

# PHIL 20401: Ethical Theory

Geoffrey Hall

Spring, 2021

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Office Hours: M/W/F 12-1pm & By appointment

Office: Zoom

Web: Sakai

Class Hours: 3:55-5:10 T/R

Class Room: Hayes Healy Center 231

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## Course Description

This course is an introduction to the core issues in contemporary ethical theory. We will start by looking at the foundations of ethics. What is it for something to be morally good? What is it for an action to be obligatory? How do we know about morality? Does morality depend on God? We will then turn to competing theories of the general principles of morality. Do the ends justify the means? Are there actions that are forbidden no matter the consequences? Do individuals have rights? Finally, with a good grasp on some of these more theoretical problems, we will turn to more applied questions: is animal consumption morally permissible? Is abortion morally permissible? What obligations do we have towards future generations? What obligations to we have towards those less fortunate than ourselves? By the end of the semester students will:

- Have knowledge of some of the main views in ethics and be able to apply this knowledge to some of the contemporary moral problems we are facing today.
- Have knowledge of the *philosophical* questions and problems concerning ethics, be able to articulate these questions and problems, be able to defend answers to these questions, and propose solutions to these problems.
- Be able to contribute to rigorous philosophical discussion and clearly present philosophical ideas in written form.

## Course Materials

All of the readings, slides, and recorded lectures will be made available on Sakai. The following outside sources are also good:

- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
- Philosophy Compass.

- Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"

These sources can all be found by Googling. Wikipedia is, unfortunately, still not a reliable source of philosophical information.

## Assignments

### Discussion Responses

A large portion of the class will be dedicated to discussion, both in small groups and as a class. Students should write these discussion responses after, and in response to, the discussions had in class. These discussion should be about a page in length. The responses should relate to the discussions had during class meetings and should reflect the student's own thoughts on these topics. You are required to turn in a total of 10 discussion responses. These discussion responses should be written in a Google Docs document that I will share with you. Every Friday, I will check and grade these documents.

The discussion responses will be graded on a scale of 0-2. Students will receive a **0** for any missing discussion responses, a **1** if they fail to adequately engage with the discussion topic, and **2** for a response that thoughtfully engages with the topic.

### TPQs

You will be required to submit two questions each week prior to the last class period of the week. The questions will be submitted on a Google document that will be shared with you. The questions must be "Thought Provoking Questions" in the following sense: (i) they must demonstrate that you have actually engaged with the text. If I can settle the question by a quick Google search or by looking briefly through the text itself, then you have not done this. (ii) they should engage with the main arguments and positions that are talked about within the text. You should be looking for parts of the argument that you do not understand or that seem to you to be ill supported. Spend some time trying to work it out for yourself before submitting the question.

### Exams

There will be three take home exams throughout the course, corresponding to the three main units of the class. These exams will be handed out on Thursday and you will have until the next Tuesday to complete them. The exam will consist of essay questions. A week before the exam, I will share 8-10 possible questions that will be on the exam. I will distribute a grading rubric for the exam at that time.

### Participation

The course will be largely discussion based so participation and attendance are very important. Attendance is mandatory and students are expected to share their cameras throughout the class. All students will begin with a participation grade of 100%. Students will lose participation points for the following reasons: unexcused absence, consistent failure to engage in discussion, failure to answer PollEverywhere, disrespectful remarks towards others.

## Guided Reading Questions

I will post Guided Reading Questions on some readings. These questions are for your reference to help you understand and work through the readings. The goal of the Guided Reading Questions is to help students develop their independent learning skills, in particular, their reading comprehension. The questions will help students to extract the main these and arguments of the philosophical papers we read.

## Grading

Final grades will be determined by four components:

- Discussion Responses: 20%
- TPQs: 20%
- Exams: 40%
- Participation: 20%

The exams are required in the sense that failure to complete any exam will result in a failing grade for the course.

## Grade Scale

Notre Dame has no official way of indexing numerical grades to letter grades. This is the system that will be used in this course:

<u>A</u>	94+
<u>A-</u>	90-93
<u>B+</u>	87-89
<u>B</u>	83-89
<u>B-</u>	80-82
<u>C+</u>	77-79
<u>C</u>	73-76
<u>C-</u>	70-72
<u>D</u>	60-69
<u>F</u>	59-

## Course Policies

### Honor Code

In all of their assignments, students are responsible for compliance with the university's honor code, information about which can be found at <https://honorcode.nd.edu/>. You should acquaint yourself with the policies and penalties described there.

Additionally, the philosophy department has prepared a document explaining what the honor code requires of students visa-à-vis writing a philosophy paper. I **strongly recommend** that you read this document, which will be made available on Sakai. It is possible to violate the honor

code without intending to do so; the best way to avoid this is to carefully read through the philosophy department's guidelines.

The most common honor code violations occur when students read an internet source while working on a paper and use material from that source without citing it. If you read something not assigned in this course as part of your work on a paper, you **must** cite the source, whether or not you quote anything from that source. Paraphrasing or summarizing the work of others without clear acknowledgement of that work is plagiarism.

It is often extremely obvious within seconds of reading a paper that it is plagiarized. You might not be able to see the difference between student writing the writings of professional philosophers. I can see this difference. The result is that in most cases of plagiarism, not only can I tell that it is plagiarized, but know immediately where it was plagiarized from. It is simply never a good idea to plagiarize.

## Reading Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	
Feb 4th	Introduction to the Course	Rachels, <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i> , ch. 1 (optional)
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Subjectivism</b>	
Feb 9th	God and Ethics	Rachels, <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i> ch. 4 Murphy "Theological Voluntarism" (Optional)
Feb 11th	Antirealism	Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , ch. 3 (skip 3.5)
<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Realism</b>	
Feb 16	Reductionism	Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , ch. 4 (skip 4.3.2-4.3.5, 4.4.3-4.4.4)
Feb 18	Intuitionism	Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , ch. 5 (skip 5.6-5.7)
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Moral Knowledge</b>	
Feb 23	Debunking	Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value"
Feb 25	The Theistic Response	Crummett and Swenson, "God and Moral Knowledge" Exam One Assigned
<b>Week 5</b>	<b>Utilitarianism</b>	
Mar 2nd	No Class	Exam One Due
Mar 4th	Hedonism	Smart, "An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics"
<b>Week 6</b>	<b>Objections to Utilitarianism</b>	
Mar 9th	Overview	Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism"
Mar 11th	Alienation and Isolation	Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality" Nozick, "The Experience Machine"
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>Deontology</b>	
Mar 16th	Strong Deontology	Rachels <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i> , ch. 9
Mar 18th	Weak Deontology	Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right"
<b>Week 8</b>	<b>Objections to Weak Deontology</b>	
Mar 23	From Consequentialism Again	Huemer, "Paradox for Weak Deontology"
Mar 25	From Strong Deontology	Thomson, "Turning the Trolley"
<b>Week 9</b>	<b>Virtue and Sainthood</b>	
Mar 30	Virtue Ethics	Rachels, <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i> , ch. 12
Apr 1	Moral Saints	Wolf, "Moral Saints" Exam Two Assigned
<b>Week 10</b>	<b>Ethical Vegetarianism</b>	
Apr 6	Equality of Animals	Singer, "All Animals Are Equal" Exam Two Due
Apr 8	The Argument from Pain and Suffering	Huemer, <i>Dialogues on Ethical Vegetarianism</i> , ch. 1-2
<b>Week 11</b>	<b>Non-Identity and Repugnance</b>	
Apr 13	The Non-Identity Problem	Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i> (selection)
Apr 15	The Repugnant Conclusion	Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i> (selection)
<b>Week 12</b>	<b>Abortion</b>	
Apr 20	Pro Choice	Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
Apr 22	Pro Life	Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"
<b>Week 13</b>	<b>Poverty and Parity</b>	
Apr 27	Poverty	Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality."
Apr 29	Moral Parity	Brennan, "When May we Kill Government Agents?"
<b>Week 14</b>	<b>Equality and Freedom</b>	
May 4	Free Speech and Harm	van Mill, "Freedom of Speech"
May 6th	Equality and Value	Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?" Huemer, "Against Equality"
<b>Week 15</b>	<b>Ethics and Immigration</b>	
May 11	The Moral Question of Immigration	Wellman, "Immigration"
May 13	Review	No Readings Final Exam Assigned (Due on assigned day of final exam).

