

Phil 241: Introductory Ethics  
Revised Syllabus  
Fall 2000

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## I. Brief Course Description

It frequently happens that someone asserts a moral proposition. For example, someone might assert that capital punishment is unjust, or that people ought to give more money to charity. Sometimes we believe the proposition asserted merely on the basis of the authority of the person who asserted it, but frequently, we try to find out for ourselves whether it is true. When we do try to find out for ourselves whether it's true, we engage in the activity of moral assessment.

In this class, we will begin by stepping back to reflect on some very general questions about moral assessment: (i) is it possible to ever succeed in moral assessment; (ii) does moral assessment's having a point depend upon the existence of God; (iii) why should we care about the results of moral assessment; and (iv) how similar is moral assessment to scientific investigation. Such questions belong to the discipline known as metaethics.

In addition to asking questions about moral assessment, we will also engage in moral assessment. At the general level, we will ask what the fundamental principle of morality is, a question which belongs to ethical theory. And at the more particular level we will ask: (i) what are our duties to aid others who are in dire need; and (ii) is abortion permissible. Such questions belong to applied ethics.

There will also be two class periods at the end for examining a topic selected by the class.

## II. Administrative Information

Professor: Robert Streiffer

Contact Info: 5123 Helen C. White Hall; 263-9479; [rstreiffer@facstaff.wisc.edu](mailto:rstreiffer@facstaff.wisc.edu)

Home Page: <http://philosophy.wisc.edu/streiffer/>

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday 2:10 - 3:30, and by appointment

Lectures: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 1:20 – 2:10, Education 147

Teaching Assistant: Chris Johnson

Discussion Sections:

dis 310:	12:05	Friday	7115 White
dis 311:	9:55	Thursday	7117 White
dis 312:	11:00	Thursday	7117 White
dis 313:	12:05	Thursday	7111 White
dis 314:	9:55	Friday	7111 White

Books:

Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings, edited by George Sher

Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, by Immanuel Kant

Utilitarianism, by John Stuart Mill

The Elements of Style, by William Strunk and E. B. White (Recommended)

A Rulebook for Arguments, by Anthony Weston (Recommended)

## Requirements:

1. Read all of the assignments. Most of the assignments are short, but they very dense. Many of them will require that you read them more than once in order to understand the argument.
2. Attend all the lectures. I won't take attendance, but you will be expected to show familiarity with the lecture material in your papers.
3. Attend and participate in the discussion sections (worth 10%).
4. Write three 5-6 page papers (each worth 30%), one in metaethics, one in ethical theory, and one in applied ethics. No joint papers will be accepted. Dates and topics will be handed out in class.

## III. Class Schedule

## Metaethics

1. Wednesday, September 6 (No Office Hours)—Course Overview
2. Friday, September 8— The Justification for Being Moral
  - Thomas Hobbes, "Morality and Self-Interest," 24-39 (16 pages)
3. Monday, September 11— The Justification for Being Moral
  - Joel Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism," 4-14 (11)
4. Wednesday, September 13 (No Office Hours)— The Justification for Being Moral
  - Plato, "The Ring of Gyges," 15-23 (8)
5. Friday, September 15—The Justification for Being Moral
  - David Gauthier, "Morality and Advantage," 40-51 (12)
6. Monday, September 18—Morality and God
  - Plato, "Euthyphro," 166-180 (15)
7. Wednesday, September 20—Moral Skepticism
  - A. J. Ayer, "The Emotive Theory of Ethics," 120-128 (9)
8. Friday, September 22—A Response to Ayer
  - David Brink, "The Form and Content of Moral Judgments," 160-165 (6)
9. Monday, September 25—Moral Skepticism; Morality and Science
  - Gilbert Harman, "Ethics and Observation," 205-211 (7)
10. Wednesday, September 27—A Response to Harman
  - Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations," 212-232 (21)
11. Friday, September 29—The Objectivity of Morality
  - J. L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values," §8, §10, §11 (7)
  - James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism," 194-204 (11)
12. Monday, October 2—The Objectivity of Morality
  - Thomas Nagel, "Value," 257-270 (14)
13. Wednesday, October 4—Summary and Review

## Ethical Theory – Utilitarianism

14. Friday, October 6 – Classical Utilitarianism
  - Jeremy Bentham, "Pleasure as the Good," 608-611 (4)
  - John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chs. I and II, 1-25 (26)
15. Monday, October 9 (Guest Lecture) – Classical Utilitarianism
  - John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chs. I and II, 1-25 (26)
  - Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine," 612-614 (3)
  - W. D. Ross, "What Things Are Good?" 659-664 (6)
16. Wednesday, October 11 – The Metaethics of Classical Utilitarianism
  - John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chs. III and IV 26-40 (15)
17. Friday, October 13 – The Metaethics of Classical Utilitarianism
  - John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chs. III and IV, 26-40 (15)
18. Monday, October 16 – Classical Utilitarianism's Account of Rights
  - John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chs. V, 41-63 (23)
19. Wednesday, October 18 – Criticisms of Classical Utilitarianism
  - John Rawls, "Classical Utilitarianism," 348-352 (5)
  - Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," 353-363 (11)
20. Friday, October 20 – Utilitarian Responses
  - Shelly Kagan, "Constraints," 364-370 (17)
21. Monday, October 23 – Utilitarian Responses
  - Richard Brandt, "Toward a Credible Form of Utilitarianism," 327-347 (21)
22. Wednesday, October 25 – Summary and Review

## Ethical Theory – Deontology

23. Friday, October 27 (Guest Lecture) – The View to Which Kant is Responding
  - David Hume, "Morality and Natural Sentiment," 90-110 (21)
24. Monday, October 30 – Kant's Ethical Theory (2<sup>nd</sup> Paper Assigned)
  - Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface, First Section, 1-18 (19)
25. Wednesday, November 1 – Kant's Ethical Theory
  - Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface, First Section, 1-18 (19)
26. Friday, November 3 (Guest Lecture) – Kant's Ethical Theory
  - Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Second Section, 19-48 (30)
27. Monday, November 6 – Kant's Ethical Theory
  - Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Second Section, 19-48 (30)
28. Wednesday, November 8 – Kant's Ethical Theory
  - Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Third Section, 49-62 (14)

29. Friday, November 10—Kant's Ethical Theory
  - Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Third Section, 49-62 (14)
30. Monday, November 13—Criticisms of Kant's Ethical Theory (2<sup>nd</sup> Paper Due)
  - William Nelson, "Kant's Moral Philosophy," 406-419 (14)
31. Wednesday, November 15—Criticisms of Kant's Ethical Theory
  - Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck," 441-452 (12)
32. Friday, November 17—A Contemporary Kantian
  - John Rawls, "A Theory of Justice," 453-472 (10)
33. Monday, November 20—A Response on Behalf of Kant
  - Christine Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," 420-440 (21)
34. Wednesday, November 22—Summary and Review  
Friday, November 24 (Thanksgiving Holiday)

### Applied Ethics

35. Monday, November 27— Abortion, a Pro-Choice View
  - Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," 720-734 (15)
36. Wednesday, November 29— A Response to Thomson
  - Joel Feinberg, "Abortion and the Conflict of Claims," 735-748 (14)
37. Friday, December 1— Our Obligations to the Needy (3<sup>rd</sup> Paper Assigned)
  - Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 694-704 (11)
38. Monday, December 4— Our Obligations to the Needy
  - John Arthur, "Equality, Entitlements, and the Distribution of Income," 705-719 (15)

### Ethical Theory—Virtue Theory

39. Wednesday, December 6— Ancient Virtue Theory
  - Aristotle, "The Nature of Moral Virtue," 476-491 (16)
40. Friday, December 8 (Guest Lecture)—Modern Virtue Theory and Relativism
  - Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," 492-516 (25)
41. Monday, December 11— A Criticism of Virtue Theory
  - Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," 563-580 (18)
42. Wednesday, December 13  
To Be Determined
  - To Be Determined
43. Friday, December 15 (3<sup>rd</sup> Paper Due)  
To Be Determined
  - To Be Determined