
Office: Clough 401
Office hours: T, TH (2 - 3pm, or appt./Zoom)

Meeting Details

Days: T, TH
Time: 12:30 – 1:45pm
Place: Buckman Hall 325
Course: PHIL 301-01

Course Description

Ethics considers a range of questions about how we ought to live. This course will introduce students to classic and contemporary debates within ethics at all levels—applied ethics, normative ethics, and metaethics. Some questions we'll consider along the way are these: Which acts are right, which are wrong, and what *makes* them right or wrong? How do we know? Is it OK to kill one innocent person to save three? What the heck are *rights* and why would anyone think we have them? Is there even any such thing as morality or is it all made up to help us cooperate, or worse, to control us? *If* there is any such a thing as morality, what does its existence depend on: God, culture, me, general agreement, nothing at all? And why should I care about morality anyway, especially when ignoring its demands helps me achieve my goals? By the end of the course, students will have acquired some of the main tools necessary for grappling with these questions (and questions like them), and they'll be encouraged to defend their conclusions with reasons and arguments.

Texts

[*Nicomachean Ethics*, by Aristotle, trans. Terence Irwin \(Hackett\)](#)

[*Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, by Immanuel Kant, trans. J. Ellington \(Hackett\)](#)

[*Utilitarianism*, by John Stuart Mill \(Hackett\)](#)

The remaining course readings will be available on the course Canvas site.

Course Objectives

- Develop ability to recognize and describe important positions and arguments in the history of ethics
- Develop and exercise a capacity to represent sympathetically, and critically evaluate, arguments for and against your own treasured moral and political views
- Develop and exercise the ability to articulate *your own* ideas in writing and speech

Course Requirements

- Participation 10%
- Reading Quizzes 15% (In-class throughout semester)
- Midterm Take Home Exam 20% Due: Sun., Oct. 17, 11:59p (Canvas)
- Argument Analysis Paper 20% Due: Tue, Nov. 23, 11:59pm (Canvas)
- Final Exam 20% Time: TBD (between Dec. 10 and 15)

Participation

Participation begins by reading the assigned readings carefully *before class*. You'll then need to contribute to class discussion, at some point, by asking questions or making comments. Some people are shy. I get that. Shy people can either rack up their participation points on the back half of the semester once they become more comfortable with the class setting, or by coming to office hours, or by chatting with me about course material over email or after class. Making lots of comments in class is not the only (or even best) way to receive a good participation grade. Quality matters too. The best thing to do is strike a nice balance between quality and quantity. Sometimes you'll say stuff that doesn't quite make sense. That's fine. Philosophy is hard and you're allowed to struggle. Feel free to contribute even if you're not 100% clear about what's going on. There's no penalty for making a good-faith effort but not quite getting it right. That's how you learn literally anything—trying and failing a bunch until you get it.

Attendance

Attendance is expected. You can miss three (3) course meetings without any notice and without penalty. Each absence beyond those three will result in a 2-point deduction from your participation grade. (Obviously, if you get COVID or something, and can't make it to class for a long time because of illness, I'm not going to tank your grade.)

Grading Scale

A: 94 – 100 A-: 90 – 93 B+: 87 – 89 B: 84 – 86 B-: 80 – 83 C+: 77 – 79
C: 74 – 76 C-: 70 – 73 D+: 67 – 69 D: 64 – 66 D-: 60 – 63 F: < 60

Office Hours & Accessibility

I'm happy to meet with you at any time to discuss assignments or simply to talk more about the topics of the class. Come to my office hours, or if those times don't work, email me to set up an appointment. Zoom works too.

I'm committed to making class fully accessible regardless of disabilities. If I can do anything to help make the class more accessible to you, let me know, or (if you would prefer) have the Accessibility Office contact me on your behalf.

Plagiarism

Do us all a favor and don't plagiarize. Plagiarism is the representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of

academic work, whether graded or otherwise. If you quote something, put it in quotes and cite it using whichever citation convention you like. If you use someone's ideas, cite them and put the idea in your own words. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, talk to me (by email or whatever) and I'll be happy to help.

Course Schedule

Consequentialism

Week 1 Aug. 26	What is Ethics? What are its methods?
Week 2 Aug. 31, Sep. 2	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Chs. 1-2, up to p. 11) Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Rest of Ch. 2)
Week 3 Sep. 7, 9	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Ch. 3, 4) Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Ch. 5)
Week 4 Sep. 14, 16	Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" Marquis, "An Argument that Abortion is Wrong"

Kantianism

Week 5 Sep. 21, 23	Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Section 1) Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Section 2)
Week 6 Sep. 28, 30	Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Section 2) Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Section 3)
Week 7 Oct. 5, 7	O'Neill, "A Kantian Approach to Famine Relief" Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"

Virtue Ethics

Week 8 Oct. 12, 14	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 1, not sec. 6) Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 2)
Week 9 Oct. 21	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 3, sec. 6-12)
Week 10 Oct. 26, 28	Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy" Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion"

Applied Ethics

Week 11 Nov. 2, 4	Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases” Shafer-Landau, “Vegetarianism, Causation, and Ethical Theory”
Week 12 Nov. 9, 11	Your choice: Affirmative Action, Genetic Engineering, Guns, Death Penalty
Week 13 Nov. 16, 18	Huemer, “Is There a Right to Immigrate?” Wellman, “Immigration and Freedom of Association”
Week 14 Nov. 23	Immigration continued
Week 15 Nov. 30, Dec. 2	DeMarneffe, “Against the Legalization of Drugs” Huemer, “America’s Unjust Drug War”
Week 16 Dec. 7	Final exam review and wrap-up