

PHIL 6219: History of Ethical Theory
Spring 2009
Thursdays 6:30-9:15, Winingham 107

Course Objectives and Description: This course will explore the theories of selected major figures in the history of Western thought. Rather than attempt a comprehensive survey, our focus will be on close readings of a few key primary texts, with an eye to developing not just student knowledge of the texts in question, but also capacities to appreciatively and critically read difficult historical material, and to discuss the issues raised by that material.

Immersion in the history of ethical thought is one of the best preparations for participation in current ethical discussions. Not only does one develop a “toolbox” of skills and substantive positions, but (perhaps even more importantly) one gets a sense of who “we” are, as we are the inheritors of this history. As part of this preparation, we will also read selected contemporary articles on the historical materials. This has two purposes: first, as an aid to understanding the historical materials; and, second, to provide examples of work that bridges historical and contemporary concerns. I have accordingly selected secondary articles partly for their intrinsic quality and helpfulness in illuminating the primary texts, partly for their significance to contemporary discussions, and partly as representative of the thinking of important theorists. I have also tried to include representatives of both “analytic” and “continental” philosophy.

The thinkers we will study – Aristotle, Hume, Mill and Kant – are often poorly understood, and reduced to bumper-stickers and reductively simple slogans. You should expect to find each of them both difficult and rewarding. We will be starting with one of the most difficult in Aristotle, for the philosophical world he inhabited is utterly different from our own; hence, some of the greatest challenges and rewards to reading Aristotle are found precisely in his distance from our own philosophical assumptions. Similar things could be said for the other thinkers we will read.

This course is primarily historically-oriented, and is also a course in ethical theory, so our work will not focus on contemporary applications.

Required Texts and Materials: There’s four books; the other readings are available on Blackboard as PDF files. These are canonical materials, and there are a million editions out there. If you have one or more of these books already, let me know which edition, and I’ll tell you if it will work. For Aristotle in particular, there are likely to be translation issues to negotiate if you use a different edition from the one we do, but there are translation issues with the Broadie edition as well. As far as I can tell, there are fewer significant differences between editions of Kant, though I of course haven’t surveyed all of them.

Books to Get:

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Sarah Broadie. Oxford: OUP, 2002, ISBN: (0198752717)

The Classical Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill, ed. John Troyer. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003 (0-87220-649-1) [contains Mill’s *Utilitarianism* and several other texts]

Immanuel Kant, *Ethical Philosophy*, 2nd ed., Trans James W. Ellington. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995, ISBN: (0-87220-320-4)/(978-0-87220-320-4)

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning The Principles Of Morals*, Ed. J. B. Schneewind. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983, ISBN: (0-915145-45-6)/(978-0-915145-45-4)

Articles on WebCT:

Barrachi, Claudia. "The Nature of Reason and the Sublimity of First Philosophy: Towards a Reconfiguration of Aristotelian Interpretation," *Epoché* 7 (2003), 223-250.

Burnyeat, M. F. "Aristotle on Learning to be Good," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: U. California Press, 1980, 69-92.

Butler, Judith. "Precarious Life," in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004, 128-51.

Jacobson, Daniel. "J. S. Mill and the Diversity of Utilitarianism," *Philosopher's Imprint* 3:2 (2003), 1-8.

Jagger, Allison M. "Caring as a Feminist Practice of Moral Reason," *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, ed. Virginia Held. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995, 179-202.

Kant, Immanuel, "A Renewed Attempt to Answer the Question: 'Is the Human Race Continually Improving?'" in *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss. Cambridge: CUP, 1991, 176-90.

Kant, Immanuel, "On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason," from *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: CUP, 1996, 198-211.

Korsgaard, Christine. "An Introduction to the Ethical, Political, and Religious Thought of Kant," in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: CUP, 1996, 3-42.

Korsgaard, Christine. "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 15 (1986), 325-49.

Lear, Jonathan. *Selections from Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*. Cambridge: CUP, 1988.

Noddings, Nel. "Caring," in *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, ed. Virginia Held. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995, 7-30.

Rorty, Amélie O. "The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: U. California Press, 1980, 377-94.

Grading/Requirements:

Weekly Assignments: 20% (total)

Presentations: 20% (total)

Prospectus: 10%

Long paper: 50%

Attendance: Attendance is not a percentage of your grade because it is not a metric by which your class performance is evaluated. Attendance is a minimal expectation of being in a class (it's a constitutive rule: if you don't show up, it's not that you're playing a game badly; it's that you're not playing). If you miss more than three classes, I reserve the right to penalize your grade, by up to a letter increment per additional absence (like a forfeit). If you have extenuating circumstances, let me know.

Presentations: Each class involves both primary and secondary texts. For each text, we will have a presenter who is charged with leading discussion (we'll sign-up at the beginning of term; you'll probably get to do each more than once). If you are the presenter, you need to have about 10 minutes of material ready, in order to lead 30-60 minutes of discussion:

- For the primary texts, you'll want to be able to produce:
 - A cogent and *brief* reconstruction of what you take to be the main argument(s) of the text (if/when there are numerous main arguments, pick and choose a couple that you think are most important, or focus on a small-enough section of text that you can reduce it to a main argument)
 - A set of some interpretive difficulties – passages that you think are ambiguous, or could be read in different ways. In this case, you'll want to be able to explain what you think the ambiguity is, and a couple of different ways you might resolve it. This can be informal – you can open up the discussion to the class.
 - Two or three discussion questions that raise what you take to be important philosophical issues in the text in question.
- For the secondary texts, you'll want to produce:
 - A brief statement of the thesis of the article, as well as the main points in its support
 - Two or three discussion questions that either raise difficulties with the thesis of the article or follow-up on it.
- For both, the idea is for you to facilitate class discussion. Your job is as a prepared facilitator; you don't need to be giving a full lecture.

Weekly Assignments: Each week you should prepare a 2-4 page reflection on a theoretical ethical issue raised in the week's (primary text) reading. Ideally, you will try to frame the issue in terms relevant to your own particular interests and course of study. The assignments are "due" at the start of class, in the sense that you need to bring a printout of them to class, but you can and should use them as a springboard for your own comments and participation in class discussion (and then turn them in at the end).

Prospectus: This is a brief statement of where you're going with your long paper. It should include (a) a topic. Even if you can't have a thesis ready, you should have a topic, along with a justification/explanation of why that topic is worth looking at, and (b) a literature survey – you need to have at least 4 secondary sources listed, with an indication of why each of them is included; (c) if possible, a very rough outline of how you plan to structure the paper. This assignment is for your own benefit, so the more you can put into it, the more it will help you – even if you end up changing a lot of what you are doing between writing the prospectus and the final paper.

Long paper (12-15 pages): This is a 12-15 page (usual format: double-spaced, 12 point, reasonable margins) paper due on the last day of class. You will develop a topic of your own choosing related to the course readings. The paper must be about (in some significant way) the history of ethical thought. More information closer to due-date.

Contact Information/Getting Assistance: It is important that you not fall behind. I want to help you avoid doing so. To get help from me:

1. Speak to me before or after class; we can set an appointment to meet at a later time if need be.
2. Office hours: T 11:12-30; R 2:00-3:30 and by appointment (Winningham 105C, in the Ethics Center)
3. Email me at ghull@uncc.edu. This is probably the best way to get in touch outside of class.
4. Call my office 72182 and leave a voicemail. This is less effective than email because I'm bad about checking my messages.

Disabilities: I share UNCC's commitment to provide reasonable accommodations to enable students with disabilities to access course material. Please address any special needs or special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs. You'll also need to contact disability services, 704-687-4355 (230 Fretwell).

Detailed Course Outline (not a contract)

Week		Topic/Reading
1	1/15	First class, start Aristotle
2	1/22	Aristotle: Ethics as politics, acting, virtues Primary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Books 1-3 Secondary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good" • Recommended: Lear, <i>Aristotle</i>, 152-74 (5.1-5.3)

3	1/29	Aristotle: faculties of soul, <i>akrasia</i> Primary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Books 6-7 Secondary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lear, <i>Aristotle</i>, 174-86 (5.4) • Barrachi, “Nature of Reason”
4	2/5	Aristotle: <i>Eudaimonia</i> Primary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Books 8-10 Secondary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rorty, “Place of Contemplation” • Recommended: Lear, 186-208 (5.5-5.6)
5	2/12	Hume: Introductory material, justice Primary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hume §1 (Of the General Principles of Morals) • Hume §§2-3 (Benevolence, Justice) Secondary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Krause, “Hume and the False Luster”
6	2/19	Hume: Pleasing things Primary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPM §5 (Why Utility Pleases), §§7-8 (Qualities Immediately Agreeable to Ourselves/Others) Secondary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA (possibly looking at feminist ethics of care and a critique, depending on how we’re doing with Hume)
7	2/26	No class – professor at conference (maybe)
8	3/5	Hume: Sensible Knaves, and Hume’s Metaethics Primary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPM §9 (Conclusion) • Appendix I, “Concerning Moral Sentiment” • Is/Ought (from <i>Treatise</i>; on Blackblard) Secondary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millgram, “Hume on Is and Ought”
	3/9-14	Spring Break
9	3/19	Mill: Principle of Utility Primary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bentham (TBA) • Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>, ch. 2 Secondary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacobson, “J. S. Mill and the Diversity...”

10	3/26	<p>Mill: Moral education and metaethics</p> <p>Primary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Utilitarianism</i>, ch. 3, 4 <p>Secondary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millgram, “Mill’s Proof” • Recommended: Foucault, “Panopticism”
11	4/2	<p>Kant: Ethics as Reason</p> <p>Primary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Grounding</i> section I • <i>Virtue</i> Preface and <i>Virtue</i> Introduction, §1 <p>Secondary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Korsgaard, “Introduction”
12	4/9	<p>Kant: Ends that are Duties:</p> <p>Primary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Virtue</i> Introduction §§ II, III, VI (Maxims) • <i>Grounding</i> II <p>Secondary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have a review sheet for the <i>Grounding</i> that I’ve used in my undergraduate classes. It schematizes a lot of the arguments, and tries to make sense of the examples. It’s on blackboard if you find it useful.
13	4/16	<p>Kant on Duties</p> <p>Primary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kant: Perfect Duties to Oneself as an Animal Being – <i>Virtue</i> §§5-7 • Kant: Perfect Duties to Oneself as a Moral Being – <i>Virtue</i> §9, “On a Supposed Right to Lie” <p>Secondary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Korsgaard, “The Right to Lie”
14	4/23	<p>Last Class, final papers due</p> <p>Kant: Imperfect Duties to Self:, Teleology</p> <p>Primary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Virtue</i> §§19-22 (imperfect duties to self) • <i>Virtue</i> §§23-45 (imperfect Duties to Others) • Kant: “Incentives to Pure Practical Reason” (pdf online) • Kant: “Is the Human Race Continually Improving?” (pdf online) <p>Secondary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA
	5/7	Scheduled exam time (6:30-9, same room). We will use this time to tie up loose ends, or make up any missed weeks (possibly 4/9).

