

PHI 319/ CHV 319: Normative Ethics Fall semester 2014/15

Instructor:

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Course Description

Normative ethics is the systematic study of what is morally right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust, and why. In Part 1 of this course, we will closely examine a number of rival moral theories that provide answers to these questions. We will contrast utilitarian or, more broadly, consequentialist moral theories with various non-consequentialist alternatives, such as contractualism and Kantian ethics, and investigate their respective strengths and weaknesses. Amongst the issues we will discuss are:

- Obligations to the distant needy and the demandingness of consequentialism
- Ideal vs non-ideal moral theories
- Theories of wellbeing
- Moral aggregation and the ‘Numbers Problem’
- Intentions and permissibility and the ‘Doctrine of Double Effect’
- Killing vs letting die and the ‘Trolley Problem’
- Negative responsibility, complicity with evil, and the problem of ‘dirty hands’
- Moral maxims and Kant’s Categorical Imperative.

In Part 2 of the course, we will look at a number of concrete issues in normative ethics, often connected to the broader theoretical debates examined in Part 1. These will include:

- Liberty and paternalism
- Moral limits on markets: objections from commodification and exploitation
- The value of distributive equality
- The ethics of risk imposition
- ‘Moral luck’
- Suicide
- Abortion
- The moral status of future persons and the ‘Non-Identity Problem’.

Course Requirements

Lectures are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00 to 11:50 am, in McCosh 2. The location and timing of precepts will be determined after the second class. You are required to attend

lectures and precepts, which will often take up issues not in the readings. There will be a midterm on October 23 (25% of grade) and a final examination (40%), as well as two short papers (5% each) and a term paper (20%). All papers are to be emailed to your preceptor. The first short paper is due by the beginning of class on October 9 and must not exceed 1000 words. The second short paper is due by the beginning of class on November 25 and must not exceed 1500 words. The term paper is due no later than 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 13 (last day of reading period), and should not exceed 5000 words. 5% of the grade is for precept participation.

Readings

Readings should be done *before* the lecture indicated. There are two required books for this class:

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, revised edition, translated and edited by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann, introduction by Christine Korsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

John Stuart Mill, *'On Liberty' and other writings*, edited by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

These books have been pre-ordered at Labyrinth Books on Nassau Street and are ready for pick-up. All other readings will be posted to the course website. In addition, you are strongly encouraged to consult the following online resources to learn how to read philosophical texts and to write philosophy papers:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

PART 1: NORMATIVE ETHICAL THEORIES

Sep 11. Session 1: Introduction to Consequentialism.

William Shaw, "The Consequentialist Perspective" in *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*, ed. James Dreier (Blackwell, 2006).

Sep 16. Session 2: The Demands of Consequentialism.

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1972).

Sep 18. Session 3: Theories of Wellbeing.

Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine" in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Basic Books, 1974).

Derek Parfit, "Appendix I: What Makes Someone's Life Go Best" in *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1984).

Sep 23. Session 4: *Consequentialism and Scarce Resource Allocation.*

John Harris, "Double Jeopardy and the Veil of Ignorance", *The Journal of Medical Ethics* (1995).

Sep 25. Session 5: *Consequentialism and Particular Value.*

Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories", *The Journal of Philosophy* (1976).

Sep 30. Session 6: *The Numbers Problem.*

John Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1977).

Oct 2. Session 7: *Contractualism and Aggregation.*

T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Chapter 5 (Harvard University Press, 1998).

Oct 7. Session 8: *The Doctrine of Double Effect.*

Warren Quinn, "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1989).

Oct 9. Session 9: *The Trolley Problem.*

Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem" in *Rights, Restitution & Risk: Essays in Moral Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

First short paper due at the start of class.

Oct 14. Session 10: *Negative Responsibility and Complicity with Evil.*

Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" in J.C.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge University Press, 1973).

Oct 16. Session 11: *Kantian Ethics I: The Argument of Groundwork, Section I.*

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), Section 1.

Oct 21. Session 12: *Kantian Ethics II: The Categorical Imperative.*

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), Section 2.

Oct 23. Session 13: **MIDTERM EXAM**

FALL RECESS

PART 2: MORAL ISSUES

Nov 4. Session 14: Freedom and Paternalism.

Selections from John Stuart Mill, ‘*On Liberty*’ and other writings (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Nov 6. Session 15: Moral Limits on Markets. The Case of Commercial Surrogacy.

Elizabeth Anderson, “Is Women’s Labor a Commodity?”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1987).

Nov 11. Session 16: Distributive Equality and the Leveling-Down Objection.

Derek Parfit, “Equality or Priority?”, *Ratio* (1997).

Nov 13. Session 17: Equality of What?

G.A. Cohen, “On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice”, *Ethics* (1989).

Nov 18. Session 18: The Ethics of Risk-Imposition.

Johann Frick, “Contractualism and Social Risk: How to Count the Numbers Without Aggregating” (manuscript).

Nov 20. Session 19: Moral Luck.

Bernard Williams, “Moral Luck” in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Nov 25. Session 20: Who Has the Standing to Blame and Condemn?

G. A. Cohen, “Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can’t, Condemn the Terrorists?” in his *Finding Oneself in the Other* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

Second short paper due at the start of class.

THANKSGIVING RECESS

Dec 2. Session 21: Suicide.

David Velleman, “A Right to Self-Termination?”, *Ethics* (1999).

Dec 4. Session 22: Abortion.

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1971).

Dec 9. Session 23: Future Persons and the Non-Identity Problem.

Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (OUP, 1984), Chapter 16.

Dec 11. Session 24: The Shape of a Life.

Frances Kamm, “Rescuing Ivan Ilych: How We Live and How We Die”, *Ethics* (2003).