

**Course Syllabus**  
**Ethics (Honors)**  
**PHIL 330H, Spring 2014**

**Instructor:** Dr. Matt Zwolinski  
**Office Hours:** 9:15 – 11:45 (Tues/Thurs)  
**Office:** F167A  
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**Core Requirements:** This course fulfills the Core Curriculum requirement in Ethics

**Required Books:**

- 1) Mark Timmons, *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Rowman and Littlefield, 2013)
- 2) Mark Timmons, *Conduct and Character: Readings in Moral Theory*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Wadsworth, 2012)

**Content:**

How should you live your life? What goals are worth striving for, and what moral constraints are there on the ways we can pursue those goals? Moral theories attempt to give us answers to these questions. This course will explore some of their answers.

The plan of study is organized around eight different moral theories: egoism, divine command theory, moral relativism, natural law theory, utilitarianism, Kantianism, pluralism, and virtue ethics. These theories represent some of the most thoughtful and influential attempts in the history of Western philosophical thought to think about morality in a systematic way. For the most part, we will be learning about these theories straight from the source, just as others have learned about them for hundreds of years before you. This means the readings will be considerably more difficult than your standard college textbook. But they will also, I believe, be considerably more rewarding.

In this course, you will learn both philosophic content and philosophic methodology. In terms of content, there are four themes that will run throughout the course. These aren't the only issues we will discuss, but they are some of the most persistent and important:

- 1) **Reason and morality** – What does it mean to be rational? Is it always rational to comply with morality's requirements?
- 2) **Happiness and morality** – What is happiness? Is making myself or others happy an important part of what morality requires me to do?
- 3) **The objectivity/subjectivity of morality** – Does morality demand the same thing from all persons at all times, or does it vary from person to person (or culture to culture)?
- 4) **Human nature and morality** – What sort of theory of human nature do different theories of morality presuppose?

Apart from the content, you will also learn various skills in philosophic methodology in this course.

- First, you will learn how to **read difficult philosophic texts**. The primary sources we will cover in this course can be trying. To help you with this, we will spend most of our class periods with the text close at hand, going over it line-by-line in many cases.
- Second, you will learn the skills of **conceptual analysis and philosophic argumentation**. Much of our time will be spent getting clear about subtle distinctions between closely related concepts (justice, fairness, desert, etc.), and you will be expected both to be able to analyze the arguments of other philosophers, and to forge new arguments of your own. These are skills that will serve you well in life, from reading the op-ed page of your newspaper to convincing others to see your point of view.

- Finally, you will learn how to write. Specifically, you will learn how to fairly and accurately describe the moral arguments of philosophers with whom you might disagree, and evaluate those arguments in a thorough and rigorous way. Again, this is a skill that will serve you well not only in this course, but in almost any endeavor you take on in life (from writing a cover letter to a resume, to getting yourself out of a parking ticket!).

As with any course on ethics, however, the ultimate goal of this course is to help you lead more thoughtful, reflective and worthwhile lives. The questions we study are all ones I find theoretically interesting, but I think the even greater value lies in their practical interest. These are real-world issues, and some of the most important and perennial ones around. Take it personally!

### Course Requirements:

Philosophical readings are dense and difficult. It will probably take longer than you expect to read them once, and it will probably be necessary to re-read most pieces at least once in order to come to an adequate understanding of the material. You should expect to spend at least **six hours per week** outside of class time reading and re-reading the material. If you do this, you will have a much easier time with the quizzes, and with the short writing assignments, which should probably take up at least an additional **five to six hours each** in preparation time.

The requirements set out below are subject to revision at the instructor's discretion.

- **Quizzes** – I will give 5-10 **unannounced, multiple-choice quizzes** over the course of the semester. The purpose of these quizzes is to test your completion and comprehension of the day's reading assignment, and to encourage attendance at class. Three things to note about them:
  - First, quizzes are given at the very beginning of class. You will not be allowed extra time to take them if you are late, and **you will not be allowed to make them up** if you miss them. So it is to your advantage to show up and be seated on time every day.
  - Second, you will receive a zero for any quiz that you miss, for any reason. However, at the end of the semester, I will **drop your two lowest quiz scores**. So missing a quiz will not destroy your grade. But you will have a better chance of excelling in the course if you show up regularly.
  - Finally, these quizzes are very difficult, so it is vital that you read the material carefully and in advance of class. Read the material actively, with pen (or computer) in hand to take notes. And feel free – encouraged, even – to come to office hours any time to discuss any difficulties you might be having with the readings or the quizzes.
- **Exams:** You will have three in-class exams – two mid-terms and a final. Each exam will consist of multiple-choice questions (drawn from your earlier quizzes), short-answer questions, and possibly a longer essay. The final exam will be cumulative, but will emphasize material covered in the last third of the course. ***The midterm and final exams must be taken at the date and time at which they are scheduled on this syllabus. No exceptions will be made except for cases of documented medical emergencies. Please look at the dates now and check for conflicts.***
- **Papers:** I will assign two short papers over the course of the semester. Each of them will be **no less than two and no more than three pages** (typed, double-spaced, 1 inch margins and normal fonts) in length. I will assign a topic for these papers which will involve two tasks: 1) **reconstructing an argument** or arguments from one or more of the readings we have covered in class, and 2) providing an **original critical evaluation** of that/those argument(s). These papers are short not to make life easy for you but in order to force you to think carefully about what is essential to an argument and what is not. I will grade these papers with an eye to *detail* and *conceptual rigor*. Expect to be challenged.
  - **Late papers:** Papers are due on Turnitin.com (see below) at the beginning of the class period on the day indicated on the schedule below. **Late papers will be penalized 5 percentage points per day**, without exception.

- **Participation** – Philosophy is best learned through active conversation with others. It is therefore important that you be a regular participant in classroom discussions. Ideally, you will be sufficiently engaged with the material to contribute to these discussions spontaneously and voluntarily. As an additional stimulus, however, I will engage in regular Socratic questioning of students – typically one lucky student per class period. This process will involve me asking you questions about both what the readings said and what you think about them. These questions will become increasingly difficult as the process continues, but the point is not for you to get the answers “right,” so don’t be afraid to stumble. The point is for you to demonstrate preparation and thoughtfulness, and to help you and your fellow students think through some very difficult issues. To the extent that you do this, you will receive full credit for this portion of your grade. Well thought-out contributions to the website will also count toward your participation grade.

### Your Grade

Each activity in this class is worth a certain number of points. Your grade will be determined based on a straight (un-curved) analysis of percentage of points earned vs. total points.

Quizzes: 5-10 @ 5 points each	25-50
Exams 1 & 2 @ 30 points each	60
Final Exam	50
Short Papers: 2 @ 20 points each	40
Participation	10
Total Points:	185-210

A+	97 - 100%
A	93 - 96.9
A-	90 - 92.9
B+	87 - 89.9
B	83 - 86.9
B-	80 - 82.9
C+	77 - 79.9
C	73 - 76.9
C-	70 - 72.9
D+	67 - 67.9
D	63 - 66.9
D-	60 - 62.9
F	59.9 or below

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course...

- Students should be able to describe the main tenets of the major ethical theories (e.g. Utilitarianism, Kantianism) in essay form.
- Students should be able to identify specific moral problems and apply these theories to them.

## **A Note About Respect**

This is a course in ethics, and one of the fundamental ethical values we will study is *respect*. I will treat you with respect in this course, and expect you to do the same for me and for your fellow students. What this means in practice is (at a minimum):

*For me:*

- I will arrive on time and prepared for each class meeting scheduled on the syllabus.
- I will take student questions seriously and attempt to address them as helpfully as I can within the constraints of class time.
- I will keep my scheduled office hours, or provide advance notice if this is not possible.
- I will return written assignments within a reasonable time and provide you with ample constructive criticism and an adequate explanation of your grade.
- I will treat you as an adult. Part of what this means is taking your philosophical opinions seriously. But taking your views seriously does not mean treating you with kid gloves. It means that I will assume that you have put some thought into your position and that I will hold you accountable for it, and challenge you when appropriate. I expect the same from you.
- I will respect your time and not give you “busy work.”

*For you:*

- You will respect the opinions of your classmates, and respond to them with seriousness, courtesy, and charity.
- You will show up to class on time.
- You will read the material assigned for class prior to the meeting at which we are scheduled to discuss it.
- You will take responsibility for turning showing up to scheduled exams.
- You will respect my time and the time of your fellow students by helping to make our time together as productive and conducive to learning as possible.

## **Integrity**

Doing your own work is part of what it means to have respect for me, for your fellow students, and for yourself.

As above, my treating you with respect involves treating you like an adult. As an adult, you are responsible for knowing the University’s regulations concerning Academic Integrity. **“I didn’t know it was cheating” is not an excuse.** Any violation of the Code of Academic Integrity is grounds for failure from the class in addition to any further penalties deemed appropriate by the Academic Integrity Committee.

USD subscribes to a service called Turnitin.com. Turnitin.com is a web-based application that compares the content of submitted papers to the Turnitin.com database and checks for textual similarities. All required papers for this course may be subject to submission to Turnitin.com for textual similarity review and to verify originality. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting textual similarities and verifying originality. Each student is responsible for submitting his or her papers in such a way that no identifying information about the student is included. A student may not have anyone else submit papers on the student’s behalf to Turnitin.com. A student may request in writing that his or her papers not be submitted to Turnitin.com. However, if a student chooses this option, the student may be required to provide documentation in a form required by the faculty member to substantiate that the papers are the student’s original work.



## Moral Relativism

- 7 Feb 18 Moral Relativism Defended  
**Required Reading:** - CC, chapter 3, pp. 55-61, "A Defense of Ethical Relativism"  
- MT, chapter 3, pp. 41-49, "Moral Relativism"
- 8 Feb 20 Moral Relativism Criticized  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 3, pp. 49-67, "Moral Relativism," continued
- 9 Feb 25 **First Midterm Exam**

## Natural Law Theory

- 10 Feb 27 Aquinas on Natural Law  
**Required Reading:** - CC, chapter 4, pp. 69-78, "Treatise on Law"
- 11 Mar 4 Timmons on Natural Law  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 4, pp. 71-86
- 12 Mar 6 Timmons on Natural Law, continued  
*First writing assignment due*  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 4, pp. 86-104

*No classes Mar 11 – 13 (Spring Break)*

## Classical Utilitarianism

- 13 Mar 18 Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism  
**Required Reading:** - CC, chapter 5, pp. 109-115, "The Principle of Utility"  
- MT, chapter 5, pp. 111-121
- 14 Mar 20 John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism  
**Required Reading:** - CC, chapter 5, pp. 115-121  
- MT, chapter 5, pp. 121-126

## From Classical to Contemporary Utilitarianism

- 15 Mar 25 Objections to Utilitarianism  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 5 and 6, pp. 130-154
- 16 Mar 27 Act and Rule Utilitarianism  
**Required Reading:** - CC, chapter 5, pp. 124-131, "Utilitarianism: Act or Rule?"  
- MT, chapter 6, pp. 154-161
- 17 Apr 1 Hedonism  
**Required Reading:** - CC, chapter 5, pp. 122-124  
- MT, chapter 6, pp. 161-172
- 18 Apr 3 **Second Midterm Exam**

## **Kant's Moral Theory**

- 19 Apr 8 The Moral Law and the Autonomy of the Will  
**Required Reading:** - CC, chapter 6, pp. 140-152, "The Moral Law and the Autonomy of the Will"
- 20 Apr 10 Kant on Duty and Practical Reason  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 8, pp. 205-218
- 21 Apr 15 Kant's Theories of Right Conduct and Value  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 8, pp. 218-233

*No class April 17<sup>th</sup> (Easter Break)*

- 22 Apr 22 Evaluating Kant's Theory  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 6, pp. 233-240

## **Moral Pluralism**

- 23 Apr 24 W.D. Ross's Moral Pluralism  
**Required Reading:** - CC, chapter 10, pp. 312-317, "What Makes Right Acts Right?"
- 24 Apr 29 Ross's Theory of Prima Facie Duties  
*Second writing assignment due*  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 9, pp. 245-255
- 25 May 1 Evaluating Moral Pluralism  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 9, pp. 255-265

## **Virtue Ethics and the Ethics of Care**

- 26 May 6 Aristotle on Virtue and Character  
**Required Reading:** - CC, chapter 8, pp. 232-242, "Virtue and Character"
- 27 May 8 Virtue Ethics and the Ethics of Care  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 10, pp. 269-288
- 28 May 13th Evaluating Virtue Ethics  
**Required Reading:** - MT, chapter 10, p. 289-299

**Final Exam** – Tuesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 8:00 – 10:00 AM