

Ethical Theory (Phil 6110)
Fall 2010
W 3:30-6:15, Winingham 107

Course Objectives and Description: Ethics is a form of practical reason, that is, reason about what to do. More specifically, it is practical reasoning about morality. This course will explore select normative ethical theories with a view to understanding both how they think about morality, and how those theories reflect metaethical commitments about the nature of normative thought more generally (we will end the semester with some readings about these metaethical questions). This is a course in ethical theory, and so our work will focus on theory, and not its applications. As much as possible, I want to conduct this course as a seminar, where much of the discussion is student-driven.

Books to Get:

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

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 2nd ed., Ed. George Sher. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002, ISBN: (0-87220-605-X)/(978-0-87220-605-2)

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 1969. (0-679-72462-1)

Readings on Moodle:

Ayer, A. J. "Critique of Ethics and Theology," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, 27-40.

Brennan, Jason. "Beyond the Bottom Line: The Theoretical Aims of Moral Theorizing," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 28 (2008), 277-96.

Butler, Judith. From *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2009, Introduction (1-32) and ch. 5 ("The Claim of Non-Violence," 165-84).

Habermas, Jürgen. "Discourse Ethics," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholson. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, 43-115

Horkheimer, Max. "Materialism and Morality," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer and John Torpey. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993, 15-47.

- 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.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. from *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 7-48 (ch 1: "The normative question") and 131-166 (ch 4: "The origin of value and the scope of obligation").
- Mackie, J. L. "The Subjectivity of Values," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, 95-118.
- Miller, Christian. "Social Psychology, Mood, and Helping: Mixed Results for Virtue Ethics," *Journal of Ethics* 13 (2009), 145-73.
- Mills, Charles W. "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology," *Hypatia* 20 (2005), 165-94.
- Noddings, Nel. "Caring," in *Justice and Care*, ed. Virginia Held (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 7-30.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988), 33-53.
- Parfit, Derek. "The Non-Identity Problem," in *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, 351-80.
- Parfit, Derek. "The Repugnant Conclusion," *Reasons and Persons*, 381-90.
- Prinz, Jesse. "The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgments," *Philosophical Explorations* 9 (2006), 29-43.
- Williams, Bernard. "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism For and Against*. Cambridge: CUP, 1973.

Grading/Requirements:

Presentations: 10% (total)
Weekly Assignments: 30% (total)
Paper Presentation: 10%
Prospectus: 10%
Seminar paper: 40%

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: For each text (with the exceptions of Mill, Kant and Nietzsche), 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 go 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. 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.
- 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 précis of one (you can pick which one) of the readings for that week (**exceptions:** you do not have to do this assignment for the longer historical writings – Mill, Kant and Nietzsche). This précis should clearly state (a) the thesis of the paper, and (b) the primary supporting arguments that the author uses to defend that thesis. This is not a book report, and you should not summarize “he says this, then he goes on to say that...” Your goal should be to extract the important parts of the argument and present them synthetically – in the manner of an extended abstract. Minor points do not go in this précis; the major ones do. You should conclude with (c) an assessment of the greatest strength of the argument – what is most compelling about it, and why; and (d) a criticism of the argument – something you think is wrong with the paper, and why. The entire assignment shouldn't be much more than 2-3 pages, double-spaced. Try to be both concise and precise.

Prospectus: This is a brief statement of where you're going with your seminar paper. It should include (a) a thesis. 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 a direction you want to take it; (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.

Paper Presentation: Each student will present to the class a 10-15 minute version of his/her seminar paper argument. This is somewhat informal in that you don't have to read out a paper text, but you should be able to communicate your paper's thesis and its main supporting arguments. You should also be prepared to answer questions from the class about the paper and its argument. This assignment is partly designed to help you with presentation skills, and partly to give you an opportunity to workshop the paper. I have allocated time each of the last four weeks of class for this.

Seminar 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) ethical theory (an applied ethics paper will not earn a passing grade). More information closer to due-date. *You must submit a passing seminar paper in order to pass the class.*

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: MW 9:30-10:30 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).

Tentative Schedule (not a contract)

Date	Topic	Reading and other Assignments
8/25	First Class; presentation (etc) signups	
9/1	Why theory? and virtue theory	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brennan, "Beyond the Bottom Line" • Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues"
9/8	Critique of Virtue theory; Sentimentalism (1)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Miller, "Social Psychology, Mood and Helping" • Prinz, "Emotional Basis"
9/15	Sentimentalism (2)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noddings, "Caring" • Jaggar, "Caring as a Feminist Practice"
9/22	Utility (1)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>, chs. 2-4 Also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No weekly assignment due
9/29	Utility (2)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parfit, "Non-Identity Problem" and "Repugnant Conclusion" • Williams, "Critique of Utilitarianism"
10/6	Kant (1)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kant, <i>Foundations</i> (we will read this entire text

		for this week and the following) Also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No weekly assignment due
10/13	Kant (2)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finish Kant, <i>Foundations</i> Also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No weekly assignment due
10/20	Critique (1)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i>, preface and first two essays Also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No weekly assignment due
10/27	Critique (2)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Horkheimer, “Materialism and Morality” Mills, “Ideal Theory as Ideology”
11/3	No class – professor at conference	
11/10	The Grammatical Question (1)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ayer, “Critique of Ethics and Theology” Mackie, “Subjectivity of Values” Also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin paper presentations
11/17	Grammatical Question (2)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Habermas, “Discourse Ethics” (both parts) Also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper presentations
11/24	Thanksgiving	
12/1	Normative Question (1)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Korsgaard, <i>Sources</i>, chs. 1 and 4 Also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper presentations
12/8	Last class Normative Question (2)	Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Butler, <i>Frames</i>, Introduction and ch. 5 Also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seminar Paper due Paper presentations (if needed)
12/15	Exam Period: 2-4:30	