Phil 362: Contemporary Ethical Theory

# Course Overview

Meetings

T, Th 2:00-3:15, DEY 307

Instructor

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Office Location

206A Caldwell Hall

Office Hours

Th 11-1 and by appointment

This course will give you an opportunity to read some of the ‘greatest hits’ from normative ethics in the 20th (and beginning of the 21st) century. We’ll begin by looking at some of the ‘anti-theoretical’ challenges to Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics that spearheaded the resurgence of virtue ethics. From there, we’ll move on to questions about moral responsibility and the appropriateness of blame. The course will end with a close reading of Miranda Fricker’s book *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, which brings together many of the trends in contemporary normative ethics, and has been largely responsible for the recent philosophical interest in the ethics of belief. Throughout the course, we’ll be asking questions like: what should a moral theory give us? What are the limits of morality? What attitudes, behaviors, and actions are morally assessable? And what role should morality, and moral philosophy, play in our daily lives?

# Required Text

Miranda Fricker, Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing

All other readings will be posted on Sakai. **You will be expected to print them out and bring a copy of them to class.**

# Honor System

It is the responsibility of every student at the University of North Carolina to obey and support the enforcement of the Honor Code, which prohibits lying, cheating, or stealing. It is further the responsibility of every student to conduct himself or herself so as not to impair significantly the welfare or the educational opportunities of others in the University community. We will strictly abide by and enforce the honor code. Each student is responsible for becoming familiar with the details of the honor system. For more information on the Honor Code, please visit <http://studentconduct.unc.edu>.

# Classroom Expectations and Course Policies

Philosophy classes are only as good as the discussions that happen in them. As such, you will be expected to come to class having completed the readings, and prepared to talk. You will also be expected to treat your peers with respect.

There is also a strict **no-electronics** policy in this class. Please refrain from using laptops, tablets, and cell phones in class.

This course assumes a working familiarity with major ethical theories (specifically Consequentialism, Deontology, and Virtue Ethics). We will be discussing the basic tenets of these theories throughout the course, but if you’d like a more detailed refresher, check out these Stanford Encyclopedia articles:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/> (Intro, S1)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/#GooWilMorWorDut> (Intro, S2, S3, S4)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/> (Intro, S1, S2.0 (no subsections))

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/> (Intro, S1, S2.1)

# Assignments

***Attendance and Participation* (10%):** Do the readings, show up for class, and be an active and thoughtful participant in class discussions.

***Comment Sheets* (30%)**: Throughout the semester, you will be required to hand in six comment sheets on the assigned course readings. Only the top five marks will be counted towards your final grade. You can write your comment sheets on any readings that you like, so long as you follow these rules:

1. You cannot submit more than one comment sheet on the same paper.
2. You cannot submit more than one comment sheet per week.
3. Comment sheets must be submitted on the day that the reading relevant to them is discussed in class.
4. You must submit at least **two** comment sheets before Spring Break and at least **two** comment sheets after.

Comment sheets should not be more than two pages in length, double-spaced. A successful comment sheet will be narrow in scope. Don’t summarize the whole article. Instead, select some component of the article (an argument, a definition, an assumption etc.), reconstruct it briefly, and critically evaluate it. Usually this will involve raising an objection, outlining an ambiguity, critiquing an assumption etc., and (ideally) considering a response on behalf of the author.

***Short Paper* (20%):** 3-5 pages, double-spaced. Prompts will be distributed on January 24th, 2017.

***Final Paper* (35% for paper, 5% for draft):** 10 pages max, double-spaced. Prompts will be distributed on March 7th, 2017. You will be required to hand in a draft copy of your papers on April 4th, 2017. I will provide you with comments on your draft and assign a grade. Your final paper, due May 8th, 2017, should show some evolution from the draft-version.

# Grading Policies

***Blind Grading*:** Please do not put your name on your papers—just write your PID.

***Assignment Submission*:** Please bring a hard copy of your assignment to class on the day that it is due. Due dates for assignments are firm, and I will dock 5% of the assignment grade for every 24-hour period it is overdue. I am, however, very generous about granting extensions so long as you request them at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline.

# Grading Scale

A grade in the ‘A’ range (90-93=A-, 94-96=A, 97-100=A+) demonstrates an impressive mastery of and insightful engagement with the course material. In written work, the A student is able to reconstruct philosophical arguments with precision and accuracy, develop criticisms that are original, persuasive, and well-developed. In class, the A student attends all or almost all classes having completed the readings, and always or almost always makes exceptionally thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

A grade in the ‘B’ range (80-83=B-, 84-86=B, 87-89=B+) denotes competent mastery of and reasonable insight into the course material. The B student is able to reconstruct philosophical arguments accurately and develop criticisms that are reasonably persuasive and well-developed. In class, the B student attends all or almost all classes, typically completes the readings, and often makes thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

A grade in the ‘C’ range (70-73=C-, 74-76=C, 77-79=C+) denotes adequate comprehension and engagement with the course material. The C student is able to reconstruct philosophical arguments with some errors and develop criticisms that are generally relevant to the course material, if not convincing. In class, the C student attends the majority of classes, regularly does the readings, and sometimes makes thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

A grade in the ‘D’ range (60-63=D-, 64-66=D, 67-69) denotes a lack of comprehension of and engagement with the course material. The ‘D’ student is unable to accurately reconstruct philosophical positions or develop critiques relevant to the course material. In class, the D student struggles with attendance, shows little evidence of having completed the readings, and rarely makes thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

# Course Schedule

\*note: this schedule may be updated throughout the semester

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| Date | Readings/ Assignments |
| Jan 12 | None |
| Jan 17 | Singer “Famine, Affluence and Morality” and “All Animals are Equal” |
| Jan 19 | Williams “Consequentialism and Integrity” |
| Jan 24 | Rawls “Two Concepts of Rules” *First Paper Prompts Distributed* |
| Jan 26 | Railton “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality” |
| Jan 31 | Nagel “War and Massacre” |
| Feb 2 | Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory” (up to p. 535) |
| Feb 7 | Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory” (pp. 535-554) |
| Feb 9 | Stocker “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” |
| Feb 14 | Velleman “Love as a Moral Emotion”  |
| Feb 16 | Hill “Servility and Self-Respect”*First Paper Due* |
| Feb 21 | Williams “Persons, Character, and Morality” |
| Feb 23 | Foot “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperative” |
| Feb 28 | Foot “Virtue and Vices” |
| Mar 2 | Nussbaum “Non-Relative Virtues” |
| Mar 7 | Calhoun “Standing for Something” |
| Mar 9 | Strawson Jr. “The Impossibility of Responsibility” *Final Paper Prompts Distributed* |
| Mar 21 | Frankfurt “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” |
| Mar 23 | Strawson Sr. “Freedom and Resentment” |
| Mar 28 | Frankfurt “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” |
| Mar 30 | Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, Chapter 1 |
| Apr 4 | Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, Chapter  |
| Apr 6 | Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, Chapter 3 |
| Apr 11 | Williams, “Moral Luck” |
| Apr 12 | Adams “Involuntary Sins” |
| Apr 18 | Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapters 1 and 2 |
| Apr 20 | Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapter 3*Draft of Final Paper Due* |
| Apr 25 | Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapter 4 |
| Apr 27 | Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* Chapter 6 |
| May 8 | *Final Paper Due*  |