

ETHICS

V83.0040-001

Department of Philosophy

New York University

Spring 2006

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00am-12:15pm

Kimmel Center 808

PROFESSOR

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Course summary: This course will be an examination of some central topics in moral philosophy. We will consider several particular moral issues, including: Is abortion morally permissible? Is there a moral difference between killing someone and letting her die? How is it permissible to treat animals? We will also consider several general issues about morality, including: What makes an action right or wrong, and to what extent is this a matter of the action's consequences? When is an agent morally responsible for her actions? Is there a single true morality, or is moral truth relative to cultures or individuals?

Course goals: The course has two goals. First, to develop and sharpen your ability to analyze and assess arguments. This is an important skill for the study of philosophy, but it is also important for any intellectual pursuit whatsoever. Second, to equip you with knowledge of many of the central questions and views in ethical philosophy.

Organization of topics: The course is divided into four units: (1) a unit on specific ethical questions; (2) a unit on normative theories; (3) a unit on moral responsibility; and (4) a unit on meta-ethics.

Level of the course: Although this course has no prerequisites, it is a mid-level philosophy course. As such, it is intended for either (a) students who have taken previous courses in philosophy or else (b) students who have no previous background in philosophy but who seek an *intensive* introduction to philosophy and/or philosophical ethics in particular. Students in category (b) should be forewarned that many of the readings for this course are difficult, and that the skills involved in writing a good philosophy paper take some getting used to. If you have any questions about whether it is appropriate for you to take the course, please feel welcome to come and talk with me about it.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grade Distribution

The course requirements will include two *argument analyses*, two *papers*, a *final exam*, and class participation, which includes *participation in discussion during lectures* and *participation in two class debates*. The argument analyses will each be worth 5% of your final grade. Class participation will be worth 10% of your final grade. Each paper will be worth 30% of your final grade. The final exam will be worth 20% of your final grade.

Missing lectures without a good reason will result in the lowering of your final grade by up to five percentage points.

Lectures

Lecture attendance is mandatory. It is also crucial if you want to do well in the course. It is virtually impossible to understand philosophy or to effectively analyze and evaluate philosophical arguments without discussing them. For that reason, questions and discussion will be an important part of every lecture.

If you know you will have to miss a lecture, please email your TA to explain *before class*. If you unexpectedly had to miss a lecture, please email your TA to explain after class. Missing lectures without a good reason may result in the lowering of your course grade by up to five percentage points.

Readings

The reading assignments are short but often difficult, and as a rule you will need to read them at least twice if you are to achieve an adequate understanding of them. Sometimes more than two readings will be necessary. It is expected that you will have completed each reading assignment before the class meeting during which it will be discussed. This is essential if you are to get the most out of the lectures and be able to participate in discussion.

Readings to purchase:

- Sher, George. *Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings, Second Edition*. Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001. This book may be purchased at the NYU Main Bookstore at 18 Washington Place.
- Coursepack #1 will be available to be purchased at Unique Copy, located at 252 Green Street, north of Waverly Place. It will be available by Tuesday, January 24. (The coursepack will be listed under the name “Harman.”)
- Coursepack #2 will be available later in the semester.

Blackboard Site

There is a Blackboard site for this course, accessible to you from the “Academic” tab on your “NYU Home” page, after you log in. You should regularly check the Blackboard site for important course announcements. You can also find any handouts that were handed out in class on this site.

Debates

There will be two in-class debates. Every student will be expected to participate in each debate. The debate topic will be distributed in advance, and the “pro” and “con” sides will be assigned. You will then have to plan with your team by developing arguments for your assigned position, as well as by anticipating arguments for your opponents’ position and developing responses.

- First debate will be during class on Tuesday, February 14.
- Second debate will be during class on Tuesday, April 11.

Argument Analyses

For each argument analysis, a short passage will be distributed. In a 2-3 page paper, you will explain the argument in the passage. Further instructions will be provided with the first assignment.

- First argument analysis due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, February 7.
- Second argument analysis due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, March 28.

Papers

Two 5-6 page papers will be assigned. The first paper assignment will be due in two drafts. Writing two drafts of the second paper is optional. The due dates for the papers are *tentatively* scheduled to be as follows:

- First draft of first paper due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, February 21.
- Second draft of first paper due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, March 7.
- *Optional* first draft of second paper due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, April 18.
- Second paper due at the beginning of class on Thursday, April 27.

Paper Grades. The grade for the first paper will be 1/3 of the first draft grade plus 2/3 of the second draft grade. If a first draft of the second paper is handed in, the grade for the second paper will be 1/3 of the first draft grade plus 2/3 of the second draft grade.

Late papers. Late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day late (for example, from A to A-, from A- to B+, and so on). Weekend days count. If you finish a late paper during a weekend, e-mail it to your TA right away, and turn in a hard copy later.

Extensions. Extensions will not be granted except under extreme circumstances.

Plagiarism. The penalty for plagiarism is an F in the course and referral to the dean. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see the Statements on Academic Integrity at http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/policies_procedures.html#statementacademicintegrity and <http://www.nyu.edu/cas/map/guidelines/academicintegrity.html>. Consult me or one of the teaching assistants if you have further questions.

Final exam

The final exam is scheduled for 10-11:50am on Thursday, May 4. The exam will consist of some short answer questions and essay questions. The essay questions will be drawn from a larger set of study questions that will be distributed on the last day of class.

Summary of Due Dates

- First argument analysis due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, February 7.
- First debate will be during class on Tuesday, February 14.
- First draft of first paper due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, February 21.
- Second draft of first paper due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, March 7.
- Second argument analysis due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, March 28.
- Second debate will be during class on Tuesday, April 11.
- *Optional* first draft of second paper due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, April 18.
- Second paper due at the beginning of class on Thursday, April 27.
- Final exam on Thursday, May 4, 10-11:50am

CALENDAR

This calendar may be revised as the semester goes on. The dates may be adjusted, readings may be removed, and *readings may be added*.

Numbers in parentheses refer to readings in *Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings, Second Edition*.

“CP1” indicates the reading is in Coursepack #1. “CP2” indicates the reading will be in Coursepack #2.

Introduction to the Course

Tuesday, January 17: Syllabus and Course Overview

- No reading assignment

Thursday, January 19: Arguments; Writing and Reading Philosophy

- James Pryor, “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy,” handed out in class, also available at <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>
- James Pryor, “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper,” handed out in class, also available at <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
- James Pryor, “Philosophical Terms and Methods,” handed out in class, also available at <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html>

Unit 1: Specific Ethical Questions

Tuesday, January 24: Abortion

- Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” (53)

Thursday, January 26: Abortion *continued*

- Joel Feinberg, “Abortion and the Conflict of Claims” (54)

Tuesday, January 31: Euthanasia and Killing versus Letting Die

- James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia” (CP1)

Thursday, February 2: Euthanasia and Killing versus Letting Die *continued*

- Thomas D. Sullivan, “Active and Passive Euthanasia” (CP1)

Tuesday, February 7: Animal Rights

- Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal” (CP1)
- FIRST ARGUMENT ANALYSIS DUE

Thursday, February 9: Animal Rights *continued*

- J. Baird Callicott, “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair” (CP1)

Tuesday, February 14: FIRST CLASS DEBATE

Unit 2: Normative Theories

Thursday, February 16: Discussion of the Debate; Utilitarianism

- John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism” (23)

Tuesday February 21: Utilitarianism *continued*

- R. M. Hare, “What is Wrong With Slavery” (24)
- FIRST DRAFT OF FIRST PAPER DUE

Thursday, February 23: Utilitarianism *continued*

- John Rawls, “Classical Utilitarianism” (26)
- Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism” (27)

Tuesday, February 28: Utilitarianism and Famine

- Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (51)

Thursday, March 2: Kantianism

- Immanuel Kant, “Morality and Rationality” (30)
- William Nelson, “Kant’s Moral Philosophy” (31)

Tuesday, March 7: Kantianism *continued*

- Immanuel Kant, “Morality and Rationality” (30)
- William Nelson, “Kant’s Moral Philosophy” (31)
- SECOND DRAFT OF FIRST PAPER DUE

Thursday, March 9: Kantianism *continued*

- Christine M. Korsgaard, “The right to lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil” (32)

Week of March 13: Spring Break

Tuesday, March 21: Kantianism *continued*

- Christine M. Korsgaard, “The right to lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil” (32)

No class on Thursday, March 23

Unit 3: Moral Responsibility

Tuesday, March 28: Free Will and Moral Responsibility

- Richard Taylor, “Freedom and Determinism” (CP1)
- SECOND ARGUMENT ANALYSIS DUE

No class on Thursday, March 30

Tuesday, April 4: Free Will and Moral Responsibility *continued*

- Harry G. Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” (CP1)

Thursday, April 6: Moral Luck

- Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck” (33)

Tuesday, April 11: SECOND CLASS DEBATE

Unit 4: Meta-Ethics

Thursday, April 13: Discussion of the Debate; Relativism versus Objectivity

- Harman, selections from “Moral Relativism” (CP2)

Tuesday, April 18: Relativism versus Objectivity *continued*

- Thomson, selections from “Moral Objectivity” (CP2)
- *OPTIONAL*: FIRST DRAFT OF SECOND PAPER DUE

Thursday, April 20: Relativism versus Objectivity *continued*

- Stevenson, selections on emotivism (CP2)

Conclusion of the Course

Tuesday, April 25: Summary of the Semester

Thursday, April 27: Review for the Exam

- SECOND PAPER DUE
- FINAL EXAM STUDY QUESTIONS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED; ***FINAL EXAM IS ON THURSDAY, MAY 4, FROM 10AM TO 11:50AM.***

Makeup Session (Date and Time TBA): More Review for the Exam