

## PHL 275 H1S Introduction to Ethics

**Instructor:** Etye Steinberg, [etye.steinberg@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:etye.steinberg@mail.utoronto.ca)

Synchronous Lecture Hours: Monday 12-2, Wednesday 12-1.

Office Hours: Mondays 10-11 and 3-4.

### Course Description:

What is the right thing to do? How should we live our lives? Do we have a duty to act morally? What does ‘acting morally’ mean? These questions seem extremely important to us, not only as philosophers, but much more importantly, as people living our lives in the world. These and related questions are at the heart of this course. In this course, we will discuss three main questions: (1) is there any such thing as the right/good? (2) what is the right/good? and (3) how can we apply moral theories to the real world? We begin by examining meta-ethical questions and positions regarding the significance of disagreement in morality and the nature of moral claims and judgments. We then move on to review – and critically evaluate – different views in moral philosophy regarding what is the good, and what is the right thing to do. We will discuss virtue ethics, consequentialism, and deontology: their historical formulations and their current, refined versions. We will follow each theoretical discussion with an applied case and see how each theory bears on this case. We will discuss the treatment of nonhuman animals – e.g. is it moral to use them for food or to rely on their labor; the moral considerations introduced by the use of autonomous vehicles; and euthanasia – should physicians be permitted to assist terminal patients in committing suicide, and what can we learn from this regarding the value of life. These cases will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the abstract moral theories at the center of the course and will (hopefully) help us understand how we should act in the world.

### Course Objectives:

In this course we will

- Familiarize ourselves with key concepts, theories, and arguments in moral philosophy
- Learn and practice how to recognize and extract arguments from a text
- Evaluate arguments: are they strong? Are they valid? Do they rely on plausible assumptions?
- Construct arguments on our own using terminology that you will learn in the course

### Online Course:

This course will be held online. It will combine asynchronous content (e.g. recorded lectures/slides) with synchronous content (e.g. live lecture sessions and live tutorial sessions).

## **Required Readings:**

All readings will be made available through Quercus. Students must cover the relevant readings before each lecture and tutorial.

## **Course Evaluation:**

- |                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Tutorial participation         | 10% |
| 2. Online participation           | 10% |
| 3. 5 Short papers (400-500 words) | 50% |
| 4. Take home exam                 | 30% |

## **Important Dates:**

**July 6:** First day of Summer S term.

**July 12:** Last day to add S courses through ACORN.

**August 3:** Last day to drop S courses from academic record and GPA

**August 3:** Civic Holiday (no classes).

**Paper Submission Deadlines: July 13, July 23, July 30, August 10, August 17.**

**Take home exam distributed: August 24, 11:59am**

**Take home exam due: August 25, 11:59am (24 hours AFTER distribution)**

## Course Schedule:

### Part I: Meta Ethics

#### July 6: Introduction; Moral Disagreement

- Sayre-McCord, Geoff, "Moral Realism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/moral-realism/>.
  - ONLY: Intro and Section 1
- Simon Blackburn (2003), *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
  - ONLY: Section 2: Relativism.
- Catharine MacKinnon (1987) "Whose Culture? A Case Note on Martinez v. Santa Clara Pueblo". *Feminism Unmodified*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.  
*Suggested reading:*
  - Chris Gowans, "Moral Relativism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/moral-relativism/>.  
Sections 2,5,6,8.
  - Angela Harris (2000) "Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory." In R. Delgado and J. Stefancic (eds.) *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, pp. 264-267.

#### July 8: Moral Judgments

- Mark Van Roojen, "Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/moral-cognitivism/>.
  - ONLY: sections 1-4
- J.L. Mackie (1977) *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, section 1.9

### Part II: Theory and Practice

#### July 13: Consequentialism (1)

- Derek Parfit (1984) "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best". In *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Appendix I.
- John Stuart Mill, *On Utilitarianism*, Ch. 2. (available online through library and though liberty fund and many other outlets)

\* \* \* **Exercise 1 due** \* \* \*

July 15: Consequentialism (2)

- Philippa Foot (1967) “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect”. In *Virtues and Vices*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 20-32.
- Bernard Williams (1973) “A Critique of Utilitarianism.” In J.J.C. Smart and B. Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 112-118.
- John Rawls (1971) *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Section 5: Classical Utilitarianism
- Robert Nozick (1974) “The Experience Machine”. In *Anarchy, State, Utopia*. New York, NY: Basic Books, pp. 42-45.
- Judith Jarvis Thomson (1976) “Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem”. *The Monist*, 59:204-17.

July 20: Applied Ethics (1) Autonomous Vehicles

- Sven Nyholm (2018) The ethics of crashes with self-driving cars: A roadmap, I. *Philosophy Compass* 13(7).

Suggested reading:

**\*\*\* Exercise 2 due \*\*\***

July 22: Virtue Ethics

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, II. Roger Crisp (trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Julia Driver (2001) *Uneasy Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Ch. 4.

Suggested reading:

- Rosalind Hursthouse (1999) *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Ch. 2.

July 23: **\*\*\* Exercise 2 due \*\*\***

July 27: Applied Ethics (2) Animal Ethics

- Rebecca L. Walker (2009) “The Good Life for Nonhuman Animals.” *Working Virtue*. Walker and Ivanhoe (eds). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**\*\*\* Exercise 3 due \*\*\***

July 29: Kant (1)

- Immanuel Kant (1785) *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, section I.

- Simon Blackburn (2003) *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ONLY: Section 18: The Categorical Imperative

July 30: \* \* \* **Exercise 3 due** \* \* \*

August 5: Kant (2)

- Immanuel Kant (1785) *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, section II.

August 10: Applied Ethics (3) Physician Assisted Death

- Francis Kamm (1999) "Physician-Assisted Suicide, the Doctrine of Double Effect, and the Ground of Value." *Ethics* 109:586-605.
- Susan Dodds (2000) "Choice and Control in Feminist Bioethics." In C. Mackenzie and N. Stoljar (eds.) *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 213-235.

\* \* \* **Exercise 4 due** \* \* \*

### Part III: Challenging Ethical Theory

August 12: Psychological Egoism (or: was this course pointless?)

- Plato, *The Republic*, 359a-360d ("Ring of Gyges"). G.M.A. Grube, C.D.C. Reeve (trans.), in John Cooper (ed.) (1997) *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing. 1000-1001.
- Simon Blackburn (2003) *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ONLY: Section 3: Egoism
- Robert Shaver (2015) "Egoism". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),  
URL=<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/egoism/>
  - ONLY: Section 1.

August 17: Conclusion (or: are we better off without this course?)

- Kieran Setiya (2010) "Does Moral Theory Corrupt Youth?" *Philosophical Topics*, 38(1):205-222.

\* \* \* **Exercise 5 due** \* \* \*

## **Policies:**

- 1) Paper Submission:** Papers should be submitted through Quercus. Late papers will be penalized 5% per day, including weekends. Papers submitted more than 7 days late will receive a grade of 0.

**Submission deadlines: July 13, July 20, July 27, August 10, August 17.**

If you must miss an assignment deadline for medical or other valid reasons, you should inform me in advance. When circumstances do not permit this (e.g. in an emergency), you must inform me as soon as possible. Students who wish special academic consideration for health reasons must submit a completed University of Toronto Student Medical Certificate, available at: <http://www.healthservice.utoronto.ca/pdfs/medcert.htm>. Students who wish special academic consideration on other grounds must submit relevant supporting documentation. Alternate arrangements will be made only in the case of circumstances that are both legitimate and unforeseeable. Examples of circumstances that do not meet one or both conditions are: extra-curricular activities, employment obligations, and deadlines in other courses.

Paper submission through Quercus will go automatically through Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com services are described on the Turnitin.com web site. You can find the guide for student use here:

<http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching/academicintegrity/turnitin/guide-students.htm>

- 2) Take home exam:**

The final assessment task in this course will be a take home exam. The exam will be posted online on August 24<sup>th</sup> at 12:00PM (noon) EDT, and must be submitted via Quercus within 24 hours, by August 25<sup>th</sup> at 12:00PM (noon) EDT. The exact structure of the take home exam will be announced later in the course

- 3) E-mail Policy:**

This course has many students. Answering everyone's emails promptly is a difficult task. To make sure that your emails receive timely responses, please adhere to the following guidelines.

- Emails should be used for quick clarificatory questions, either about administrative issues (e.g. "the syllabus says that the paper is due on Wednesday, but with Thursday's date – which one is it", "I can't make it to your office hours – is there another time we can meet"), or for brief and simple questions about the material (e.g. "Mill talks about the greatest happiness principle – does he mean \*my\* happiness or \*everyone's\* happiness").
- The teaching staff – Prof and TAs – will **not** answer the following types of emails:
  - Emails with questions that are answered in the syllabus or the assignment instructions (e.g. "how much is attendance worth", "when is the 3<sup>rd</sup> paper due", "what did I miss

- last week”, “how do I get an extension”, “how long should my paper be”, “when are your office hours”). If you have this sort of question, read the syllabus or assignment instructions. You will probably find an answer there.
- Emails with substantive questions about the material (e.g. “what is Kant’s view”, “why does Aristotle think that a virtuous life is a happy life”). Substantive philosophical questions are better answered in person – either in class, tutorial, or office hours. Who knows – maybe other students also have a similar question, or maybe we will have an interesting discussion following your question!

#### **4) Academic Integrity:**

Academic integrity is a core value of academic work and research. Without abiding to rules of academic integrity, research becomes worthless. If an experiment’s results are forged, then that experiment cannot be useful in future work; if a paper does not properly cite its sources, then the continuous thread of knowledge is torn. This applies to the work of everyone taking part in the project of academia: from full time faculty members publishing papers in peer-reviewed journals, through graduate students and research assistants taking their first steps in research, and all the way to first year undergraduate students writing short essays.

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. Academic integrity is a fundamental value of learning and scholarship at the UofT. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that your UofT degree is valued and respected as a true signifier of your individual academic achievement.

The University of Toronto’s [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic misconduct, the processes for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. You are expected to be familiar with the contents of this document. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

- In papers and assignments:
  - Using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
  - Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
  - Making up sources or facts.
  - Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment (this includes working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work).
- On tests and exams:
  - Using or possessing any unauthorized aid, including a cell phone.
  - Looking at someone else’s answers.
  - Letting someone else look at your answers.
  - Misrepresenting your identity.
  - Submitting an altered test for re-grading.
- Misrepresentation:

- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes.
- Falsifying institutional documents or grades.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#). If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information from me or other available campus resources like the [College Writing Centres](#), the [Academic Success Centre](#), or the [U of T Writing Website](#).

- 5) Accessibility Services:** Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and Accessibility Services at <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca>. The earlier you make us aware of any potential accessibility issues, the more help we can provide! This also applies to any accessibility issue you may have regarding the online nature of the course.