ETHICAL THEORIES

This course examines four central approaches to ethical theory on the contemporary scene--virtue ethics, deontology, consequentialism, and intuitionism--by a close reading of the key texts from which they spring:

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
- Jeremy Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*
- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*
- W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*

Our discussion will not be limited to those texts; we will consider subsequent developments, especially recent contributions, and we will seek to identify and address the primary problems each tradition faces.

Prerequisite: Six semester hours of coursework in philosophy. This course counts toward the writing flag requirement.

**Syllabus**

All readings required for this course are linked from this page.

**Ethics and Ethical Theories**
Aug 29  What is ethics?
Aug 31  Ethical theories

**Common Sense Ethics: Intuitionism**
Sept 5  Confucius, *Analects*
Sept 7  Confucius, *Analects*
Sept 10 Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, III, i
Sept 12 Ross, *The Right and the Good*, II
Sept 14 Ross, *The Right and the Good*, III

**Virtue Ethics**
Sept 17  Plato, *Laches*
Sept 19  Plato, *Laches*
Sept 21  Plato, *Republic IV*; Augustine, *Confessions VIII*, 9, 10

Sept 26  Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I
Sept 28  Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II

Oct 1  Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II
Oct 3  Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III-IV
Oct 5  Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III-IV

Oct 8  Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, VII
Oct 10  Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, IX
Oct 12  Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X

**Deontology**
Oct 15  Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* I
Oct 17  Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* I
Oct 19  Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* I

Oct 22  Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* II
Oct 24  Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* II
Oct 26  Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* II

Oct 29  Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* II
Oct 31  Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives"
Nov 2  Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* III
Consequentialism
Nov 5  Bentham, Principles of Morals and Legislation, Chapters I, II, IV, V, VI; Sidgwick, "The Meaning of Utilitarianism", Methods of Ethics
Nov 7  Bentham, Pannomial Fragments I; The Rationale of Reward, III, 1; Deontology I,3
Nov 9  Mill, "Of the Logic of Practice"; "Bentham"
Nov 12 Mill, Utilitarianism I, II; prospectus due
Nov 14 Mill, Utilitarianism II
Nov 16 Mill, Utilitarianism II
Nov 26 Mill, Utilitarianism III, IV
Nov 28 Bentham, Pannomial Fragments, III
Nov 30 Mill, Utilitarianism V

Dec 3  Prisoners’ Dilemmas and the Tragedy of the Commons
Dec 7  Dilemmas from Parfit; paper draft due

Requirements

Prospectus  10%
Draft  10%
Comments  10%
Final Paper  50%
Quizzes  20%

COURSE OBJECTIVE

Your goal: an excellent 15 page (4000 word, more or less) paper on a topic of your choosing, relating to at least one of the approaches to ethical theory explored in this course. You will pursue this goal in four stages:

• A 1 page prospectus, explaining your topic, your objective, and how you plan to go about achieving it, due by November 12. (10% of your grade.)
• A draft of your paper, to be distributed to a group of students working on related topics as well as to the professor, due by December 7. (10% of your final grade.)
• Comments on other students' drafts, pointing out strengths and weaknesses, and giving advice for improvement, due by December 10. (10% of your final grade.)
• Your final paper, revised in light of comments from your group members and the professor, due by noon on December 13. (50% of your final grade.)
• Quizzes constitute 20% of the final grade. At the beginning of each class there will be a few questions on the reading assigned for that day. Perfect scores will receive ten points; each question missed will subtract a point. Unexcused absences generate a 0.

Submit all of the above by emailing them to the professor.
WRITING YOUR PAPER

A good paper will address an important topic; state clearly the thesis to be advanced; argue for that thesis clearly and compellingly; show an awareness of possible questions, objections, and counterarguments, indicating at least in outline how to respond to each; and show familiarity with some relevant secondary and contemporary literature. The Philosophers' Index is your friend.

Read carefully the advice on writing philosophy papers found on web sites linked from this page. The only requirement for topics is that the paper have to do with ethics, and make some reference to at least one of the figures in the course (Confucius, Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Bentham, Mill, Prichard, Ross).

Kinds of papers students often write:
1. a historical paper: What did X really mean? What 's Y's theory of Z?
2. a critical paper: X says that (or argues that) Z. But that's wrong, because....
3. an analytical paper: If you examine X's theory of Z, or the general problem of Y, or X's argument for Z, you see that it has this structure, and rests on some assumptions....
4. an application paper: X's theory of Z implies something interestingly true or false about W.... (some very good papers of this kind have been written about literature, movies, and TV shows—but avoid politics, because this course doesn't cover crucial questions about the nature and role of government, which makes it very hard to write a sophisticated paper about those topics)
5. a comparative paper: If you compare X's theory of Z to Y's, you see that the crucial difference between them comes down to W (or, that they agree about V)....
6. a synthetic paper: If you take some elements of X's theory of Z, and combine it with some aspects of Y's theory, together with some highly original ideas of my own, you get a much better theory of Z.

Policies
The grading system for this course uses pluses and minuses.
Out of respect for your fellow students, please do not use cell phones in class.
Your papers must be your own work. You must not use material without citing your sources.

HONOR CODE
The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS
Religious holidays will be respected in accordance with University policy.

DISABILITIES
Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone).