

PHIL 13: Introduction to Ethics
Spring 2024; MWF 12-12:50pm; Mandeville B-202
Professor David O. Brink

- **Office: RWAC 0480**
- **Office Hours: MW 10-11am and by appointment**
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TAs:

- **Aaron Chipp-Miller; RWAC 0432; OH: MW 10:45am-11:45am; achippmi@ucsd.edu**
- **Tyler Farmer; RWAC 0433; OH: TBD; tfarmer@ucsd.edu**
- **Min Heo; RWAC 0461/0434; OH: M 2:15-3:15pm, W 1:15-2:15pm; miheo@ucsd.edu**

Sections:

1. **M 10-10:50am; H&SS 1315; Min Heo**
2. **M 1-1:50pm; H&SS 1305; Min Heo**
3. **W 4-4:50pm; Center 203; Aaron Chipp-Miller**
4. **M 3-3:50pm; H&SS 1305; Aaron Chipp-Miller**
5. **F 1-1:50pm; H&SS 1315; Tyler Farmer**
6. **F 2-2:50pm; H&SS 2150; Tyler Farmer**

CONTENT

Normative ethics concerns issues within ethics about what is morally good or right. Some normative issues are *theoretical* — e.g. the nature of the personal good, the grounds of duty, the nature and grounds of rights and justice. Other normative issues are more *applied* — e.g. whether the death penalty is ever permissible, whether it is permissible to regulate hate speech, what constitutes informed consent for risky medical procedures.

Whereas normative ethics studies first-order questions *within* morality, *metaethics* studies second-order issues *about* morality — e.g. whether moral judgments assert facts or express feelings or desires, whether there are right answers to ethical questions, whether morality requires a religious foundation, whether altruistic demands are psychologically realistic, and whether happiness is a purely subjective matter.

This course is an introduction to ethics that will cover selected issues in metaethics and normative ethics, at both theoretical and applied levels. Though we will touch on all three kinds of issues, we will focus on normative ethical theory about the good and the right. We will examine different theoretical approaches to understanding what makes a life good and what grounds the obligations we have.

Before studying rival conceptions of value and obligation, however, we need to consider some common challenges to the possibility of doing secular moral theory. These are metaethical issues. Moral theorizing seems to presuppose the existence of right answers to moral questions, but that assumption may seem hard to square with the importance of tolerance of diverse moral codes. Even if we believe that there are moral truths, it may seem hard to recognize the autonomy of ethics. Can we make sense of moral requirements independently of God's commands? Plato (427-347 BCE) first raised these issues in his dialogue the *Euthyphro*. If moral requirements depend on God's will, we face a dilemma. Atheism or agnosticism would seem to imply moral skepticism. But even if theism is true, this would seem to reduce moral deliberation to ascertaining God's will. Is autonomous ethics possible? Moral theory is under threat from another quarter if, as some people maintain, all human action is at bottom self-interested, for that would appear to threaten altruistic demands and concern with the common good. Finally, there seems to be little point in entertaining rival conceptions of what makes a life good if, as some believe, the good is essentially a subjective matter on which the individual's own judgment must be authoritative. These are some potential obstacles to taking moral theory seriously that we will address first.

Having explored some of these metaethical issues, we will turn our attention to normative ethics, especially moral theory. Our discussion will focus on two influential traditions — *utilitarian* and *deontological* ethics. The utilitarian explains duty in terms of doing things that have good consequences. By contrast, the deontologist thinks that the right (duty) is independent of what is good and sometimes constrains our pursuit of good consequences. In discussing utilitarianism and deontology, we will start

by focusing on influential historical statements of these views in the writings of John Stuart Mill (1806-73) — specifically, his *Utilitarianism* (1861) and *On Liberty* (1859) — and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) — specifically his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). These are key texts in the utilitarian and deontological traditions. While we will try to understand these texts in their own terms, we will also try to understand and assess those traditions in ways that take us beyond their texts and require reformulating their ideas in modern idiom.

Utilitarianism assesses governmental actions, institutions, and policies by the value of their consequences for human welfare or happiness. In assessing the consequences of alternatives, the utilitarian counts everyone's welfare and counts it equally. The utilitarian concludes that actions, institutions, and policies must promote — in one formulation, maximize — human welfare or happiness.

Though utilitarianism was a progressive doctrine historically, challenging traditional institutions of class and privilege in the nineteenth century, nowadays it strikes some people as morally problematic. In requiring us to do what is best for all, utilitarianism may seem *overly demanding*, requiring agents to sacrifice their personal concerns for the greater good. Moreover, maximizing total welfare doesn't seem to allow the utilitarian to attach any intrinsic significance to the way in which welfare is *distributed* or to *individual rights* that many think trump the pursuit of collective goals. This rights-based criticism of utilitarianism is reflected in modern criticisms of utilitarianism by John Rawls (1921-2002) and Robert Nozick (1938-2002). However, Mill thinks that utilitarianism can answer these challenges. In particular, he thinks that rights and justice have utilitarian foundations. This claim is defended at the end of *Utilitarianism* and at greater length in *On Liberty*, where he defends individual rights to liberty, apparently claiming that liberty may only be restricted to prevent harm to others, not for paternalistic or moralistic purposes or for preventing offense.

In assessing Mill's utilitarian commitments, we will focus on how demanding utilitarianism is by looking at the implications of utilitarianism for our duties of beneficence (e.g. famine relief). Peter Singer (1946-) has argued on utilitarian grounds that even the moderately well off have extensive duties of aid to those who are less well-off. Should we accept this utilitarian understanding of our duties to others? We will also try to assess whether Mill can provide a plausible utilitarian foundation for individual rights and social justice.

The deontological tradition recognizes duties and rights that are independent of utility and sometimes constrain the pursuit of good consequences. This tradition is reflected in rights-based criticisms of utilitarianism by Rawls and Nozick. We can dig deeper into the deontological tradition by focusing on Kant's ethical theory in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Kant is famous for insisting that moral requirements are requirements of reason — categorical imperatives — that are not grounded in our emotions, interests, or desires. He thinks that this requires us to act on rules that all rational agents can accept. This, he thinks, requires that we treat everyone as an end and never merely as a means.

It will help us better understand the Kantian project if we look at how it can be developed and applied. In *A Theory of Justice* (1971) Rawls defends an egalitarian conception of justice that he calls Justice as Fairness. He defends his egalitarian conception of justice by appeal to a hypothetical social contract in which parties are represented as free and equal persons, deliberating behind a veil of ignorance about their identities and attributes. Rawls sees himself as developing a Kantian conception of social justice.

It will also help to examine other applications of Kant's ideas. Onora O'Neill (1941-) is a Kantian who interprets Kant's injunction never to treat others as means as requiring their actual, rather than hypothetical, consent. She illustrates these claims in discussing sexual norms and workplace relations.

FORMAT

MWF class meetings will be lectures. I'm happy to entertain some student questions and comments in lecture, but sustained discussion should take place in weekly section meetings. Sections will provide opportunity for discussion and will also explore specific issues that illustrate themes from the lectures.

Readings and issues will be analyzed and discussed at several levels. My lectures will provide philosophical background and structure to the issues raised by the readings and present and assess these issues in a fairly systematic way. I'll use PowerPoint slides during lecture and will post those slides to Canvas after the lecture. Section meetings provide an opportunity for students to discuss issues from the readings and lectures with their TA, but TAs will also use sections to apply principles discussed in lecture to novel issues. Students will be responsible for material covered in the readings, lectures (summarized in PowerPoint slides), and in sections.

REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

Work for the course will consist of five bi-weekly quizzes and two papers. There will be no final exam. Attendance and participation at section will also be a component of a student's overall grade.

- **Quizzes.** Five bi-weekly quizzes will be administered online, through the Canvas website. They will take no more than 10 minutes and consist of true/false and multiple-choice questions. The quizzes test basic comprehension of the readings and lectures. Quizzes can be taken within a 48-hour window between Friday 3pm and Sunday 3pm. They are timed. Students are expected to prepare in advance. The quizzes are not open-book, and students may not collaborate in taking them. The quizzes will be (begin) Friday, April 11; Friday, April 25; Friday, May 9; Friday, May 23; and Friday, June 6. Your quiz grade will be calculated based on your four best quiz scores (throwing out your lowest score). Collectively, the quizzes will be worth 40% of your overall grade.
- **Missed Quizzes.** There is more than adequate notice and opportunity for students to take the quizzes, and students can take the quizzes at their convenience during a 48-hour period. Since the lowest quiz score will be dropped, opportunities to make-up a missed quiz will be limited and exceptional. They are limited to unavoidable conflicts; they must be justified in writing with suitable documentation in advance or, where that is not possible, immediately after the administration of the quiz in question. Do not ask if you can make-up a quiz you forgot to take.
- **The First Paper.** The first paper should be about 1K words (+/-) and is due by 5pm, Wednesday, April 30 (week #5) but can be submitted earlier. Paper topics will be distributed well in advance of the due date. The first paper will be worth 20% of your overall grade.
- **The Second Paper.** The second paper should be 1.5-2K words (+/-) and is due by 5pm on Wednesday, June 12 (exam week) but can be submitted earlier. Paper topics will be distributed well in advance of the due date. The second paper will be worth 30% of your overall grade.
- **Submission of Papers.** Students will be expected to submit papers electronically, via turnitin.com on the Canvas website.
- **Late Papers.** If students require an extension on the (first) paper, they must request and justify an extension with their TA in advance via email. Late papers (for which an extension was not approved in advance) will lose one full grade for every day (24-hour period) late. For instance, a paper that would have received an A- if handed in on time will receive a C- if handed in two days (more than 24 hours and not more than 48 hours) late. So, if you hand in an A- paper 25 hours late, that counts as two days late, and the paper will get a C-.
- **Plagiarism.** Students should note that plagiarism is a violation of the Principles of Academic Integrity (<http://senate.ucsd.edu/manual/appendices/app2.htm>). Anyone determined to have violated these principles will fail the assignment and the course and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Use of ChatGPT and other LMM to write your papers counts as plagiarism for purposes of this course. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism or other academic misconduct, please consult with your TA *in advance*.
- **Attendance and Participation.** Attendance and participation are expected in sections. 10% of your overall grade will reflect your attendance and participation in section. If you have to miss a section, let your TA know. If you have a legitimate reason for missing more than one section, you should contact your TA about alternative forms of participation.

- **Questions about Grades.** Students who have questions about their grades should consult their TAs. Students who have questions about the grade they received on a paper should first read the comments and reread the paper. If they still have questions, they can make an appointment with their TA to discuss the comments and grade. Students should aim to resolve any disagreements with their TAs. I will become involved in disputes about graded papers only as a last resort, and students should understand that if I am asked to regrade their paper I might raise or lower their original grade.
- **Grade Breakdown.** As percentages of your total grade: the quizzes collectively = 40%; the first paper = 20%; the second paper = 30%; and attendance and participation in section = 10%.

DIVISION OF LABOR BETWEEN PROFESSOR AND TAs

My responsibility is to plan the course, select readings, prepare lectures and PowerPoint slides, consult with the TAs about their duties, and hold office hours. The TAs will lead sections, hold office hours, and grade papers. I'm happy to meet with students to discuss the content of the class and lectures either after class or during office hours. But this is a large class, and it's not feasible or appropriate for me to respond to everyone's questions about their papers, quizzes, grades, etc. This is the job of the TAs. You should regard them as your first recourse for most of your questions about the course.

BOOKS

All the readings for the course are available as PDFs on the Canvas course website. However, I have also ordered paperback copies of two of the texts we will be discussing in some detail from the university bookstore for those who prefer to read these texts in hard copy.

- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and other Essays*, 2d. ed. (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2015).
- Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3d ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett).

The paperback editions in the bookstore should be pretty inexpensive, but you could also find new or used paperback copies online (e.g. at Amazon). Additional required readings will be posted on the course website.

READINGS

The reading assignments are listed on the Syllabus. It is important to read the assignments on time.

WEBSITE

All course materials and handouts will be posted on the course website, available through Canvas on Course Finder (<https://coursefinder.ucsd.edu>). Students enrolled in the course should have automatic access to the website. You should check periodically to make sure that you have current versions of all the handouts, which are revised or updated periodically.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to doing the readings and completing the assignments, students need to know and comply with the course policies and requirements described here. Exceptions to these policies and requirements will be made only in cases where the student had an unavoidable conflict, beyond their control, which they document in a timely manner. Exceptions will not be granted to accommodate student negligence.

PHIL 13: Ethics
Spring 2024
Professor David O. Brink
Syllabus

Here are the projected topics and readings for the quarter. If we progress slower (or faster) than initially anticipated, I may revise the Syllabus, so please check periodically to make sure you are operating with the current version. The required readings include extended selections from three books — John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* and *On Liberty* and Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. PDFs of these texts have been posted on the Canvas website. If you would like hard copies, you can purchase paperbacks from the campus bookstore or online. There are additional required readings posted on the Canvas website. I will also post PowerPoint slides from class lectures on the website.

WEEK #1: ETHICAL OBJECTIVITY AND ITS CRITICS

- Monday, April 1: Introduction
- Wednesday, April 3: David O. Brink, “Ethical Objectivity and Its Critics”
- Friday, April 5: David O. Brink, “Ethical Objectivity and Its Critics” (continued)

WEEK #2: DOES MORALITY REQUIRE A RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION?

- Monday, April 8: Thomas Hurka, “Why Social Liberals Are Not Moral Relativists”
- Wednesday, April 10: Plato, *Euthyphro*
- Friday, April 12: David O. Brink, “The Autonomy of Ethics” and **Quiz #1**

WEEK #3: PSYCHOLOGICAL EGOISM AND SUBJECTIVISM ABOUT HAPPINESS

- Monday, April 15: David O. Brink, “The Autonomy of Ethics” (continued)
- Wednesday, April 17: Joel Feinberg, “Psychological Egoism”
- Friday, April 19: Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 42-45

WEEK #4: UTILITARIANISM AND THE GOOD

- Monday, April 22: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 2
- Wednesday, April 24: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 2 (continued)
- Friday, April 26: Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” and **Quiz #2**

WEEK #5: UTILITARIANISM AND OPTIONS

- Monday, April 29: Liam Murphy, “The Demands of Beneficence”
- Wednesday, May 1: Liam Murphy, “The Demands of Beneficence” (continued) and **First paper due by 5pm**
- Friday, May 3: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §§5-6; Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 28-33

WEEK #6: UTILITARIANISM AND RIGHTS

- Monday, May 6: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 5
- Wednesday, May 8: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 5 (continued)
- Friday, May 10: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 1 and **Quiz #3**

WEEK #7: MILLIAN LIBERALISM

- Monday, May 13: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 1 (continued)
- Wednesday, May 15: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, chs. 2-3
- Friday, May 17: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, chs. 4-5

WEEK #8: KANTIAN ETHICS

- Monday, May 20: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface and Section 1
- Wednesday, May 22: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section 2
- Friday, November 19: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section 3 and **Quiz #4**

WEEK #9: JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS: RAWLS AND KANT

- Monday, May 27: **NO CLASS, MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY**
- Wednesday, May 29: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §§1-6, 11-17
- Friday, May 31: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §§20-29, 40

WEEK #10: APPLYING KANTIAN PRINCIPLES

- Monday, June 3: Onora O'Neill, "Between Consenting Adults"
- Wednesday, June 5: Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger"
- Friday, June 6: **Quiz #5**

WEEK #11: EXAM WEEK

- Wednesday, June 12: **Paper #2 due by 5pm**