

Ethical Theory
PHIL 340
Spring 2019
Meets T/Th 10:05-11:30

Prof. Lisa Tessman

Office: Library Tower 1215

Office hours: Tues 2:45-3:45 PM and Thur 8:45-9:45 AM or by appointment

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Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the main Western philosophical theories of ethics. Students will examine how particular moral problems are treated within 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 ethics through written work and class discussion.

Course Objectives:

- To survey historical and contemporary work in Western philosophical ethics.
- To have students develop their own original, critical thinking about each of the theories studied, and identify and articulate their own position in ethics.
- To have students learn and practice philosophical skills.

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.

Text:

Moral Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction by Daniel DeNicola.

All other readings are available under “Content” on MyCourses and/or are available online through a provided link. 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 an electronic device so you can refer to the reading in class.

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 and reflecting on the readings, writing responses, and studying for tests.

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. 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 you to practice this kind of speaking and for me to grade your participation appropriately.

If I, or your classmates, are pronouncing your name wrong, using the wrong pronouns for you, etc., please correct us! Also please let me know if there is anything I can do to facilitate your learning or accommodate your particular learning style.

150-200 word responses:

There are 13 written responses due, as listed in the schedule. They are due by 8:00 PM on the evening before the topic will be discussed in class and are to be submitted via MyCourses (there is a link to each assignment under “Content”). Late responses will not receive credit. The response presented on the last day of class may also earn you a bonus point. I will share selected responses for discussion in class, anonymously. You may write “please don’t share this response” (or something similar) on your response if you do not want it to be shared. Please feel free, but not obligated, to reveal that you are the author of a response that is shared in class.

There are two types of responses assigned:

- 1) Responses to either “Questions for Discussion” or “Questions for Personal Reflection.”

These questions can be found at the end of each chapter of *Moral Philosophy*.

- 2) “Are you a _____?” responses.

Each of these responses 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. It is fine to change your mind about your position as the course progresses! (So, if in week 5 you claim that you are a Utilitarian, but then in week 6 you decide you are really a Kantian, your responses should reflect this change).

All responses should demonstrate a clear understanding of the relevant reading(s) and should engage critically with the reading(s). Imagine you are writing for an audience who has not read the assigned reading, so first you have to explain the relevant points in the reading before you can respond to the question. All responses will be graded anonymously—I will see your names only after I have submitted grades for all responses.

Grading of responses:

- 0 = did not complete the assignment (on time), or outside of word limits, or showed little or no understanding of the reading, or very poorly written, etc.
- 1 = showed at least some understanding of the reading and at least some development of and argument in support of the response.

2 = showed excellent understanding of the reading and developed and supported the response well.

Total points

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

Tests:

There will be two tests, each on approximately half of the course material. Tests are *open book* and *open notes*. This means that you do not have to memorize anything. However, don't let this fool you into thinking that you don't need to study. The questions will require critical thinking about the material; you will not just be asked to regurgitate material. You may write your answers by hand or on an electronic device (preferred), but you may not go online during the tests, until you are ready to log on to submit your test.

Tests will be graded anonymously.

Tests may be made up only with a documented excuse (due to illness or emergency) and must be made up within a week of the date for which you have an excuse.

Grading:

- 50% 150-200 word responses
- 25% Test #1
- 25% Test #2

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.

Disability-related equal access accommodations: I am happy to make accommodations (e.g. extended time, quiet environment, etc.) for any student with a documented need for it. Students needing accommodations to ensure their equitable access and participation in this course should register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office as soon as they're aware of their need for such arrangements. [Visit the SSD website](#) for more detailed information. The office is in the University Union, room 119. Phone number 607-777-2686. Students who are already registered with SSD may make an appointment to meet and discuss the implementation of their authorized accommodations.

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. 22

Introductions

Thur, Jan. 24

Moral Philosophy (hereafter: *MP*): Chapter 1, “Ethical Theory, Moral Concerns.”

150-200 word response #1

Questions for Discussion #4 or #5

Due Wed. Jan 23rd by 8:00 PM.

Week 2:

Tues, Jan. 29

MP: Chapter 2, “Morality and Religion.”

150-200 word response #2

Questions for Personal Reflection #2

Due Mon. Jan 28th by 8:00 PM.

Thur, Jan. 31

MP: Chapter 3, “Relativism.”

Week 3:

Tues, Feb. 5

David Wong. 2010. “Pluralism and Ambivalence,” in Michael Krausz, Ed., *Relativism: A Contemporary Anthology* (pgs. 254-267).

The text is available under “Content” on MyCourses.

150-200 word response #3

“Are you a moral relativist?”

Due Mon. Feb 4th by 8:00 PM.

Thur, Feb. 7

MP: Chapter 4, “Moral Naturalism.”

Martha Nussbaum, “Creating Capabilities” (9 minute video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoD-cjduM40>

Week 4:

Tues, Feb. 12

MP: Chapter 5, “Egoism.”

150-200 word response #4

Questions for Discussion #7

Due Mon. Feb 11th by 8:00 PM.

Thur, Feb. 14

C. Daniel Batson. 2012. "The Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis: Issues and Implications," in Jean Decety, Ed., *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside* (pgs. 41-54).
The text is available under "Content" on MyCourses.

Paul Bloom, "Why Empathy Is Not the Best Way to Care" (8 minute video).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVCwjT_CVY

Week 5:

Tues, Feb. 19

MP: Chapter 6, "Utilitarianism."

Thur, Feb. 21

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>

150-200 word response #5

"Are you a Utilitarian?"

Due Wed. Feb 20th by 8:00 PM.

Week 6:

Tues, Feb. 26

MP: Chapter 7, "Kantianism."

Thur, Feb. 28

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

The text is available under "Content" on MyCourses.

150-200 word response #6

"Are you a Kantian?"

Due Wed. Feb 27th by 8:00 PM.

Week 7:

Tues, March 5

MP: Interlude, "Principled Ethics."

Iyad Rahwan, "What moral decisions should driverless cars make?" (13 minute video).

https://www.ted.com/talks/iyad_rahwan_what_moral_decisions_should_driverless_cars_make

Thur, March 7

MP: Chapter 8, "Contractarianism."

150-200 word response #7

Questions for Discussion #3

Due Wed March 6th by 8:00 PM.

Week 8:

Tues, March 12

Martha Nussbaum, 2004. "Beyond the Social Contract: Capabilities and Global Justice."
Oxford Development Studies, Vol. 32, No. 1.

The text is available under “Content” on MyCourses.

Thur, March 14

Test #1.

Week 9: spring break

Week 10:

Tues, March 26

MP: Chapter 9, “Virtue Ethics.”

150-200 word response #8

Questions for Discussion #4 or #5

Due Mon March 25th by 8:00 PM.

Thur, March 28

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I and II.

The text is available at: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>

Week 11:

Tues, April 2

Rosalind Hursthouse. 1991. “Virtue Theory and Abortion.” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* Vol. 20 No. 3.

The text is available under “Content” on MyCourses.

150-200 word response #9

“Are you a virtue ethicist?”

Due Mon. April 1st by 8:00 PM.

Thur, April 4

Watch in class:

Jonathan Haidt, “The Moral Roots of Liberals and Conservatives” (19 minute video).

https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind

Daniel Ariely, “Our Buggy Moral Code” (16 minute video).

https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_ariely_on_our_buggy_moral_code

Week 12:

Tues, April 9

MP: Chapter 10, “Emotions and Moral Sentiment Theory.”

150-200 word response #10

Questions for Discussion #5

Due Mon April 8th by 8:00 PM.

Thur, April 11

MP: Chapter 11, “Care Ethics and the Feminist Standpoint.”

Maureen Sander-Staudt, “The Revolution that Never Happened: Women and Care” (6 minute video).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4yFbBCVh-U>

Week 13:

Tues, April 16

Asha Bhandary. 2017. “The Arrow of Care Map: Abstract Care in Ideal Theory.” *Feminist Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 3, Issue 4.

The text is available under “Content” on MyCourses.

150-200 word response #11

“Are you a care ethicist?”

Due Mon. April 15th by 8:00 PM.

Thur, April 18

Watch in class:

Edge: The New Science of Morality

Talk by Joshua Greene: <https://www.edge.org/conversation/a-new-science-of-morality-part-2>

Talk by David Pizarro: <https://www.edge.org/conversation/a-new-science-of-morality-part-6>

(Each one is a 25 minute video).

Week 14:

Tues, April 23

MP: Chapter 12, “Particularism and Intuitionism.”

150-200 word response #12

Questions for Discussion #7 or #8

Due Mon April 22nd by 8:00 PM.

Thur, April 25

MP: Chapter 13, “Metaethics.”

Week 15:

Tues, April 30

Sharon Street. 2015. “Does Anything Really Matter or Did We Just Evolve to Think So?” In Byrne et al, Eds., *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy* (pgs. 685-693).

The text is available under “Content” on MyCourses.

Thur, May 2

MP: Chapter 14, “Moral Theory and the Good Life.”

150-200 word response #13

Questions for Discussion #8

Due Wed May 1st by 8:00 PM.

Week 16:

Tues, May 7

Test #2.

Thur, May 9

“What is your position in ethics?” response to be shared out loud in class (speak for 2-3 minutes).