

## Philosophy 361: Ethics

Fall 2017

Lectures: MW 3:00-4:00 pm, 1640 Chemistry

Professor Peter Railton

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Office hours (tentative): Tuesdays 3:30-5:00 pm & by appointment

### General Overview

#### Course goals:

This course is intended to help students develop conceptual tools and analytical frameworks to enable them to explore, and seek their own answers to, some of the fundamental questions about how we should live our lives, as individuals and as societies. To accomplish this, we will:

- read and discuss texts written by some of the greatest minds in the history of Western thought, with a focus on fundamental issues about the nature and content of ethics;
- read and discuss a range of contemporary writings about ethics, examining questions of current relevance from both philosophical and political perspectives;
- discuss how to construct and evaluate arguments or justifications in ethics, seeking to sharpen skills at analysis and critical thought;
- create occasions for students to discuss controversial ethical issues together in a setting of mutual respect and shared inquiry;
- use in-class polling to help us gain a sense of the range of student thinking on moral problems, and to enable students to track the evolution of their ethical thinking over the course of the term;
- introduce students to some important recent research on the psychology, neuroscience, and anthropology of ethical thought, feelings, and action.

#### Course components:

**Lectures** are intended to provide an introduction to the main schools of thought in ethics—their assumptions, their main claims, their implications for practice, and their strengths and weaknesses. Lectures will present detailed analyses of philosophical arguments and case studies, providing material for students to discuss and use to challenge or develop their own moral thinking. Lectures will also involve in-class polling, and participation in this polling is an important part of the course.

**Sections** are intended to provide an opportunity for discussion of the issues raised in the lectures and the readings, giving you a chance to deepen your understanding of these issues, and to develop your own skills in philosophical argumentation and writing. To help promote these goals, there is one hour of section for every hour of lecture, and students are expected to attend sections. Participation in sections will be one component of student grades.

All students must be enrolled in one of the following sections, in addition to the lecture section (001):

**(002)** MW 5:00-6:00 pm – 1448 Mason Hall

**(003)** MW 4:00-5:00 pm – 5179 Angell Hall

**(004)** MW 5:00-6:00 pm – 2271 Angell Hall

**(005)** MW 4:00-5:00 pm – 2271 Angell Hall

Overrides are granted in accord with the Philosophy Department policy on overrides:

<https://lsa.umich.edu/philosophy/undergraduates/studying-philosophy/waitlist-policy.html> (Links to an external site.)

If you are on the wait list for a section, go to the first meeting of the section for which you are wait-listed, and inform the instructor that you are still actively seeking to enroll in the course.

### **Text:**

The following anthology has been ordered through the textbook ordering service, and is required for all students:

Russ Shafer-Landau, *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Wiley-Blackwell).

Please note that you should have the **Second Edition**. The textbook ordering system has been contacted, and copies have been placed on reserve at the University Reserves, Shapiro Library. If you are having any difficulty obtaining a copy, please inform Professor Railton.

All readings will be drawn from this text, or from materials distributed in class or posted on Canvas. Readings that are to be found in the Shafer-Landau anthology are

designated as **ET** in the schedule below, as are the pages from these excerpts that you are expected to read are noted.

Students are also expected to acquire and bring to class **iClickers** for participation in lectures and discussions, and for occasional, ungraded comprehension questions. iClickers can be purchased through Computer Showcase, and (I am told) can be resold back to the Showcase at the end of term. After purchasing, you must register your iClicker. If you are having any difficulty obtaining or registering an iClicker, please contact Professor Railton. Taking part regularly in the in-class iClicker sampling will be part of the course participation grade. Although we keep a record of days in which you have submitted an iClicker response, we do not consult this record to see which views you have expressed as individual students, which are treated as wholly confidential.

### **Schedule of Readings and Assignments:**

*Schedule is subject to change—all changes will be announced in class.*

#### **Part I: Introduction: Understanding our own moral thought**

**September 6** – *Case studies and moral intuitions.* No reading assigned.

**Sept 11** – *The fundamental questions of justification in ethics, and the distinctive concepts used in answering them.* “Some ‘Obvious Features’ of Morality” and “Three Families of Normative Concepts” (handouts, available on Canvas).

#### **Part II: Morality and a life worth living**

**September 13** – *The immoralist’s challenge.* Plato, *Republic*, Book III, excerpt (**ET** 132-137).

**Sept 18** – *Relating morality to religion.* Plato, *Euthyphro*, excerpt (**ET** 218-219).

**Sept 20** – *Divine command and natural law.* Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Questions 90 (Introduction and First Article), 91, 93, and 94, excerpts (available on Canvas)

**Sept 25** – *Morality and the aim of life.* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, excerpt (ET 615-621).

**Sept 27** – *Virtue as a life proper for humans.* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, excerpt (ET 621-629).

**October 2** – *Contemporary virtue theory.* Martha Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach”, excerpt (ET 630-644).

**Oct 4** – *From virtue theory to consequentialism.* John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, two excerpts (ET 417-422 and 258-263).

**October 9 – First Short Paper Due** (see description, below). Reading: *The critique of consequentialism—the importance of agency.* Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, excerpt (ET 264-265).

**Oct 11** - *The critique of consequentialism—the importance of moral desert.* W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, excerpt (ET 299-302).

**Oct 16** – Fall Study Break.

**Oct 18** – *The critique of consequentialism—means and ends.* Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem”, excerpt (ET 543-551).

**October 23 – Midterm Examination.** This examination is meant to test comprehension. The examination will take place during the normal class period and in our regular classroom. A study guide will be distributed in advance, and there will be a review session scheduled beforehand.

### **Part III: A rational basis for rightness?**

**October 25** – *Moral rightness and the good will.* Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, excerpt (ET 485-490).

**Oct 31** – *The categorical imperative as an objective criterion of practical rationality.* Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, excerpt (ET 490-498).

**November 1** – *Morality as rational cooperation.* Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, excerpt (ET 558-570).

**Nov 6** – *Morality as rational cooperation.* Review Hobbes reading from November 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Nov 8** – *Justice as a hypothetical contract.* John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, excerpt (ET 581-592).

**Nov 13** - *Justice as a hypothetical contract: Rawlsian or Utilitarian?* Review Rawls reading from November 8th.

#### **Part IV: Toward a universal morality?**

**November 15** – *Morality as grounded in duties of relations.* W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Excerpt (ET 756-762).

**Nov 20** – *Embedding relation-based thought within universalism.* R.M. Hare, “What is Wrong with Slavery?”, excerpt (ET 458-465).

**Nov 22** – *Beyond the relational: Utilitarian and Kantian.* Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, (ET 466-473) and Onora O’Neill, “Kantian Approaches to Some Famine Problems”, excerpt (ET 510-520).

**Nov 27** – *Widening the circle beyond autonomous agents.* Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, (ET 361-371).

**November 29** – **Second Short Paper due** (see description, below). Reading: *A limit to universalism?—Dealing with cultural difference.* Gilbert Harman, “Moral Relativism Defended”, excerpt (ET 35-43).

**December 4** – *A limit to universalism?—Special relations and an ethic of care.* Nell Noddings, “An Ethic of Caring”, excerpt (ET 699-712).

#### **Part V: The status of morality**

**December 6** – *A debunking account of the origin and function of morality.* Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Preface and First Essay (available on Canvas).

**Dec 11** – *A vindictory account of the origin and function of morality.* David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Conclusion of Book III (available on Canvas).

**December 18 (Monday, 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm) – Final Examination:** Questions will concern material from the whole of the course, though with primary emphasis on post-Midterm material. A review sheet will be distributed, which is to be used in conjunction with the review sheet from the Midterm. A review session will be scheduled in advance.

**Information concerning short papers.** All students will be asked to write two short (5-7 pp.) papers. The purpose of the short papers is to give you a chance to develop your own moral thinking. Therefore, while suggested topics will be distributed in advance, you are also encouraged to develop your own topic in consultation with your section instructor. A more detailed description of the expectations for a short paper will be posted on Canvas.

**Information concerning grading.** *Attendance at both lectures and sections is considered a course requirement.* You will receive credit for participating in the iClicker

sampling. Your papers and exams will be graded by your section instructor. Students must complete all assignments and both examinations, and otherwise will not receive a passing grade in the course.

The total weight in grading will be divided as follows:

- Midterm Examination, 20%
- Final Examination, 25%
- First Short Paper, 20%
- Second Short Paper, 25%
- Class participation (Lecture and Discussion), 10%

All work submitted in the course is expected to be your own. This includes both papers and examinations, and excludes the use of unauthorized material during exams, using or copying another student's work, and any other form of academic misrepresentation. For a list of actions that constitute misconduct and possible sanctions for those actions, please see the Code of Conduct at <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/> (Links to an external site.). Proper procedures for the citation of sources will be discussed at the time of the paper assignments.

Accommodation will be made in lectures, sections, and examinations to ensure accessibility for all students. Students who will be requesting accommodation should make this known to their instructor(s) as early in the term as possible, and contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD; 734-763-3000; <http://ssd.umich.edu> (Links to an external site.)) to help determine appropriate academic accommodations and to secure proper documentation to present to us. Any information you provide SSD is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

In ethics we explore the most fundamental questions about how we should act. Mutual respect is essential to a free and open dialogue in which all voices can be heard. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Finally, your health, wellbeing, and safety are of paramount concern to us, and to the University of Michigan. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, unable to cope, at risk of harm, or in need of advice and support, services are available. For help, contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at (734) 764-8312 and <https://caps.umich.edu/> (Links to an external site.) during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult University Health

Service (UHS) at (734) 764-8320 and <https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs> (Links to an external site.). For alcohol or drug concerns, see [www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources](http://www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources) (Links to an external site.). For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: <http://umich.edu/~mhealth/> (Links to an external site.).