

PHIL 13: Intro to Ethics, Spring 2013
Instructor: Eric Campbell

HSS 1330 11 – 1:50
OH: Roma Café, W 12 to 2

Daniel Schwartz
HSS 7089 Tue 9 – 11

Matthew Piper
HSS 8037 MF 12 – 1

Cory Davia
HSS 8088 W 12 – 1

SYLLABUS

Readings and Course Site

All readings and lecture notes will be on our course site, run by Piazza. Here is where you go to sign up for the site: piazza.com/ucsd/spring2013/phil13; and here is the course site itself: piazza.com/ucsd/spring2013/phil13/home. The readings are under 'Resources'. All enrolled students **must** sign-up for this site, and you should all do this **right away**. Some of the lecture notes I post on here will be important to read **before** you read the primary material. I will also make announcements through this site. When you sign in to the site, set it up to receive emails and check your email. If you miss any of the announcements because you haven't signed up for the site or don't check your email, it's on you. The site also has a Q and A function, and students should feel free to ask questions about the class or related material.

The order in which we will do the readings is pre-established, but how much time we spend on each one is not. The readings are all listed on the Piazza site in the order we will read them, and I also list them below in conjunction with the 4 parts of the course.

Course Goals, Structure and Requirements

This course will consist of an introduction to metaethics, normative ethics and a little bit of applied ethics. Metaethics is, very roughly speaking, the study of what is going on when we make more judgments or engage in moral discourse. Normative ethics is, roughly speaking, the attempt to create theories about what the good or right thing to do is, or how to live a good life. Applied ethics addresses specific ethical topics, such as what to do in the face of global poverty and/or famine. All topics in this course will be interrelated.

You are expected to attend all lectures and sections. I will not take attendance at lectures because I find it tedious, but I still expect you to be there. I will present material in lecture that will be available nowhere else. There I will provide responses to the readings that it will be **crucial** for you to be aware of when writing your papers. **You can expect to do very poorly if you miss lectures.** I'm doing it this way because I really want you to both attend and pay attention in lectures. If you have to miss a lecture, please let me know in advance if possible. If you have work or any other conflicts with lecture, please **eliminate either that conflict or this class**. You will almost certainly not do well if you miss multiple lectures. Further, it is crucial that you do the readings **before** coming to lecture. Seriously. Some of these readings are very hard, but I chose them because I think they are very interesting and play an important role in the course. It is my job to help you understand them, and to that end I will lecture over them and provide you with lecture notes. However, it is your job to try your best to read them **before** you come to class. If lecture is the first time you are hearing the material, you will have a much harder time following the lectures and they will therefore not be nearly so helpful.

Grading

- 1) In-class quizzes. These will take place *roughly* once a week at the beginning of class. They will be unannounced and can be on any day. They will be turned in no later than 10 minutes after class starts and they cannot be made up if you miss one. They will not be very difficult **if you have done the reading carefully and paid attention in lecture**. That is a big if. I really want you to pay attention in class and I really want you to do the reading and so I will design the quizzes with the aim that those who do these things get points and those who don't don't. You get to drop your lowest score (so if you have to miss one, you can drop it): **20%**
- 2) Section attendance/participation: **10%**
- 3) Short (900-word limit) paper *due at the beginning of 3rd week (4/15)*: **20%**.
- 4) Longer paper (about 2000 words) due on the day of the final exam: **35%**. You are strongly encouraged to write a one-page proposal beforehand and get feedback from your T.A. before beginning to write. I will talk more about the proposals when the time comes.
- 5) Final Exam. This will be a fairly short final. You should be able to do well without much additional studying **if and only if** you have been doing the reading carefully and paying attention in lecture all quarter: **15%**

Academic Integrity

UCSD policy: <http://senate.ucsd.edu/manual/appendices/app2.htm>. You'll have to turn your papers into turnitin.com. Further information on how to do so will be forthcoming.

Electronics

Laptops are not allowed in class. Seriously. I know it's lame for those of you who would really only take notes on them if I allowed them, but experience has shown me that no matter how much I insist that laptops are only to be used for note-taking, the vast majority of people cannot (or do not) resist using them in naughty ways, and this distracts other students and me. At any rate, I think it's very easy to get too focused on taking detailed notes, and I provide you with lecture notes. I want you to come to class having carefully done the readings, ready to listen, think about what I'm saying and ask questions. You should take notes when reading, and I am perfectly happy for you to take notes when I'm talking, but what is most important in lecture is that you're paying attention and thinking. The notes you take should be limited to main ideas and/or things not in the readings. It should take only a few minutes to transfer them to your computers after class.

Also, **no texting or any electronic gadgetry whatever during class.** If you expect to receive a vitally important message while in class, sit in the back and leave the class to take the call or message. Nobody's perfect; I'll give you a friendly reminder/warning the first time you use these electronic devices. The second time, I'll ask you to withdraw from the class.

If you require special accommodations of any sort, please let me know on the first day of class.

Part 1: Initial Threats to Moral Discourse

A) Do moral obligations depend on divine will? Dostoevsky said that if God is dead, everything is permitted. This is a famous expression of the common idea that moral right and wrong depend on divine commands or will (though it seems that what he should have said is

that if God is dead, then nothing is either permitted or forbidden). This claim is quite important. For if it and atheism are both true, then there can be no moral right or wrong. And if it and theism are true, then figuring out moral right and wrong becomes a matter of figuring out God's will. And as hard as moral reasoning can be, it might be even harder or impossible to figure out God's will.

Plato's *Euthyphro* provides a famous argument against the idea that the good or right depends on divine will. Our own David Brink draws upon *Euthyphro* in giving a fuller account of why ethics is autonomous, in the sense of not depending on any divine will. Is morality dependent on religion? Is religion dependent on an independent morality?

Read Brink's 'Autonomy of Ethics' by the second class day (Wednesday).

B) Is it even possible for people to be morally motivated? Many people think it is a truism that to be motivated by moral considerations involves being motivated by considerations beyond pursuing one's self-interest. However, many philosophers, economists and laypeople have thought that people are necessarily motivated by self-interest alone. If this 'psychological egoism' is true, then it appears impossible to be morally motivated. Is psychological egoism true, or plausible?

Read Feinberg's 'Psychological Egoism' by Friday, the third class day.

C) Aren't moral norms or truths relative to different cultures, and if so, isn't it wrong for one culture to try to impose its norms on another?

Read 'Subjectivism: First Thoughts' by Williams.

Part 2: Consequentialism, Alienation and the Demandingness of Morality

Everybody thinks consequences matter in morality. Some people think *only* consequences (ultimately) matter. These people are called consequentialists. Those who deny this are called non-consequentialists. Both consequentialism and nonconsequentialism about morality have many adherents. Both positions can be made to seem very plausible, even to the point of being obviously true. We will look at Mill's argument for classical Utilitarianism, which is the view that morality requires us to maximize the total [pleasure-minus-pain] in the world. We will then look at part of a famous argument against utilitarianism by Bernard Williams, the heart of which is that utilitarianism, and consequentialism generally, lead to a profound alienation and lack of integrity. Then we'll look at an argument by Peter Singer which helps to give us some idea of what we would be morally required to do if some form of consequentialism were true (and perhaps even if some forms of non-consequentialism were true). Finally, we'll look at a paper by Peter Railton that attempts to defend a consequentialist morality against charges that such a morality is too demanding and/or alienating.

Are consequences all that matter (morally)? If so, are we morally required to promote the best overall consequences, or at least promote them impartially?

Read in this order: 1) The Stanford Encyclopedia entry on well-being; 2) John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism, Chapters I, II and IV; 3) Nozick on Side-Constraints; 4) Bernard Williams 'Against Utilitarianism' Sections 3 – 5 (pp. 93 – 118 of the book); 5) Singer's 'Famine, Affluence and Morality'; 6) Railton's 'Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality'

Part 3: More Serious Threats to Moral Discourse

A) Are there any objective moral values?

As we saw in the Brink reading, moral discourse seems to have a deep commitment to objectivity. Objectively true moral judgments are supposed to be true no matter what any person's or group's beliefs or concerns happen to be. Yet many people think these truths should motivate anyone who is aware of them, no matter their actual motivations. Would the universe have to contain very strange properties in order for there to be objective moral truths?

Read in this order: Mackie, Chapter 1, sections 1, 2, 4, 8, 9; Dworkin 'Objectivity and Truth', Section IV onward; Finlay's 'Too Much Morality'. I will be providing important information in lecture about these readings that you will need to have before starting to read.

B) Can acting morally conflict with acting rationally?

Suppose there are objective truths about what morality requires. But also suppose that there are objective truths about what self-interest requires. What is the rational thing to do when they conflict? And suppose there are things you care about even more than self-interest or morality? Can your strongest reasons for action come apart from both self-interest **and** morality? And if so, does this threaten to undermine moral discourse?

Read Finlay's 'Too Much Morality'.

Part 4: The Science of Morality

One way to do science relevant to ethics is to investigate the ways that people think when they think about ethical or moral matters. This is science as applied to the domain of our ethical thinking and nothing more; it attempts to describe how we *do* think in a domain.

Another thing to do, or something more to do, is to take the results of such experiments and attempt to draw conclusions about how we *should* think about ethical matters. Some think this enterprise is simply confused. They hold that empirical investigations into what people actually do or think is simply irrelevant to what they ought to do or think. A weaker claim is that while such *descriptive* information could be relevant, any conclusions about how we ought to think or behave will still require irreducibly ethical, or more generally, *normative* premises. This is summarized in the slogan (from Hume), 'One cannot derive an ought from an is.'

What is the value of scientific research into morality? Can scientific investigation shed light on how we ought to think or behave? Has it already?

Read Haidt's The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology, then Greene's The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul