

Philosophy 160: Introduction to Ethics

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Spring 2009

Instructor: Lowell Friesen
Office: 385 Bartlett Hall
Office Hour: Tuesday 1:00–2:00 (or by appointment)
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1 Course Description

This introduction to ethics will begin with a brief examination of the question, Is morality absolute, or is it, in some sense, relative? We will then turn our attention to the philosophers who shaped western thought about ethics, making sure to read them in their own words (or in translation). Finally, we will take some time to engage some ethical issues that are of particular contemporary significance. Our goals in this course will be to make some progress toward forming our own considered views on important ethical and meta-ethical questions and to learn how to think carefully and systematically about them.

2 Course Text(s)

Cahn, Steven M. *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Required readings that are not in the course text will *not* be distributed in class. Instead, they will be made available in electronic format (.pdf) via the course website (see below). It is your responsibility to gain access to them and to make your own copies of them.

3 Course Website

<https://udrive.oit.umass.edu/phil160-lfriesen/website/>

Important course information, notices, assignments, handouts, readings, etc. will all be posted on the course website. To access to the course website, enter the above url into your web browser. When prompted for a username and password, enter your username and password from you OIT account. This should gain you access to the website. If you have problems, let me know and I will try to help.

4 Course Outline

Readings marked '(CW)' can be found on the course website. All other readings can be found in the course textbook.

Preliminaries

1. Introduction

Frankena, "Morality and Moral Philosophy"

2. Evaluating Theories and Arguments

Foundations

3. Relativism and Subjectivism

Regan, "How Not to Answer Moral Questions"

Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

Rachels, "Subjectivism in Ethics" (CW)

4. Founding Ethics on God's Command

Plato, *Euthyphro* (CW)

Schafer-Landau, "Does Ethical Objectivity Require God?" (CW)

Test 1: Tuesday, February 17th

Historical Survey

5. Aristotle

Aristotle, "The Nature of Virtue"

Copleston, "Aristotle's Ethics" (CW)

6. Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles & Summa Theologica* (CW)

Copleston, "St. Thomas Aquinas—IX: Moral Theory" (CW)

7. Thomas Hobbes

Hobbes, "The Social Contract"

8. David Hume

Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (CW)

Test 2: Thursday, March 12th

9. Immanuel Kant

Kant, "The Categorical Imperative"

O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics"

10. John Stuart Mill

Mill, “Utilitarianism”
Pojman, “Strengths and Weaknesses of Utilitarianism”

11. John Rawls

Rawls, “A Theory of Justice”

Test 3: Tuesday, April 14th

Current Ethical Concerns

12. Abortion

Thomson, “A Defence of Abortion”
Warren, “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion”
Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”

13. Affluence and Poverty

Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”
Wolff, “Moral Saints”

14. Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Disparities

Cahn, “Two Concepts of Affirmative Action”
Thomas, “What Good Am I?”

Test 4: May 15th at 1:30PM in 61 Bartlett Hall

5 Course Evaluation

Your grade will be determined by a combination of 4 in-class tests and (approximately) 10 short written assignments. At the end of the semester, I will drop your worst test. Your best 3 tests will each be worth 25% of your grade, and the remaining 25% of your grade will be determined by the written assignments. The first three tests will be written during regularly scheduled class time. The last test will be scheduled during the week of final exams. The assignments will be due at a rate of about 1 per week—excluding weeks in which there is an in-class test scheduled—and will be posted on the course website at least a week in advance of their respective due dates.

6 Late Assignments and Missed Exams

Late assignments will, in general, not be accepted, and missed tests will, in general, not be rescheduled. If you know that you will be away on the day a homework assignment is due, it is your responsibility to contact me in advance of the due date to make alternate arrangements for the submission of your assignment. If you have a *legitimate* reason to be granted an extension on an assignment or to have a test rescheduled, I will do my best to accommodate you. However, it is your responsibility to contact me in advance. Decisions regarding extensions and reschedulings will be made on a case by case basis, and I reserve the right to deny a request for an extension or rescheduling.

7 Plagiarism and Cheating

Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses and will be dealt with severely. I refer you to the universitys policy on academic honesty:

http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty