

Introduction to Ethics

Summer 2017

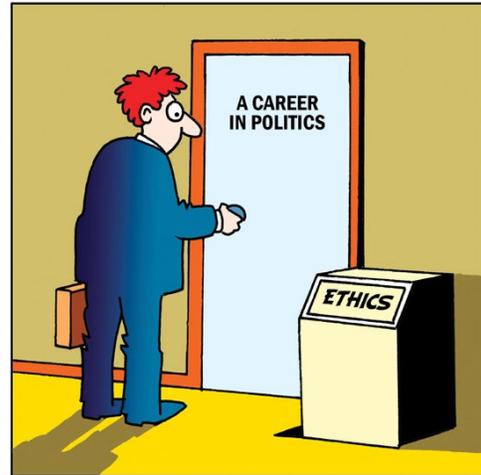
AS.150.206

MWF - ?

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Office Hour: ?



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Course Description

What does it mean to live a flourishing human life and what does this have to do with how we treat others? Can we establish firmly the truth of moral claims? Or is morality an invention of society? Finally, if you have a choice between doing nothing and letting *five* people be run over by a trolley car, or switch a lever so that the trolley car only kills *one* person, what do you do? These questions will concern us for the semester. In order to do so, we will be exploring the works of Aristotle, Kant, and Mill, as well as looking into some more contemporary readings. Further, we will be making connections and discussing how the questions relate to **bioethics** and **business ethics**. In this way, we will be making brief jaunts into the field of applied ethics in order to see how theory fits (or does not fit) into everyday life. Because these questions permeate our pop-culture, be prepared to watch *Star Trek* episodes and clips from the *Bourne Identity*. Our ultimate goal is to think precisely through these questions and be able to assess critically their application beyond the philosophy classroom.

Required Texts

The following works you will need to purchase:

Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd Ed., Trans. Terence Irwin. Hackett Publishing, 1999.

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, Trans. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Hackett Publishing, 2001.

Other readings will be posted online via BlackBoard.

Evaluation

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| Short Paper 1 | 25% |
| Long Paper | 50% |
| Dialogue Hours | 15% |
| Participation | 10% |

Tentative Schedule and Readings

WEEK 1 – *INTRODUCTION AND FOCUS*

CLASS 1

Introduction & What Makes a Philosophical Argument 101

CLASS 2

Plato – *Ion*, What does it mean to be virtuous? (*selected readings posted online*)

CLASS 3

Aristotle (Session 1) – Read Book I, Chapters 1 and 2 of the *N.E.*

WEEK 2 – *ARISTOTLE AND THE NOTION OF FLOURISHING*

CLASS 4

Aristotle (Session 2) – Read Book I, Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 7 of *N.E.*

CLASS 5

Aristotle (Session 3) – Read Book II, Chapters 1-6; selections from Book VI of *N.E.*

CLASS 6 – [SHORT PAPER DUE]

Applying Aristotle's thinking in the world: *Akasia* in the *Bourne Identity*? –
Flourishing in the business world? – Bioethical implications: assisted suicide and
abortion.

WEEK 3 – *THE KANTIAN LENS AND UNYIELDING DUTY*

CLASS 7

Kant (Session 1) – Read Preface of the *Groundwork* and Part I

CLASS 8

Kant (Session 2) – Finish *Groundwork* Part I

CLASS 9

Kant (Session 3) – Begin *Groundwork* Part II

WEEK 4 – *HANGING IN THERE, BECAUSE KANT IS IMPORTANT*

CLASS 10

Kant (Session 4) – Finish *Groundwork* Part II

CLASS 11

Kant (Session 5) – Read *Groundwork* Part III & Lecture on Kant’s search for justification (i.e., why a “deduction” is so important)

CLASS 12

Applying Kant’s thinking in the world: *Star Trek* (Season 5, Ep. 16) and bioethics: assisted suicide and abortion (again) – Business, what counts as an end in itself? Do corporations qualify?

WEEK 5 – *UTILIZING UTILITARIANISM*

CLASS 13

Mill – Read chapters I and II in *Utilitarianism*

CLASS 14

Mill – Read chapter IV in *Utilitarianism*

Applying Mill’s thinking in the world: The trolley car problem and its iterations – How does utilitarianism mix with capitalism? – Bioethical consideration: CRISPR and its implications for us as a species (revisit assisted issues raised in previous sessions).

CLASS 15 – [LONG PAPER DUE]

Ethical Battle Royale – Scene from *The Dark Knight*, which ethical framework answers it best? – Bring in an ethical quandary and argue for why *your* favorite philosopher offers the best solution – let the discussion begin! Tying up loose ends, evaluations, and a teary goodbye.

Details on Evaluation

Short Paper:

This paper will be just two pages and will be a place to practice your evaluative and analytic skills. You will be required to evaluate an argument from a reading in your own terms. This sort of expository practice will prepare you for the long paper and hone your ability to break down complex arguments into simpler parts.

Long Paper:

You will be working on this paper throughout the course and will have a chance to improve upon earlier drafts as you proceed. This makes up a large part of your grade and is also a chance for you to philosophize on your own terms. It will be developed throughout the semester via the dialogue hours, which I describe below.

Dialogue Hours:

Just as Socrates before you, this is your chance to experience philosophy as it should be... that is, in lively, interpersonal back-and-forth dialogue. You will be in dialogue with me and at least one of your peers. How does this work and in what does it consist? Twice during the semester, you will have to meet with me in person. Twice during the semester, you will have to meet with your peers *in person*. The point of these sessions is to dig into the meat of an argument, the substance of a philosophical work's mechanics. More to the point, these sessions will be the workshops in which you create your paper. Here is the breakdown –

1st Hour = Meet with one or more of your peers and discuss material from the course in more depth; question points further and ask how one might best go about answering these; arguing against possible answers to it; etc. Make notes of your brainstorms and be ready to share them with me in the next hour.

2nd Hour = Meet with me and discuss a question that intrigues you from your first hour.

3rd Hour = Meet with one or more of your peers and present an idea for your final paper; brainstorm your arguments, your questions, and discuss any problems or ways to fine tune it further. Afterwards, make an outline to share with me in the final hour.

4th Hour = Meet with me one last time with your outline for your final paper, or maybe more and an overview of your 2nd hour. We will discuss this and try to develop your ideas further.

You will be graded by simply showing up and giving it your all. Of course, I will trust you to be honest and tell me with whom you've met for the two peer-dialogue hours. If you lie, then you might gain some significant phenomenological insight into the notion of moral guilt, however, I would appreciate your honesty more. Depending on class size, some of your meetings with me might be group meetings since there are only so many hours in a day.

Participation:

This is straightforward. Show up. Talk. Respect others. Do everything well that is listed above.

Course Policy

First, it should be noted that the reading is crucial to a successful course. Next, the reading assigned will always be doable.

Though the calendar is to be followed, we will not be bound by the content. The works will offer us topics and arguments that we can then freely discuss and work on. There is no hidden agenda to interpret these texts in a single manner. We are solely interested in thinking about what is at work in ethics and what applications can be drawn to modern social issues.

During my office hour, I am there *for you*. Please do not hesitate to come by and chat. If my office hour is inconvenient, e-mail me and we will find a time that works for both of us.

Also, it will be a laptop- and Smartphone-free course. Leave your technology at home and bring your thinking caps instead. Pen and paper are as good a way as any to take notes and at the end of the day.

Regarding the turning in of papers, please bring them to me in paper copy to the course on the day they are due. I do not want them e-mailed to me if it can be avoided.

Finally, it is obvious: *but don't plagiarize or cheat in any way!* It is much easier to catch than one thinks, while thinking on one's own is much more rewarding. In dealing with plagiarism before, I've found that it does *nobody* any good. Your own work is so much better, no matter how much effort you put into it.