

PHIL 20208: Ethical Theory

Geoffrey Hall

Fall, 2020

E-mail: ghall14@nd.edu

Office Hours: W/R 2pm-3pm & by appointment

Office: Zoom

Web: Sakai

Class Hours: 10:00-12:30 M-R

Class Room: Zoom

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 between one and two pages in length. The responses should related to the discussions had during class meetings and should reflect the student's own thoughts on these topics. You are required to turn in one discussion response each week of the class, and so three in total. 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.

Quizzes

There will be a quiz at the end of each of the first 3 weeks of the winter session. These quizzes will consist of around 5 true/false questions and around 5 short answer questions about the material covered during that week.

TPQs

You will be required to submit two questions each week prior to the first class period of the week. The questions must be submitted at least 8 hours before the class period for which they are due. 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.

Final Exam

There will be a final exam consisting of essay questions. This exam will take place during the final meeting of the course, Wednesday January 27th. For the final exam, students will be given 4 essay questions from which they can choose to answer 3. 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 absense: -5 points
- Failure to share camera: -3 points
- Absent for Discussion Portion: -3 points
- Failure to answer PollEverywhere: -2 points

Guided Reading Questions

I will post Guided Reading Questions. 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: 15%
- TPQs: 10%
- Quizzes: 25%
- Final Exam: 25%
- Participation: 25%

The final exam is required. Failure to complete it 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.

Reading Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
Week 1	Metaethics	
Jan 4th	Introduction to the Course	Rachels, <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i> , ch. 1
Jan 5th	God and Ethics	Rachels, <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i> Murphy "Theological Voluntarism" (Optional)
Jan 6th	Antirealism	Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> ch. 2 (skip 2.4-2.7) Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , ch. 3 (skip 3.5)
Jan 7th	Realism	Huemer, <i>Ethical Intuitionism</i> , ch. 4 Enoch, "An Outline of an Argument for Robust Metanormative Realism" (Optional)
Week 2	Normative Ethics	
Jan 11th	Utilitarianism I	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (selections) Rachels, <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i> , ch. 8
Jan 12th	Utilitarianism II	Nozick, "The Experience Machine" Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism and the Demands of Morality"
Jan 13th	Deontology I	Rachels <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i> Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right"
Jan 14th	Deontology II	Huemer, "Paradox for Weak Deontology"
Week 3	Applied Ethics	
Jan 18th	Abortion	Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral" Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
Jan 19th	Ethical Vegetarianism	Huemer, <i>Dialogues on Ethical Vegetarianism</i>
Jan 20th	Non-Identity and Repugnance	Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i> (selections)
Jan 21st	Immigration	SEP "Immigration"
Week 4	Politics and Ethics	
Jan 25th	Equality	Huemer, "Against Equality" Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality"
Jan 26th	Lockdowns, Rights and Protection	TBD
Jan 27th	Final Exam	