

**Ethical Theory**  
**PHIL 340**  
Spring 2015  
Meets T/Th, 8:30-9:55 AM

Prof. Lisa Tessman  
Office: Library Tower 1215  
Office hours: Mon 9:30-10:30 and Tues 10:00-11:00 or by appointment  
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**Text:**

*Moral Theory: An Introduction*, by Mark Timmons (second edition, 2013). Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN#: 978-0-7425-6492-3.

The text is available at the bookstore. All other readings are on electronic reserves and/or available as an ebook through the library. Hard copies of books are on physical reserves at the library. You must always have a copy of the day's reading with you in class. For readings that are available electronically, either print or bring a laptop so you can refer to the reading in class.

**Course Description:**

This course is an introduction to the main traditions in ethical theory. Students will examine how particular moral problems are treated within theoretical frameworks that each emphasize different considerations, such as what sort of person is morally admirable, how one should live, what good motives for action are, whether there are certain actions that are morally obligatory or morally prohibited, whether one should consider anything other than the consequences of one's actions, what role the moral emotions should play, when impartiality is appropriate, and what the value of care is. Students will question and develop their own views of morality through class discussion.

**Course Objectives:**

- To survey historical and contemporary work in philosophical ethics.
- To have students develop their own original, critical thinking about each of the texts, and identify and articulate their own position in ethics.
- To have students learn and practice philosophical skills; these skills include understanding difficult texts; analyzing, constructing, and responding critically to arguments; engaging in conceptual thinking; developing, articulating, and defending their own positions both verbally and in writing; thinking in complex and original ways.

This course satisfies the Humanities ("H") General Education Requirement.

Learning Outcomes: Students in H courses will demonstrate an understanding of human experience through the study of literature or philosophy.

**Course Requirements:**

This course is a 4-credit course, which means that in addition to attending and participating in class meetings, students are expected to do at least 9.5 hours of course-related work *outside of class* each week during the semester. This includes time spent completing assigned readings, taking notes on the readings, preparing questions and comments on the readings to bring to class, writing the discussion board entries, studying for tests, and meeting with reading groups to develop a group presentation.

**Class preparation and participation:**

Please avoid scheduling travel, appointments, etc., to conflict with class time. Email me before class time if you are ill and will be missing class. More than three absences will result automatically in failure of the course, unless you provide adequate documentation showing that all absences were due to illness or emergency. Please do not use an electronic device in class for any purpose other than referring to the day's reading, or taking notes. Do give serious attention to the *quality*—not just the quantity—of your participation in discussions. If you find it difficult to speak in class discussions, please come talk to me about this *during the first week or two of the semester*, and we will devise a plan for practicing this kind of speaking.

**“Are you a \_\_\_\_\_?” responses on Discussion Board:**

There are 9 discussion board responses due, as listed in the schedule; you will get credit for your top 8 grades on the responses (so you may choose to skip one response). They are due by 9:00 PM on the evening before the position will be discussed in class. Responses may not be posted, and can receive no credit, after 9:00 PM. Responses must be between 200-250 words. Each response must begin with either “Yes,” “No,” or “It’s complicated,” and then go on to explain (why are you a \_\_\_\_\_? what are the claims made by \_\_\_\_\_ that you agree with?) and justify (that is, offer reasons in support of) your response. Your response should demonstrate a clear understanding of the reading. After 9:00, please read everyone else’s responses in preparation for the class discussion. It is fine to change your mind about your position as the course progresses! (So, if in week 5 you claimed that you are a consequentialist, but then in week 8 you decide you are really a Kantian, your responses should reflect this change). Even though this is an online discussion, proper grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc., is expected.

Grading of discussion board responses:

- 0 = did not complete assignment, or outside of word limits, or did not answer with yes/no/it’s complicated, or showed no understanding of the reading.
- 1 = showed little understanding (or misunderstanding) of the reading and/or did not explain or support position.
- 2 = showed good understanding of the reading and explained and supported position well.
- 3 = showed excellent understanding of the reading and explained and supported position very well.

Total points

21 or more =	A
19-20 =	A-
17-18 =	B+
16 =	B
14-15 =	B-
12-13 =	C+
11 =	C
9-10 =	C-
8 =	D
7 or below =	F

**Tests:**

There will be two tests, each covering about 5 weeks of material. Tests are *open book* and *open notes* (this means that you do not have to memorize anything) but you may not use any electronic devices during tests. Thus I recommend buying a hard copy (rather than ebook) of the textbook and printing out any other material that you would like to refer to during tests. Tests will consist of short-answer and essay questions, and will require critical thinking about the material.

**Reading groups, and group presentation:**

On April 16, when we have finished all readings that are assigned to the whole class, students will decide what area of ethics interests them the most, and will form groups to engage in further study in this area of ethics. In consultation with me, each group will decide upon additional readings appropriate to their chosen area of study (the reading lists will require my approval), and devise a timeline for reading and discussion of this material. Each group will also develop a 20-30 minute presentation based on their studies. The group will receive a group grade for the quality of their in-class discussions and their presentation, though this grade may be adjusted up or down in individual cases, depending on the individual's contribution to the group.

**Grading:**

- 25% Discussion board posts
- 25% Test #1
- 25% Test #2
- 25% Reading group discussions and presentation

The final grade may be raised or lowered by a plus or minus (e.g. from a B- to a B, from an A- to a B+, etc) depending on the quality of class participation.

**Academic Honesty:** I follow the Philosophy Department policy on academic honesty (see below); furthermore, any student who plagiarizes or commits any other form of academic dishonesty will receive an F for the course. Students are responsible for being familiar with, and abiding by, the Student Academic Honesty Code.

**Philosophy Department Guidelines on Academic Honesty**

The Philosophy Department considers plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty to be serious breaches of the code of ethics governing academic life. They are also violations of Harpur College and Binghamton University policies.

In order to contribute to a culture of Academic Honesty within both the Department and the University, the Philosophy Department has agreed on the following guidelines:

- 1) Instructors will include a statement describing their policy regarding Academic Honesty on all course syllabi.
- 2) When a student commits an act of academic dishonesty, the instructor will formally bring the violation to the attention of the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee by either:
  - a. submitting an Admission of Dishonesty Form that has been signed by the student,
  - or*
  - b. initiating a hearing before the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee.
- 3) When a student commits an act of academic dishonesty, the instructor for the course will not give the student credit for the assignment, whether or not the student re-submits honest work.
- 4) Instructors will decide what further grade consequences are appropriate in response to the dishonesty at their own discretion; the typical consequence is a grade of 'F' for the course.

## Schedule

### **Week 1:**

**Tues, Jan. 27**

Introductions

**Thur, Jan. 29**

*Moral Theory* (hereafter: *MT*): Chapter 1, “An Introduction to Moral Theory.”

### **Week 2:**

**Tues, Feb. 3**

*MT*: Chapter 2, “Divine Command Theory.”

“Are you a divine command theorist?” response due Mon. Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> by 9:00 PM.

**Thur, Feb. 5**

Louise Antony, “Atheism as Perfect Piety” in *Is Goodness Without God Good Enough?* edited by Nathan King and Robert Garcia, pgs. 67-84.

### **Week 3:**

**Tues, Feb. 10**

*MT*: Chapter 3, “Moral Relativism.”

“Are you a moral relativist?” response due Mon. Feb 9<sup>th</sup> by 9:00 PM.

**Thur, Feb. 12**

Michele Moody-Adams, “Taking Disagreement Seriously,” in *Fieldwork in Familiar Places* (excerpt from chapter 1), pgs. 29-43.

### **Week 4:**

**Tues, Feb. 17**

*MT*: Chapter 4, “Natural Law Theory.”

“Are you a natural law theorist?” response due Mon. Feb 16<sup>th</sup> by 9:00 PM.

**Thur, Feb. 19**

*MT*: Chapter 5, “Consequentialism 1: Classical Utilitarianism.”

### **Week 5:**

**Tues, Feb. 24**

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter II and Chapter IV.

The text is available at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11224/11224-h/11224-h.htm>

**Thur, Feb. 26**

*MT*: Chapter 6, “Consequentialism 2: Contemporary Developments.”

“Are you a consequentialist?” response due Wed. Feb 25<sup>th</sup> by 9:00 PM.

### **Week 6:**

**Tues, March 3**

Bernard Williams, selection from “A Critique of Utilitarianism” (pgs. 77-150) in *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, by J.J.C. Smart & Bernard Williams; read pgs. 82-118 only.

**Thur, March 5**

Test #1

**Week 7:**

**Tues, March 10**

*MT*: Chapter 7, "Ethical Egoism."

"Are you an ethical egoist?" response due Mon. March 9<sup>th</sup> by 9:00 PM.

**Thur, March 12**

*MT*: Chapter 8, "Kant's Moral Theory."

**Week 8:**

**Tues, March 17**

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, Chapter I.

"Are you a Kantian?" response due Mon. March 16<sup>th</sup> by 9:00 PM.

**Thur, March 19**

Barbara Herman, 2001. "The Scope of Moral Requirement." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 30 (3): 227-256.

**Week 9:**

**Tues, March 24**

*MT*: Chapter 9, "Moral Pluralism."

"Are you a moral pluralist?" response due Mon. March 23<sup>rd</sup> by 9:00 PM.

**Thur, March 26**

I will be away giving a talk. Please watch these two talks by Jonathan Haidt:

<http://edge.org/conversation/a-new-science-of-morality-part-1>

[http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan\\_haidt\\_on\\_the\\_moral\\_mind](http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind)

**Week 10:**

**Tues, March 31**

*MT*: Chapter 10, "Virtue Ethics."

"Are you a virtue ethicist?" response due Mon. March 30<sup>th</sup> by 9:00 PM.

**Thur, April 2**

Virginia Held, 2006. "The Ethics of Care as Moral Theory," chapter 1 of *The Ethics of Care: Personal Political and Global*, pgs. 9-28.

Available as an ebook through the BU library.

**Week 11:**

**Tues, April 14**

*MT*: Chapter 11, "Moral Particularism."

"Are you a moral particularist?" response due Mon. April 13<sup>th</sup> by 9:00 PM.

**Thur, April 16**

*MT*: Chapter 12, "Conclusion."

"What is your position in ethics?" response to be shared out loud in class.

Organize reading groups.

**Week 12:**

**Tues, April 21**

Test #2

**Thur, April 23**

Reading groups.

**Week 13:**

**Tues, April 28**

Reading groups.

**Thur, April 30**

Reading groups and preparation for presentations.

**Week 14:**

**Tues, May 5**

Presentations.

**Thur, May 7**

Presentations.