

Omar Fakhri

Ethics

Course Description

We will read both historical and contemporary texts that focus on questions that are largely influenced by the Western philosophical tradition. The material will not be arranged chronologically, but topically. Here is a sample of some of the topics we will discuss: Is morality relative? Should I prefer my interests over the interests of others? Does moral disagreement undermine our moral knowledge? What constitutes a good life? how should we live? Is it always morally wrong to kill an innocent human? Do animals have rights?

In this class, we begin by considering important questions that might hinder even attempting to answer some of the questions in the above paragraph. These include issues about moral relativism, psychological and ethical egoism, and skepticism about moral knowledge. Then we will look at moral theories that have had important influence on our moral thinking such as utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, divine command theory, and natural law theory. We will examine arguments for and against these theories. After that, we'll engage in important ethical questions outside of the domain of general moral theorizing, such as the nature of moral responsibility and determinism. Lastly, we will turn to applied ethics. We will look at important moral questions about helping the poor, abortion, animal rights, among others. The overall aim of this course is to introduce students to important philosophical questions, and to help students cultivate critical reasoning skills so that they can start to develop their own answers to these questions. This class is a survey class in which we discuss many different topics in hopes that some of these topics will grip your interests, and perhaps even persuade you to take other philosophy courses.

Course Requirements:

- Attendance and Participation Grade 10% – Section and class attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections and class having done all the assigned reading.
- Two Papers 20% each – These are shorter papers. The prompt will ask you to explicate an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. Each paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
- Précis 15% – A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 500 words and no longer than 600 words* double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose.
- Final Paper 35% - This is a longer paper. The final paper will function as your final for the class. It will ask you to deal with the views or arguments of two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

Required Text:

Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues, 6th edition. Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie.

I will supplement this book with other readings. I will post them online.

Course Schedule

E= *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, 6th Edition

*= handout (check becourses)

Part 1: Meta-Ethics

Week 1: Ethical Relativism

Ruth Benedict: A Defense of Ethical Relativism*

Louis Pojman: A Critique of Ethical Relativism*

Week 2: Moral Disagreement

George Sher: But I Could be Wrong*

Renford Bambrough: Proof*

Part 2: Moral Theory

Week 3: Egoism

Ayn Rand: The Virtue of Selfishness*

James Rachels: Egoism and Moral Skepticism (E: 802-808)

Week 4: Utilitarianism

Mill: Utilitarianism (E: 363-397)

Week 5: Deontology

Kant: Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals (E: 314-353)

Week 6: Virtue Ethics

Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics (E: 130-168)

Week 7: Divine command and natural law

Plato: Euthyphro (E: 5-15)

Robert Adams: A New Divine Command Theory*

Russ Shafer-Landau: Natural Law*

Week 8: Critique of utilitarianism and deontology

Robert Nozick: The Experience Machine*

Bernard Williams: A Critique of Utilitarianism (E: 544-560)

Philippa Foot: Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives (E: 647-653)

Week 9: Other critiques

Susan Wolf: Moral Saints*

Margaret Walker: Feminist Skepticism, Authority, and Transparency*

Part 3: Applied Ethics

Week 10: Famine

Peter Singer: Famine, Affluence, and Morality (E: 870-877)

John Arthur: Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code (E: 878-889)

Week 11: Abortion

Judith Thomson: A Defense of Abortion (E: 813-823)

Don Marquis: An Argument that Abortion Is Wrong (E: 834-845)

Week 12: Animal Rights

Tom Regan: Empty Cages: Animal Rights and Vivisection*

R. G. Frey: Animals and Their Medical Use*

Week 13: Immigration

David Miller: Immigration: The Case for Limits*

Chandran Kukathas: The Case for Open Immigration*

Week 14: Pornography

Andrew Altman: The Right to Get Turned On*

Susan Brison: The Price We Pay? Pornography and Harm*