

Introduction to Ethics

University of Houston
Phil 1305 (26728)
AH 9
Mon-Wed 1:00pm-2:30pm

Instructor: Dr. Luis R.G. Oliveira
Contact: lroliveira@uh.edu
Office Hours: Tue 1pm-3pm, or by appointment.

Course Description: *Ethics* is a broad philosophical discipline. It includes the attempt to understand the nature of good and bad state of affairs, of right and wrong actions, of virtuous and vicious characters, of praiseworthy and blameworthy agents, of deserving and undeserving rewards, and of just and unjust societies. In each of these areas, Ethics is the attempt to understand what it is, if anything, that makes certain ordinary objects—states of affairs, actions, characters, agents, rewards, and societies—display certain normative properties—goodness, rightness, virtue, praiseworthiness, deservingness, and justice. In this introduction, we will examine the nature of morality (subjectivism, realism, its alleged connection with religion and/or self-interest) and the four major Western moral theories (Aristotelianism, Contractualism, Kantianism, and Consequentialism).

Course Objectives: This course has three goals and your success in it will be measured by how well you achieve them. The *first goal* of the course is introducing you to questions and views on various aspects of moral theory. On the midterm exam and on the final paper, you will be expected to display the knowledge you have acquired in this class. The *second goal* of the course is developing the philosophical skill of critical thinking. You will be encouraged to exercise this skill during classroom discussion and activities, and you will be required to apply it on short assignments. The *third goal* of the course is developing the important skills of reading comprehension and clear and precise writing. The readings, discussion questions, short assignments, and the final paper, all provide you with an opportunity to get better and better at understanding complex texts and effectively communicating your own ideas. Altogether, this class will challenge you to *receive, process, and convey* philosophical ideas about morality.

Required Text: *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, by Russ Shafer-Landau (2nd Edition)

Course Requirements:

Participation (5%)
Discussion Questions (15%) ----- See below for due dates
Short Assignments (20%) ----- See below for due dates
Midterm Exam (25%) ----- Wed (10/04)
Final Paper (35%) ----- Fri (12/08)

Grade Curve: Your final letter grade will be assigned in accordance to the following curve:

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	65-59
A	93-96	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	60-64
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	F	0-59

Course Policies

Discussion Questions: There are 6 discussion questions. The purpose of these questions is developing and exercising the skill of reading comprehension. Each question asks you to explain a certain aspect of the next day's reading assignment. All answers should be submitted through Blackboard. *You are allowed to miss one discussion question.*

Assignments: There are 5 short assignments. The purpose of these assignments is developing and exercising the skills of critical thinking and clear writing. For each assignment, you will be directed to a short passage and asked to (a) clarify the argument in that passage, and (b) state your thoughts on it. All assignments should be submitted through Blackboard. *You are not allowed to miss any assignment.*

Midterm Exam: There is a midterm exam. The exam has a "three sections" structure: a section where you will be expected to give *very short* answers (1 sentence); a section where you will be expected to give *short* answers (1 paragraph); and a section where you will be expected to *explain and evaluate an argument*. One week before the exam, you will be provided with a list of possible questions (a "study guide") from which the exam questions will be selected. We will discuss the study guide in a review section during the class meeting before the exam.

Final Paper: There is a final paper. The final paper should be about 12-15 pages long. You will be given the choice between two possible topics which will be discussed in our last two class meetings. The paper should have the following three-part structure: (a) a proper introduction, (b) an explanation of the argument in question, (c) either a critique or a defense of that argument, and (d) a proper conclusion.

Late Submissions: With the exception of *well-documented* emergencies, your grade on short assignments will suffer a 2-points deduction per late day. (This is equivalent to losing 10% of your grade for that assignment per day.) No exceptions will be made for excuses such as: "I am too busy," "I found it hard to understand," "I am going through a hard time in my life," and so on. You should come talk to me in advance about any of these issues. Answers to discussion questions will not be accepted late. The Final Paper will not be accepted late.

Participation: I do not take attendance in my classes. This means that missing classes *will not* affect your attendance grade. When you come to class, however, you will be required to follow certain common sense rules. Minimally: (a) you cannot use your phone, (b) you cannot carry unrelated conversations during class, (c) you cannot use your computer for class-unrelated activities, and (d) you cannot take naps during class-time. Violation of these rules will affect your participation grade.

Grade Complaints: I am happy to talk to you about your grade throughout the course. If you are *confused* about why you received the grade that you did, or if you *disagree* with the grade that you received, then you should come see me during office hours, or schedule an appointment. There is, however, a procedure that you will be expected to follow. First, you are expected to *read the comments*, if any, that are available on your work. Second, you are expected to *write down* either your questions or your complaints about your grade. Third, you are expected to *email me* those questions or complaints in advance. This procedure will add speed and clarity to our conversation.

Office Hours and Appointments: You are encouraged to make good use of my office hours. I am here to help you succeed in this course, and I am more than happy to review your lecture notes, to explain difficult material a second time, and to discuss any questions or insights that you may have. I love talking about philosophy and it will be my pleasure to discuss any aspect of it with you.

Disabilities: If you have the need for disability-related services, please get in touch with the University of Houston's *Center for Students with Disabilities*. I will be happy to work with you and the center in arranging for reasonable accommodations: <http://www.uh.edu/csd/>

Academic Honesty: Do not cheat. Punishment will be harsh if you do. You're expected to be familiar with the University of Houston's policies: <http://www.uh.edu/provost/policies/honesty/>

Class Schedule

Intro to Moral Theory

- Aug 21 - Class Intro
- Aug 23 – Feldman, “Truth and Rationality” (PDF)
- Aug 28 – Feldman, “Well-Formed Arguments” (PDF)

Moral Subjectivism and Skepticism

- Aug 30 – Ayer, “A Critique of Ethics” (pp. 16-22) ----- Discussion Question #1
- Sep 04 – Labor day
- Sep 06 – Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values” (pp. 22-31) ----- Assignment #1

Morality and Religion

- Sep 11 – Plato, “Euthyphro” (pp. 218-220)
- Sep 13 – Wielenberg, “God and Morality” (pp. 242-253) ----- Discussion Question #2

Moral Realism

- Sep 18 – David Enoch, “Why I am an Objectivist About Ethics” (PDF)
- Sep 20 – Shafer-Landau, “11 Arguments Against Moral Objectivity” (PDF) ----- Assignment #2

Why be Moral?

- Sep 25 – Plato, “The Immoralist’s Challenge” (pp. 132-138)
- Sep 27 – Hunt, “Flourishing Egoism” (pp. 178-193) ----- Discussion Question #3

Midterm Week

- Oct 02 - Review Session
- Oct 04 – *Midterm Exam*

Aristotelianism

- Oct 09 – Aristotle, “The Nature of Virtue” (pp. 615-630)
- Oct 11 – Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues” (pp. 630-645) ----- Discussion Question #4

Contractualism

- Oct 16 – Hobbes, “Leviathan” (pp. 558-571)
- Oct 18 – Rawls, “A Theory of Justice” (pp. 571-581) ----- Assignment #3

Kantianism

- Oct 23 – Kant, “Groundwork I” (pp. 485-499)
- Oct 25 – Kant, “Groundwork II” (pp. 485-499) ----- Discussion Question #5
- Oct 30 – O’Neill, “Kantian Approaches to Famine” (pp. 510-521)
- Nov 01 – Thomson, “The Trolley Problem” (pp. 543-553) ----- Assignment #4

Consequentialism

- Nov 06 – Mill, “Utilitarianism” (pp. 417-423)
- Nov 08 – Smart, “Extreme and Restricted” (pp. 423-428) ----- Discussion Question #6
- Nov 13 – Parfit, “What Makes Life Go Best?” (pp. 294-299)
- Nov 15 – Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality” (pp. 466-474) ----- Assignment #5
- Nov 20 – TBD
- Nov 22 – Thanksgiving

Discussion of Paper Topics

- Nov 27 – Harris, “The Survival Lottery” (pp. 474-479)
- Nov 29 – Singer, “All Animals Are Equal” (pp. 361-372)

Final Paper is Due by Dec 08th

Selected Bibliography

1. Annas, Julia (1993) *The Morality of Happiness*. Oxford University Press.
2. Aquinas, Thomas (1260/1999) *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*. Penguin Classics
3. Aristotle (350BCE/1999). *Nichomachean Ethics*. Hackett Publishing Company.
4. Axelrod, Robert (1984). *The Evolution of Cooperation*. Basic Books.
5. Ayer, A.J. (1936). *Language, Truth, and Logic*. London, Gollancz.
6. Adams, Robert M. (2002). *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Oxford University Press.
7. Feldman, Fred (2004). *Pleasure and the Good Life*. Oxford University Press.
8. Feldman, Richard (1998). *Reason & Argument*. Pearson.
9. Gauthier, David (1986). *Morals by Agreement*. Oxford University Press.
10. Hobbes, Thomas (1668/1982). *Leviathan*. Penguin Classics.
11. Hooker, Brad (2002). *Ideal Code, Real World*. Oxford University Press.
12. Kant, Immanuel (1785/2012). *Groundwork*. Cambridge University Press.
13. Mackie, J.L. (1977). *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. Penguin Books.
14. Mill, J.S. & Bentham, J. (1863/1987). *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*. Penguin Classics.
15. Moore, G.E. (1903). *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge University Press.
16. Nussbaum, Martha (2000). *Women and Human Development*. Cambridge University Press.
17. O'Neill, Onora (1975). *Acting on Principle*. Cambridge University Press.
18. Parfit, Derek (1984). *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press.
19. Plato (380BCE/2003). *The Republic*. Penguin Classics.
20. Rawls, John (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press.
21. Ross, W.D. (1930). *The Right and the Good*. Clarendon Press.
22. Singer, Peter (1993). *Practical Ethics*. Cambridge University Press.
23. Shafer-Landau, Russ (2003). *Moral Realism: A Defense*. Oxford University Press.
24. Thomson, Judith Jarvis (1990). *The Realm of Rights*. Harvard University Press.
25. Wielenberg, Erik (2005). *Value and Virtue in a Godless World*. Cambridge University Press.

Warning: You should be very careful with information acquired through the Internet. Be wary of simply searching for help on issues discussed in class. Most of the stuff that you will find originates from people who have less education than you, and it often ranges from poorly informed opinion to complete and utter nonsense. When you search the internet, you *must* keep to reputable publications (but be critical even then!). For philosophical matters in general, here are two trustworthy online resources: the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/>) and the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/>). For all its other values, Wikipedia *is not* an adequate resource for serious academic work.

Mental Health: Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the “Let’s Talk” program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html