

PHILOSOPHY 34: NORMATIVE ETHICS

MATTHEW SILVERSTEIN

SPRING 2008

CONTACT INFORMATION

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Is anything to be said in a principled way about right and wrong, or good and bad? We will examine a number of positive and negative answers to this question. Our primary focus will be on three of the central traditions of Western ethical philosophy, typified by Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill. We will also study one of modern morality's harshest critics: Friedrich Nietzsche. Along the way, we will look at contemporary discussions of the relation between the demands of morality and those personal obligations that spring from friendships, as well as recent views about the nature of well-being.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be one short expository paper (2–3 pages) and two longer critical papers (6–8 pages). Preparation and active participation also count towards your grade. Your final grade will be determined as follows:

20%	Short Paper
35%	Long Paper 1
35%	Long Paper 2
5%	Preparation
5%	Participation

Your preparation grade will be a function of unannounced, in-class ten-minute essay assignments. There will be several such assignments over the course of the semester. Their purpose is to ensure that everyone has studied the assigned reading and to encourage thoughtful discussion in class. Though they will not be graded, I will collect them at the end of class. These essays cannot be made up, and unsatisfactory work will receive no credit.

Active participation is an essential part of any philosophy class. Philosophy is a conversational discipline: you are not doing philosophy if you are not participating in the conversation.

COURSE POLICIES

Late Papers. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, you will be penalized for late work. Papers that are submitted late and without an extension will be marked down $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade (from A- to

B+, for example) for every day of lateness. If there are special circumstances (sporting events, family emergencies, dire illness), please contact me *before the paper is due* to arrange an extension.

Rewrites. You will have the opportunity to rewrite all of your papers. (You are never required to rewrite an assignment.) If you choose to rewrite a paper, you must submit the revised version along with the original version (and my comments). Rewrites are due one week after the graded original is returned to you. Your grade for that assignment will be the average of your grades on the original and the rewrite. Papers that are submitted late and without an extension may not be rewritten under any circumstances.

COURSE BOOKS

In addition to the course reader, there are four required books for the course:

John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*
Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

The following books about writing have also been ordered. They are not required, but I encourage you to buy them and to make use of them.

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*
Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources*
Michael Harvey, *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*

All of the above books are available at Amherst Books (8 Main Street). The course reader is available in the philosophy department office (208 Cooper House).

COURSE WEBSITE

A link to the course website can be found on your portal on Amherst's CMS website. I will *not* be using the Blackboard site for this course.

For those of you unfamiliar with the college's new CMS website, here are directions to reach the course website for the first time. Start at the Amherst homepage (www.amherst.edu). Log in by clicking the "Log in to My Amherst" link at the top right, and then select one of the "Philosophy 34" links under "My Academics" on the left. Finally, click the "Course" button that appears in the middle of the page. This is the course website. (You might want to Bookmark it to make return visits easier.) You can also reach the website directly by entering the following URL:

<https://cms.amherst.edu/academiclife/departments/courses/0708S/PHIL/PHIL-34-0708S>

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

January 28 - Introductions

UNIT 1 - CONSEQUENTIALISM

January 30 - Mill: Basics

Utilitarianism, chapter I (pp. 272–6)

Utilitarianism, chapter II (first two paragraphs) (pp. 276–8)

February 4 - Mill: The Good

Utilitarianism, chapter II (first half) (pp. 276–84)

Utilitarianism, chapter IV (pp. 307–14)

February 6 - Mill: The Right

Utilitarianism, chapter II (second half) (pp. 284–98)

Utilitarianism, chapter V (pp. 314–38)

February 11 - Critique

Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism”

John Rawls, “Classical Utilitarianism”

February 13 - Demandingness

Shelly Kagan, “Constraints”

R. M. Hare, “What’s Wrong with Slavery?”

February 18 - Sophisticated Consequentialism

Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality”

February 19 - SHORT PAPER DUE

February 20 - Sophisticated Critique

Neera Badhwar Kapur, “Consequentialism and Friendship”

February 25 - Rule Consequentialism

Richard Brandt, “Toward a Credible Form of Utilitarianism”

UNIT 2 - DEONTOLOGY

February 27 - Kant: The Good Will and Moral Worth

Groundwork, section I (first half) (pp. 1–12)

March 3 - Kant: Moral Worth and the Moral Law

Groundwork, section I (second half) (pp. 12–18)

March 5 - Kant: The Categorical Imperative

Groundwork, section II (first half) (pp. 19–34)

March 10 - Kant: The Kingdom of Ends

Groundwork, section II (second half) (pp. 34–51)

March 12 - Challenges

Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints"

Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck"

March 24 - A Defense

Christine Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie"

UNIT 3 - CRITIQUE

March 26 - Modest Critique: Particularism

Jonathan Dancy, "Moral Particularism"

March 27 - LONG PAPER I DUE

March 31 - Modest Critique: Character

Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Moral Theories"

Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, Morality"

April 2 - Radical Critique: Slave Morality

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface and First Essay

April 7 - Radical Critique: Guilt and Punishment

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Second Essay

UNIT 4 - VIRTUE ETHICS

April 9 - Aristotle: Teleology

Nicomachean Ethics, book I

April 14 - Aristotle: Virtues and the Mean

Nicomachean Ethics, book II

Nicomachean Ethics, book III

April 16 - Aristotle: Practical Wisdom

Nicomachean Ethics, book VI

April 21 - Aristotle: Virtue and Friendship

Nicomachean Ethics, book VIII

Nicomachean Ethics, book IX

April 23 - Updates and Reactions

Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices"

Robert Loudon, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics"

UNIT 5 - WELL-BEING

April 28 - Transition

Nicomachean Ethics, book I

Nicomachean Ethics, book VII, chapter 11-14

Nicomachean Ethics, book X, chapters 1-6

Richard Kraut "Two Conceptions of Happiness"

April 30 - Hedonism

Robert Nozick, "Happiness"

May 1 - LONG PAPER 2 DUE

May 5 - Informed Preferences

Richard Brandt, "The Criticism of Pleasures and Intrinsic Desires"

Don Loeb, "Full-Information Theories of Individual Good"

May 7 - Value Pluralism

Charles Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods"