

INTRODUCTORY HANDOUT PHILOSOPHY 13 **Fall, 2014**
INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY---ETHICS **revised October 2**
 Professor (lecturer): Richard Arneson.

Teaching Assistants: Titus Jewell, Noel Martin, Cami Koepke, and Dean Tracy.

For further information about the course, which will change week by week, consult the Philosophy 13 course TED page. Required and recommended readings (other than the course texts available in the Bookstore), occasional class notes, this course syllabus, and eventually advance information handouts on the final exam will be made available at this TED page.

Lectures Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30 a.m. to 10:50 a.m., Center Hall 119.

The final exam for this course will take place on Thursday, December 18 from 8:00-11:00 a.m. If you enroll in this class, you must be free to take a regular final exam for this course at this time.

People disagree about moral and ethical issues. These are issues about what we fundamentally owe one another by way of conduct, and about what, if anything, is really good or choiceworthy in human life. We have these disagreements in ordinary life, not just in philosophy classes or in academic journals. If someone says "Abortion is wrong" and another person says "Abortion is not wrong," what sort of disagreement is this? One view is that moral disagreement is disagreement in attitude. One person is expressing a favorable attitude toward abortion, the other is expressing an unfavorable attitude. On this view, moral statements are not genuine assertions, and cannot be true or false. Another possible view is that moral claims are a type of order or command, so "abortion is wrong" means something like "Don't have an abortion!" On yet another view, moral claims make genuine assertions, and can be true or false, correct or incorrect. Most of the authors of the writings we will read in this class assume the latter view just described. In the last week of the course, we look briefly at what might be said on both sides of this issue, and also ask, what could make moral claims true, if they are true.

Moral codes concerning the right and the good differ from society to society and change over time within any single society. Is there some uniquely valid fundamental standard for determining what is right and good or not? We study two contrasting proposals for identifying fundamental standards. Call them "consequentialism" and "nonconsequentialism." One proposal holds that we should assess laws, social practices, actions and policies by their consequences. What's morally right is always the act or policy that would produce the best reachable outcome. This proposal identifies rationality with maximizing the fulfillment of goals and moral rationality with maximizing the fulfillment of an impartial goal. This might be human well-being fairly distributed, or it might be conceived in some other way.

In the nineteenth century, J. S. Mill argued for a utilitarian version of consequentialism. According to Mill, individual actions and social policies are morally better or worse, depending on the extent to which they promote or reduce the happiness of all humans (and other animals). Critics of Mill's views deny that happiness as Mill conceives of it (pleasure and the absence of pain) is really the correct standard for assessing the quality of a person's life, what makes someone's life go better for worse for the person who is living it. Critics also deny that what's morally right is always doing what aggregate maximizes human happiness.

We also look at *On Liberty*, a famous book by Mill that affirms a strong right to individual liberty grounded on the value of individuality and self-development. In that book Mill presents utilitarian arguments for the position that in modern societies adult persons should be left free to do whatever they choose so long as they do not harm others in certain ways. We try to gauge the extent of Mill's libertarian commitment and to determine whether his libertarianism (a) coheres with his utilitarianism and (b) makes sense and is plausible on its own terms. (Maybe Mill's liberty principle can be justified even if the utilitarianism he offers to back it up cannot be justified.)

The other proposal as to the standard of morally right conduct rejects consequentialism. This family of proposals holds, in a slogan, that the right is prior to the good: We should respect persons by constraining our conduct toward them in certain ways, and we are permitted to pursue our conception of what is good only within the limits set by these moral constraints. Along with affirming moral constraints, nonconsequentialist morality also affirms options. So long as we aren't violating the moral constraints, each of us has wide freedom to choose and pursue our own projects and live as we choose, even if our choices and actions aren't maximizing good consequences. Some nonconsequentialists hold that some moral constraints are absolute and exceptionless: there are some things we may not do whatever the consequences.

Consequentialism also opposes common opinion in denying partiality: Most of us think it is sometimes morally permissible, and sometimes morally required, to favor those who are personally related to us by ties of friendship or kinship, over mere strangers. But morality is supposed to involve impartiality in some sense; so how do we draw a principled line between acceptable and unacceptable partiality?

The consequentialist family of views is perhaps better understood, the nonconsequentialist alternative is perennially popular but is at present less clearly understood—a work in progress. Most course authors who identify with the nonconsequentialist perspective are trying to develop it or figure out how it might best be conceived. One might opt for one or another of these proposals, try to split the difference between them, or reject the whole lot. We examine conflicting views on these issues.

We test rival approaches to morality by examining two controversial moral issues: the acceptability of paternalism (restricting someone's liberty against her will for her own good) and the stringency of duties to distant needy strangers.

THE AIMS OF THE COURSE are (1) to improve our skills at reading and understanding difficult writings and thinking clearly about complex issues and writing about those issues (2) to become more aware of the structure of our own moral views and of moral positions opposed to our own.

COURSE TEXTS: All course readings are available for downloading at the course TED page, except that the two Mill texts are available on-line at www.utilitarianism.com/jsmill.htm

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Attendance at class is required, but only section attendance will be checked. There may possibly be some quizzes in discussion section meetings. There will be a midterm exam in class (week 5), a short writing assignment, five to seven pages in length, topics to be assigned in lecture, and a regular comprehensive final examination. On your exams and the writing assignment you will be graded according to the clarity of your prose, the cogency of your arguments, and the soundness of the understanding of course materials that you exhibit. The final examination will comprehend all course materials including required readings, lectures, and handouts distributed in class.

GRADING FOR PASS/NOT PASS ENROLLEES: If you are taking the course on a PASS/NOT PASS basis, you must get (1) a C- or better on the final examination as well as (2) an overall C- average on all course work in order to achieve a PASS grade, with one exception: If you have an A- or better average on the midterm exam, section quizzes, and writing assignment, and are enrolled on a PASS/NOT PASS basis, you need not take the final exam in order to earn a PASS grade.

GRADING: Participation in discussion section meetings count for ten per cent of your final course grade, the midterm exam counts for 20 per cent, the writing assignment for 30 per cent, and the final examination for 40 per cent.

Only medical excuses certified by a note from your physician or a comparable certified excuse will be accepted for late submission of the writing assignment or absence from the midterm exam, or to justify the assignment of an Incomplete course grade.

DISCUSSION SECTIONS. A discussion meeting for each section will occur once a week and students are expected to attend. Quizzes posed in discussion section will be based on the reading to be done for that specific section meeting, as your TA will explain. Your attendance and performance in section will also affect your course grade in borderline cases (e.g., if the average of your grades is on the border between A- and B+). Apart from grades, the discussion sections are essential to the learning process because they provide the opportunity for a structured dialogue in which your opinions on ethical issues can be expressed, debated, and clarified. Helped by your TA, you learn from your classmates and they from you. Also, the TA will sometimes offer a different perspective on the issues from what the lectures provide.

DISABILITY. If you have a certified disability that requires accommodation, you should register with the campus Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) and provide me a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by that Office. A copy of this same letter should also be given to the OSD liaison person in the Philosophy Department at the start of the term, so accommodation can be arranged. Please let me know your disability status at the start of the course, so I can work with the office to comply with the accommodation it stipulates as appropriate.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. No dishonesty or cheating, in other words. See the University Policy on academic integrity at <http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/index.html/>

OFFICE HOURS: You are welcome and encouraged to come to my (Arneson's) office hours or those of your TA whenever you want to talk about the course material and themes, the assignments, or any other course-related concerns you have.

Writing: Your success in this class will depend in part on your ability to express yourself clearly. The course readings provide exemplars of clear philosophical writing. At the TED course page are some handouts with tips about how to write philosophy essays. As you work on your writing assignment (due on Tuesday, December 2), your TAs and I can help you talk through your ideas. Another resource is the UCSD Writing Center (located at 127 Mandeville; writingcenter@ucsd.edu). Their staff can help you with drafts of essays and generally provide advice for you at all stages of the writing process.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURE TOPICS AND READINGS

Note: All readings are available at the course TED page, except for the Mill readings, excerpts from *Utilitarianism* (weeks 1 and 2) and *On Liberty* (week 6).

Week 1. September 29-October 5.

THURSDAY: Introduction to ethics. Mill's utilitarianism.

Reading: J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapters 1 & 2. Available at www.utilitarianism.com/jsmill/htm

Also: Russ Shafer-Landau, "Fundamentals of Ethics: Introduction"

Week 2. October 6-12.

TUESDAY: Same topic continued; Mill on higher pleasures. Reading: Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2 (part of the same reading as for last Thursday).

THURSDAY: What makes someone's life good for that very person? Pleasure, desire satisfaction, and other conceptions of good. Reading: Richard Kraut, "Desire and the Human Good," Robert Adams, "Well-Being and Excellence," Derek Parfit, "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best?."

Week 3. October 13-19.

TUESDAY: The place of rules in utilitarianism. Reading: J. J. C. Smart, "Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism,"; also John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules."

THURSDAY: Utilitarianism and consequentialism; arguments against consequentialism; the doctrine of double effect and the doctrine of doing and allowing. Reading: Russ Shafer-Landau, "Ethical Pluralism and Absolute Moral Rules."

Week 4, October 20-26.

TUESDAY: The structure of nonconsequentialist morality; constraints and options; prima facie duties. Reading: Russ Shafer-Landau, "Ethical Pluralism: Prima Facie Duties and Ethical Particularism"; Thomas Nagel, "Agent-relativity and Deontology."

THURSDAY: Justice versus utility-maximizing. Reading: J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter 5 (available at www.utilitarianism.com/jsmill/htm).

Week 5. October 27-November 2.

TUESDAY: Moral rights; rights and utility; overriding rights. Reading: Robert Nozick, "Side Constraints"; Amartya Sen, "Rights and Agency," sections 1-4.

THURSDAY: **MIDTERM EXAM IN CLASS.**

Week 6. November 3-November 9.

TUESDAY: Mill's liberty principle. Paternalism. Reading: Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 1 (available at www.utilitarianism.com/jsmill/htm); also Gerald Dworkin, "Paternalism".

THURSDAY: Mill on individuality. Reading: Mill, *On Liberty*, chapters 3 & 4 (available at www.utilitarianism.com/jsmill/htm).

SCHEDULE OF LECTURE TOPICS & READINGS CONCLUDED

Week 7. November 10-16.

TUESDAY: NO CLASS. VETERANS' DAY.

THURSDAY: Legal prohibitions of recreational drugs. Reading: Douglas Husak, "Liberal Neutrality, Autonomy, and Drug Prohibitions," Peter de Marneffe, "Against the Legalization of Drugs."

Week 8. November 17-23.

TUESDAY: Nudge. Reading: Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler, "Nudge"; Daniel Hausman and Brynn Welch, "Debate: To Nudge or Not to Nudge."

THURSDAY: Beneficence. Reading: Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," Jean Hampton, "Selflessness and the Loss of Self".

Week 9. November 24-November 30.

TUESDAY: Global poverty. Reading: Thomas Pogge, "Are We Violating the Rights of the Global Poor,?" Jan Narveson, "We Don't Owe Them a Thing! A Tough-minded but Soft-Hearted View of Aid to the Faraway Needy."

THURSDAY: NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY.

WEEK 10: December 1-7.

TUESDAY: What makes a being morally considerable? Moral status and equal moral status. Reading: Peter Singer, "All Animals Are Equal." **WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS.**

THURSDAY: What (if anything) makes all human persons morally equal? Puzzles of moral status and equal moral status. Reading: George Sher, "Why we Are Moral Equals"; Ian Carter, "Respect and the Basis of Equality."

Week 11. December 8-14.

TUES: Is there any true or false, right or wrong, in ethics? Reading: J. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values"; also "Ronald Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It."

THUR: How, if at all, might we discover ethical truth, if there is any such thing? Reading: John Rawls, "Some Remarks on Moral Theory"; also Michael Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism."

Arneson's office hours: Wednesdays 1-2 & Tuesdays 3:00-4:00 in HSS 8057.

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