

**PHL 340: Ethics  
Fall Semester 2017  
2:40-4pm  
A316 Wells**

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Office Hours: Wednesday 3-5

**Course Description**

This course surveys central ideas and literature on the following questions in philosophical ethics (and in roughly the following order):

- What is ethics about? How does the subject matter and study of ethics differ from that in related fields like theology, psychology or biology?
- Do our ethics just express our feelings or can we be rationally criticized for our moral beliefs? How has gender shaped traditional ethical thought?
- Is ethics subjective or objective? Are any moral judgments true?
- Can people ever be altruistic? Why be moral anyway?
- What is happiness? Is happiness the only thing that matters or makes life go well for us?
- What is the right thing to do?
- What are good people like? Do men and women think alike ethically?

Work for the course includes regular homework assignments covering readings, class participation, a research paper and presentation, a philosophical methods presentation, and two mid-term exams.

### **Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Use examples to explain in speech or writing basic concepts of ethics, such as the fact/value distinction, and the basic principles of different ethical theories, such as utilitarianism.
- Take and philosophically defend a position on an ethical issue in speech and writing.
- Critically evaluate and engage ethical ideas in the media.
- Engage in respectful but critical discussion of an ethical issue with others who may or may not share their views.
- Formulate and communicate more sophisticated or nuanced ethical ideas than before the course.

### **Texts**

#### **Required**

- Baggini, J. and Fosl, P. 2010. *The Philosopher's Toolkit* (Wiley-Blackwell)
- Shafer-Landau, R. 2015. *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (Oxford UP).
- Shafer-Landau, R. 2015. *The Ethical Life* (Oxford UP).

Course Work and Grading Scale

Assignment		Points
Regular attendance		0
Discussion question assignments		15
Class preparation and participation		15
Quizzes, in-class exercises, short homework assignments		15
Toolbox conversation assignment		8
Fishbowl presenter assignments		NA
	Critical summary presenter	15
	“In the media” presenter	10
	Philosophical methods presenter	10
First midterm test		25
Second midterm test		30
Final test		30
<b>Total</b>		<b>173</b>

100-90%	4.0
89-85	3.5
84-80	3.0
79-75	2.5
74-70	2.0
69-65	1.5
64-60	1.0

Regular attendance: Attendance is required and will be checked in by Matt daily. You get 3 free absences for any reason (one every 5 weeks). Further absences will result in grade deductions of a ½ grade point per absence barring an obviously valid and legitimate excuse.

Class preparation and participation: This class will often involve discussion, sometimes quite open-ended. This is the best way to learn much of this material, but it is successful only if everyone comes to class having read and given some thought to the material, and only if everyone makes an effort to speak at least once every couple of weeks. You will be asked every 5 weeks to self-assess your preparation and participation and these assessments together with my notes and impression will form the basis of your grade here.

Discussion question assignments: Approximately 16 of these is assigned for the term (see the schedule of readings for due dates). You need to submit only five of own your choosing. Graded pass/fail. Submissions beyond 5 will generally be accepted and counted as 1 extra credit point.

Quizzes, in-class exercises, short homework assignments: These will occasionally be given in order to measure preparation and comprehension or to aide learning. These may sometimes be checked for correctness but will normally be graded pass/fail, including quizzes (e.g. for a quiz with 5 questions, earning 2/5 or worse = failing or 0 points, while earning 3/5 or better = passing or 1 point).

Toolbox conversation assignment: For this assignment, students will select and have a 1-hour conversation about an important ethical issue with a person whose worldview (or ethics or politics) is sharply different from their own, then submit a brief report about their experience. More information will be given the week before the assignment, but students should begin to think now about who they might approach. Suggestions include a family member with known obnoxious politics or a fellow student associated with a campus political organization whose politics you reject.

Fishbowl presenter assignments: 10 times throughout the term teams of 9-12 students will lead class discussion while the rest of us listen and prepare questions for the team. Each team will consist of three sub-teams, (1) critical summary presenters, (2) “in the media” presenters, and (3) philosophical methods presenters. Every student will sign-up to present three times throughout the term, once as a critical summary presenter, once as “in the media” presenter, and once as philosophical methods presenter. Each

role is briefly described here, but sign-up sheets and more information will be posted to D2L. The schedule for fishbowl presentations is below.

1. Critical summary presenters: When assigned this role, students will come to class having prepared a short 2-page essay analyzing and briefly taking and defending a position in response to a reading assigned for the day. They will summarize their ideas to the class.
2. Philosophical methods presenters: When assigned this role, students will come to class with a handout or slide show explaining/illustrating the relevance or application of some aspect of philosophical method (as discussed in the book *The Philosopher's Toolkit*) to one or more of the assigned readings for the day.
3. "In the media" presenters: When assigned this role, students will come prepared to explain how the day's material is connected to related material in the media, such as the news, a podcast, a book, a film, or music. For example, if the day's material concerns human well-being and nature appreciation, one might come prepared to explain the story of the book *Into the Wild* and how it connects to the readings (or summarize the movie *Grizzly Man* and explain how it connects to the readings). Students in this role will submit one page of notes documenting their preparation.

Tests: These will consist of a few short answer essay questions and 20-30 fixed-response questions (e.g. multiple choice, true/false). Essay questions are mostly objective and will ask students to use examples to explain course ideas. Fixed-response questions will test for understanding of basic concepts and their relationship. All tests should generally take one hour or less to complete. The final test covers only the last third of the course, i.e. is not cumulative.

### **Late and Revised Work**

Late work will be accepted only by the grace of the instructor. If you expect to or do miss a deadline, you should write the instructor immediately explaining your situation. Technical problems with the D2L course management system will excuse late work only if the D2L technical staff verifies your reported problem.

Students may submit a revision of any critical reflection paper up to a week after the assignment is returned for a chance at a higher grade. Because of time constraints few or no comments explaining the grading may be provided.

**Schedule of Topics, Readings and Major Assignments**

**Key: FE = Fundamental of Ethics, EL = Ethical Life, PT = Philosopher’s Toolkit, D2L = D2L**

<b>Course Introduction</b>			
<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>The nature of ethics and ethical inquiry</b>		
		Focus questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is ethics about? How can we meaningfully study ethical questions?</li> <li>• How has gender shaped traditional ethical thought?</li> <li>• How does the study of ethics differ from the study of theology, psychology, or biology?</li> </ul>
Week 1	Aug. 31	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Syllabus, D2L</li> <li>• Brighthouse, Why is an argument clinic less silly than an abuse or contradiction clinic? D2L</li> <li>• PT 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.6, 7.1</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online module for day 1 discussion</li> </ul>
Week 2	Sept. 5	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE Introduction</li> <li>• Kipnis, Sexual Paranoia Strikes Academe, D2L</li> <li>• Stabile, Why Kipnis Is Really Really Wrong About Teacher-Student Affairs, D2L</li> <li>• PT 3.11, 3.18, 3.19</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brighthouse discussion questions (optional)</li> </ul>
		In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Says/does exercise</li> </ul>
	Sept. 7	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Lindemann, What is Feminist Ethics?</li> <li>• FE 18 Feminist Ethics</li> <li>• PT 4.9, 6.1, 6.4</li> </ul>

		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL discussion questions for Lindemann, 2, 3, 4 and for FE ch. 18, 1, 2, 5</li> </ul>
		In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toolbox survey and discussion</li> </ul>
Week 3	Sept. 12	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE, Morality and Religion</li> <li>• Plato, EL Euthyphro</li> <li>• PT 1.5, 1.8, 3.20</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL discussion questions for Plato</li> </ul>
		In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical summary writing</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Right action</b>		
		Focus questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the right thing to do?</li> <li>• Is there a single correct principle by which we can determine the right thing to do or do we need many principles?</li> <li>• How does the study of ethics differ from the study of theology, psychology, or biology?</li> </ul>
	Sept. 14	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE Natural Law</li> <li>• Corvino, Why shouldn't Tommy and Jim have sex? D2L</li> <li>• PT 2.8, 3.8, 3.15, 6.8</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE review questions for Natural Law</li> <li>• Fishbowl group 1</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 3</b>	<b>Moral motivation and the justification of morality</b>		
		Focus questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can people be altruistic?</li> <li>• Why be moral anyway?</li> </ul>
Week 4	Sept. 19	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Singer, The Singer Solution to World Poverty</li> <li>• FE Psychological Egoism</li> <li>• PT 3.11, 2.1, 3.26</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groundhog Day review questions (on D2L)</li> <li>• Review questions for FE Psychological Egoism</li> <li>• Fishbowl group 2</li> </ul>

	Sept. 21	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE Ethical Egoism</li> <li>• EL Hobbes, Leviathan</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review questions for EL Hobbes</li> </ul>
		In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social contract game</li> <li>• Test review</li> </ul>
Week 5	Sept. 26	<b>First midterm test</b>	
<b>Theme 4</b>	<b>Well-being, happiness, and the good life</b>		
		Focus questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is happiness?</li> <li>• Is happiness the only thing that's good for us?</li> <li>• How can we live a good life?</li> </ul>
	Sept. 28	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus</li> <li>• EL Mill, Hedonism</li> <li>• FE Hedonism: Its Powerful Appeal</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE Hedonism review questions</li> </ul>
Week 6	Oct. 3	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Huxley, Brave New World</li> <li>• EL Nozick, The Experience Machine</li> <li>• FE Is Happiness All That Matters?</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review questions for FE ch. 1: Hedonism</li> <li>• Fishbowl group 3</li> </ul>
	Oct. 5	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE Getting What You Want</li> <li>• FE Problems for the Desire Theory</li> <li>• EL Kazez, Necessities</li> <li>• Recommended: Mill, On Liberty, Chapter III, Of Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-being</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review questions for EL Kazez 2, 4, 6 and for FE ch. 4 1-3</li> <li>• Fishbowl group 4</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Right action again</b>		

Week 7	Oct. 10	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics</li> <li>• Aristotle, excerpts from Nichomachean Ethics, D2L</li> <li>• FE Virtue Ethics</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review questions for EL Aristotle 3-4 and for FE ch. 17 1, 2, 5</li> </ul>
	Oct. 12	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions</li> <li>• Mill, On Liberty, Chapter I, Introductory</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review questions for FE Consequentialism: Nature and Attractions</li> </ul>
Week 8	Oct. 17	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE Consequentialism: Its Difficulties</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion questions for FE ch. 10 3-5</li> </ul>
	Oct. 19	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mill, On Liberty, Chapter II, Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion</li> <li>• Friedersdorf, Suspensions for College Students Who Thwarted Free Speech, D2L</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishbowl group 5</li> </ul>
Week 9	Oct. 24	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mill, On Liberty, Chapter II, Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion</li> <li>• Lawrence III, Racist Speech as the Functional Equivalent of Fighting Words, D2L</li> <li>• Six college students, NYT Opinion, When Flamethrowers Like Coulter Come to Campus, D2L</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishbowl group 6</li> </ul>
	Oct. 26	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mill, On Liberty, Chapter IV, Of the Limits to the Authority of Society over the Individual</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toolbox conversation report</li> </ul>
Week 10	Oct. 31	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul>
	Nov. 2	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Kant, The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative</li> <li>• FE The Kantian Perspective: Fairness and Justice</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review questions for FE ch. 11 1-3 and EL Kant 1, 2, 3, 5</li> </ul>
Week 11	Nov. 7	<b>Second midterm test</b>	
	Nov. 9	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FE The Kantian Perspective: Autonomy and Respect</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Dershowitz, Should the Ticking Time Bomb Terrorist Be Tortured?</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion questions for FE ch. FE</li> </ul>
Week 12	Nov. 14	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Norcross, Puppies, Pigs and People</li> <li>• FE The Social Contract Tradition, Ch.s 13 and 14 both</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review questions for FE ch. 13 2 and 4 and for ch. 14 1, 2, 5</li> <li>• Fishbowl group 7</li> </ul>
	Nov. 16	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul>
Week 13	Nov. 21	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Ross, What Makes Right Acts Right?</li> <li>• FE Ethical Pluralism: Prima Facie Duties and Ethical Particularism</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review questions for FE ch. 16 1, 3, 4</li> </ul>
	Nov. 23	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishbowl group 8</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 5</b>	<b>Metaethics</b>		
		Focus questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isn't ethics subjective?</li> <li>• Are any moral judgments true?</li> </ul>
Week 14	Nov. 28	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Gensler, Cultural Relativism</li> <li>• FE Ethical Relativism</li> <li>• PT 4.14, 4.15</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review questions for FE Ethical Relativism</li> </ul>
	Nov. 30	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Hume, Moral Distinctions Not Derived from Reason</li> <li>• FE Moral Nihilism</li> <li>• PT 2.4, 5.4</li> </ul>
		Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review questions for EL Hume</li> <li>• Fishbowl group 9</li> </ul>
Week 15	Dec. 5	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EL Enoch, Why I Am an Objectivist about Ethics</li> <li>• FE Ten Arguments Against Moral Objectivity</li> </ul>

		Due	• Review questions for EL Enoch
	Dec. 7	Literature	TBD
		Due	TBD
Exam wk	Dec. 14		12:45-2:45pm in 100 Berkey