

PHIL 442 History of Ethics to 1900

Spring 2016

Classes: MW 3:30—4:50pm

Location: THH 213

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Office Hours: MW 2–3pm or by email appointment

Office: 229 Stonier Hall

Course Description

In this course we will read and discuss material from five of the most influential texts in the history of western ethics:

Plato's *Republic*

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*

Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*

By closely reading and thinking about these texts, we will both try to understand what some of the greatest philosophers in history believed about morality and the good life, and try to develop our own ideas regarding some of the central question in ethics. Those questions include:

- Why be moral?
- What makes certain acts right and wrong?
- Are moral claims even capable of being true or false in the same way as other statements of fact?

Required Texts

The required texts are the five books listed above. They should be available from the campus bookstore. The particular editions I have ordered are:

Plato, *Republic*, translated by Grube and revised by Reeve (Hackett 1992 2nd Edition)
 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Irwin (Hackett 1999 2nd edition)
 David Hume, *Moral Philosophy*, Sayre-McCord ed. (Hackett 2004)
 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Gregor ed. (Cambridge 2012 2nd edition)
 J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Sher ed. (Hackett 2002 2nd edition)

You should bring your copy of the relevant book to each class since we will sometimes need to examine particular passages during class discussion. For this reason it is also important that we all use the same edition of each text.

The only required texts are the primary ones listed above. However, here are a few secondary texts that you might also find helpful:

G.A. Cohen, *Lectures on the History of Moral and Political Philosophy*
 Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: Volumes I-III*
 John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*
 David Wiggins, *Ethics: Twelve Lectures on the Philosophy of Morality*

Grading

First midterm paper:	25%
Second midterm paper:	25%
Final exam:	50%

The two midterms and the final exam constitute your *provisional* grade for the course. Your *final* grade can also be affected by your *preparation, attendance, and participation*. More on all this below.

Each midterm paper must be 2,300-2,500 words in length. The due date for the first midterm paper is **Monday February 8th at 10am**. The due date for the second midterm paper is **Monday March 7th at 10am**. You are required to submit the essays via Blackboard. There will be a penalty of one grade increment for every day after the deadline an essay is submitted. So, for example, if you submit your paper one day late, and the paper is judged to be worth an A, you will only receive an A- grade. If you submit the same paper two days late, it will receive a grade of B+, and so on. Note that a submission on the correct date but after the 10am deadline will count as one day late.

The final exam is scheduled for **Friday May 6th 2-4pm.**

Further details about the content of midterm papers and the final exam will be provided in due course. Please see the University Catalogue or Grade Handbook for definitions of particular grades.

Preparation: Each Wednesday (excluding the first week) you must submit 250-300 words on the reading assigned for that class, which you must hand in to me (typed, not handwritten) at the beginning of class. In these weekly writing assignments you should answer one of the questions about the reading that I will post on Blackboard. I will not be grading these assignments, but they must be completed each week to a minimal standard. Students who fail to submit their weekly writing assignments (or hand in an assignment that fails to meet the minimum standard) *more than twice* will have their final grade *lowered by one grade increment*. So, for example, if your provisional grade was a B+, but you failed to submit your writing assignments three or more times, then your final grade would drop to a B. Successfully completing the weekly writing assignments is thus a way of *maintaining* your provisional grade.

Attendance: Class attendance is mandatory. I reserve the right to lower your final grade if you are repeatedly absent without a valid and verifiable excuse.

Participation: The class will be partly discussion-based, and participation in class discussions is an important element of making the class a success. Students who regularly make excellent class contributions will, at the end of the course, have their final grade increased by one letter grade increment. So, for example, if your provisional grade was a B+ but you regularly made excellent contributions to the class discussion, your final grade would be an A-. Note: *your performance in class discussion can only improve your final grade*—it cannot diminish your final grade.

Preparation for Class/Class Format

The format for each class will be a combination of a lecture and a discussion amongst all of us, and you are encouraged to ask questions both of me and of each other whenever something is puzzling, or whenever you feel an important point is being overlooked. The aim of the course is to have thoughtful and well-reasoned discussions and arguments about the issues, and the class will be more intellectually rewarding and more fun the more each person joins in the discussion. Participating in class discussions is also a small part of how you will

be assessed (see above). If you are particularly uncomfortable with public speaking, please speak to me about this.

You will be expected to come to class having done the required reading. When you prepare for class, it's important not simply to read the assigned material, but to read it carefully and critically. This may be the first time you have read philosophical work, and the style of writing and argument can take some getting used to. You will see from the syllabus that I have not assigned a great deal of reading for each class measured in terms of the number of pages, but the material is sometimes dense and difficult: a lot of complicated arguments can be found in the space of just a few pages, and this means you may need to read the material more than once to gain a clear understanding of an author's argument. I strongly encourage you to make careful notes as you read. Of course different people have different methods of note-taking, but whatever your method, you should be taking notes in a way that will help you achieve the following aims:

- Gain a clear understanding of the author's main claims and the arguments the author uses to try and establish these claims. You have a clear understanding when you can accurately summarize the author's key claims and arguments in your own words.
- Identify any terms/claims/ideas that remain puzzling to you
- Try to understand how the author's view might be challenged. This means you must read with a critical eye. Try to identify the weak points in an argument or think of counterexamples to what the author is saying, or look for implications of their view that might seem unacceptable or inconsistent.
- Try to understand what the wider implications of the author's position might be—see how his/her view fits (or doesn't fit) with the views of other philosophers we are reading.

Policies on Disability, Academic Integrity, and Electronic Devices

Students who need to request accommodations based on a disability are required to register each semester with the Disability Services and Programs. In addition, a letter of verification to the instructors from the Disability Services and Programs is needed for the semester you are enrolled in this course. If you have any questions concerning this procedure, please contact the course instructor and Disability Services and Programs at (213) 740-0776, STU 301.

No form of plagiarism or other type of academic dishonesty will be tolerated, and **ignorance of the rules regarding plagiarism is no excuse**. If in any doubt about what constitutes plagiarism or any other question about academic integrity, please ask me. Do not assume the answer can be obtained from another source. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/> Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>

The use of tablets, laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices in class is prohibited. The use of these devices is distracting for other students, and studies have shown that students who take notes by hand tend to do better learning the material being discussed. Lecture slides will be made available via Blackboard. You should check Blackboard and your University email account regularly for information about the course.

Schedule of Classes: Topics and Readings

Introduction

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|-------|---|
| 01/11 | Introduction to the course and to ethics (no reading) |
| 01/13 | Introduction to ethics (no reading) |
| 01/18 | NO CLASS (Martin Luther King Jr Day) |

Plato's Republic

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| 01/20 | Book I |
| 01/25 | Book II |

01/27 Book IV

02/01 Book VI

02/03 Book VII

Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics

02/08 Book I

02/10 Book II

02/15 NO CLASS (President's Day)

02/17 Book III

02/22 Book V

02/24 Book VI

02/29 Book VII

Hume's A Treatise of Human Nature

03/02 Book II, Pt. III, sect. iii, Book III, Pt. I

03/07 Book II, Pt. III, sect. iii, Book III, Pt. I (same as previous)

03/09 Book III, Pt. II, sect. i-ii

03/13-20 SPRING BREAK

03/21 Book III, Pt. II, sect. iii-vi

03/23 Book III, Pt. III

03/28 Book III, Pt. III (same as previous)

Kant's Groundwork

- 03/30 Kant's Introduction + First section
- 04/04 Second section pp. 21-33
- 04/06 Second section pp. 33-48
- 04/11 Second section pp. 33-48 (same as previous)
- 04/13 Second section pp. 48-55
- 04/18 Third section pp. 56-72

Mill's Utilitarianism

- 04/20 Chapters 1-2
- 04/25 Chapters 3-4
- 04/27 Chapter 5