

PHIL. 1100: Ethics

Fall, 2008

Class Meets: TR 12:30 - 1:45, Hellems 229
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Office Hours: TR 1:50 - 3:25
Hellems 266

What Is This Course About?

This course is an introduction to ethics, as studied in contemporary academic philosophy. The course will have 4 units, addressing the following sorts of questions:

First unit: Metaethics. Do evaluative facts exist? Are they objective? How do we know about them?

Second unit: Ethical Theories. Do the ends justify the means? What rights do we have, and why? Are rights absolute?

Third unit: Applied Ethics. Do fetuses have rights? Do animals have rights? Are we obligated to feed the poor?

Fourth unit: Proofs & Paradoxes. Can we wrong future generations? How many people should there be? Is equality intrinsically valuable?

What will students learn from the course? Three kinds of things: a) you may (hopefully) learn some important ethical truths; b) you will receive a conceptual framework for thinking about ethical questions, making you more sensitive to these questions; c) most importantly, you will become more familiar with how philosophers reason carefully and logically about ethical questions, as opposed to relying on emotions, authority, or tradition.

Texts

Required: A collection of required readings will be distributed on the first day of class.

Recommended: *Ethical Intuitionism*, by Michael Huemer, is available at the university book store. This provides optional reading material for motivated students.

Who Should Take This Class?

There's only one good reason to take this class. That is because you want to learn more about good and bad, right and wrong. If you don't care about that, don't take the class.

Warnings and requests: Don't take the class if you are unable to regularly make it here on time. Be forewarned that the objective nature of my tests means that if you don't do the readings and come to class, you will bomb the tests. Lastly, if you love political correctness, if you need someone to pump up your self-esteem, or if you think there's no truth and all beliefs are equally good, then you shouldn't take a class from me.

The benefit of the course is that you will learn to think more critically and rationally about value questions, and perhaps even become more ethical.

General Guidelines

1. To contact me: send email to the address listed above, and I will probably respond the same day. Or call between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. Leave a message, since I screen my calls.

2. Come to my office to talk about philosophy, or play chess. If you have any questions, I will do my best to answer them, but you needn't have a specific question to come.
3. During class, please do not hesitate to comment on or ask about anything we discuss. Feel free to say whatever you think (that has to do with philosophy). Don't be afraid to contradict something that's been said, and don't be afraid of asking a stupid question. It is debate and asking "stupid" questions that helps us learn most.
4. The course web page <<http://spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/>> includes information about the class, including this syllabus and some lecture notes. There is also some philosophical entertainment.

Course Requirements & Grading

- *Unit Tests (60% of final grade):*

There will be four in-class tests. See schedule below for dates. 20 questions, multiple choice & short answer. They will be objective questions about what was said in the readings and in class.

- *Short Papers (30%):*

You'll write four short papers. Guidelines:

- < *Length:* 2-4 pages. Don't play with margins, font size, etc., to make it look longer. If you can't fill two pages, you need to think more. Seriously.
- < *Due Dates:* are written on the schedule below. Keep track of them; don't expect me to remind you.
- < *Late papers:* will lose 20% credit. ; If you do this repeatedly, it will have a *serious* impact on your grade. Papers more than a week late won't be accepted at all! ; ;
- < *If you can't come to class:* You may send it by email. Must be *received before 10 a.m.* on the due date. Acceptable formats: rtf, txt, pdf, or pasted into an email message. If you send something that I can't read, then your paper will be late!
- < *Grading:* Papers will be graded on a scale of 1-5, 5 being best. The typical grade will be **4** (a B-), which you will receive for basically answering the question and following these guidelines. 5 is for unusually insightful or impressive papers. 3 is for people who didn't answer the question, turned it in late, wrote less than a page, or otherwise didn't follow instructions. If you violate instructions in multiple ways, you can get below 3.
- < *Writing Guide:* I have posted a guide to writing philosophy papers at <<http://spot.colorado.edu/~huemer/writing.htm>>. If you want your papers to be good, read that. All papers should conform to paragraph 29 in the guide.
- < *Plagiarism:* Don't give me something written by someone else. If you use ideas or information from someone else, cite the source (although no outside information should be needed for these papers). If you use someone else's words, they must be in quotation marks or set off, and the source must be cited. If you plagiarize a paper, you'll get an F in the *entire course*, and be reported to the dean. ; ; ; If you are unsure what plagiarism is, see <<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>>.
- < *Topics:* Each paper should answer one of the following questions. Identify the question you are answering at the top of the page. Don't answer the same question more than once (except for #1 and #2, which you may answer more than once, using different readings). Questions:
 1. Pick one of the readings for this unit, and explain what is wrong with it.
 2. Pick one of the reading for this unit, and explain what is good or right about it.
 3. What are your most important values? Discuss the nature of these values and why they are

so important.

4. Discuss an example of unethical behavior from your own life or that of someone you know. Discuss why the person did it, and why it was unethical.
 5. The University of Colorado has an “ideals and values” core requirement, which this class satisfies. Is this requirement a good idea?
 6. If you taught an ethics class, what would you cover in it? Explain why.
 7. Do you believe in objective values? Why or why not? (Read at least one of the articles from unit 1 before answering this.)
 8. Is it possible to prove ethical truths? If yes, give an example. If no, why not?
 9. Suppose that you or someone you are close to (e.g., girlfriend, sister) gets pregnant, and you (or they) do not want a baby at this time. Would you (advise them to) have an abortion? (Read one of the articles about abortion before answering.)
 10. Do you use animal products, such as meat, leather, etc.? Explain why/why not. (Read one of the articles about animals before answering.)
 11. Do you donate to charity? Why or why not? (Read one of the articles about feeding the poor before answering.)
 12. Do you think it’s good to create more people? (Read Parfit on the “Repugnant Conclusion” before answering.)
 13. If you want to write about something not listed here, ask the professor about it.
- < *Rewriting Papers:* After your paper has been handed back, if you don’t like your grade, you may revise the paper and resubmit it. You have to hand in the revised version by the due date indicated in italics on the schedule below (see where it says “*Rewrite #1 due*”, etc.). By doing this, you can earn up to 1 additional point (20%) on your paper. However, the paper must be *significantly better* to receive an increase. This will typically involve (i) correcting all errors identified by the grader on the paper, and (ii) adding significant new material that further explains, justifies, or defends what you said the first time. Again, see the Writing Guide mentioned above for how to make a paper good.

• *Participation (10%):*

This is based on the professor’s subjective sense of how well you contributed to class discussion, and how regularly you attended class.

Note about grades: Grades are based on observable performance, rather than effort or virtue. Please do not tell me you should get a higher grade because you tried really hard, or because you really need it. Also, do not obsess about your grade. After you graduate, no one will ever look at your grades again. You should come here to increase your understanding, not to get a grade.

Schedule

This shows what you should read for the class discussion on each day. Also note the **test dates** and **due dates**. All readings are indicated by the author's last name. Some days have *more than one* assigned reading.

Unit 1 Meta-Ethics		
T, Aug 26	Introduction, course requirements, the subject of ethics.	
R, Aug 28	Subjectivism	Benedict, "Anthropology and the Abnormal." Optional: Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , pp. 226-8.
T, Sept 2	Non-cognitivism	Ayer, "Critique of Ethics & Theology." Optional: Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , pp. 225-6.
R, Sept 4	Nihilism Paper 1 due.	Mackie, "Refutation of Morals." Optional: Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , p. 230.
T, Sept 9	Naturalism	Smith, "Morality's Roots in Life." Optional: Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , pp. 228-30.
R, Sept 11	Intuitionism	Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , pp. 99-107. Optional: Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , pp. 231-5.
T, Sept 16	More on intuitionism <i>Rewrite #1 due</i>	Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , pp. 236-40, 248-50. Optional: Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , pp. 240-8, 250-3.
R, Sept 18	Test #1.	
Unit 2 Ethical Theories		
T, Sept 23	Utilitarianism	Smart, "Outline of a System...", pp. 30-7, 27.
R, Sept 25	Objections to utilitarianism	McCloskey, "Note on Utilitarian Punishment." Nozick, "The Experience Machine." Smart, "Outline...", pp. 67-73.
T, Sept 30	Absolute deontology Paper 2 due.	O'Neill, "Moral Perplexities of Famine Relief." Nozick, "Moral Constraints & Moral Goals."
R, Oct 2	Objections to absolutism	Friedman, "Problems."
T, Oct 7	Moderate deontology	Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right."
R, Oct 9	Objections to moderate deontology <i>Rewrite #2 due</i>	Huemer, "Paradox for Weak Deontology," pp. 1-11, 19-20. Optional: pp. 11-19.
T, Oct 14	Test #2.	

Unit 3 Applied Ethics		
R, Oct 16	Abortion & rights	Tooley, "Abortion and Infanticide."
T, Oct 21	Against abortion	Marquis, "Why Abortion Is Immoral."
R, Oct 23	For abortion	Thomson, "Defense of Abortion."
T, Oct 28	Animal liberation Paper 3 due.	Singer, "Equality for Animals," 55-65, 69-72. Optional: pp. 65-9.
R, Oct 30	Against animal rights	Machan, "Do Animals Have Rights?"
T, Nov 4	More on animal rights	Singer, "Equality for Animals," pp. 72-8.
R, Nov 6	Feed the poor	Singer, "Rich and Poor."
T, Nov 11	Don't feed the poor <i>Rewrite #3 due</i>	Hardin, "Case Against Helping the Poor."
R, Nov 13	Test #3	
Unit 4 Proofs & Paradoxes		
T, Nov 18	The non-identity problem	Parfit, "Non-Identity Problem," pp. 351-64.
R, Nov 20	More non-identity problem	Parfit, "Non-Identity Problem," pp. 364-78.
T, Nov 25	<i>No Class - Fall Break</i>	
R, Nov 27	<i>No Class - Fall Break</i>	
T, Dec 2	The repugnant conclusion Paper 4 due.	Parfit, "Repugnant Conclusion."
R, Dec 4	More repugnant conclusion	none
T, Dec 9	Equality	Nagel, "Equality."
R, Dec 11	Against equality <i>Rewrite #4 due</i>	Huemer, "Against Priority..."
Sat, Dec 13, 9:00 am	Test #4	

Please don't kill me!

