

PHL309: MORAL PHILOSOPHY

(Winter 2018)



Class meetings Mondays & Wednesdays 2:00-3:50, building 5, room 124

Instructor Michael Cholbi

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Office hours, winter 2018 Mondays 1:00-2:00, Wednesdays 9:00-11:30 (building 1, room 319B)

Please do not hesitate to contact me to set up an appointment outside of these hours if necessary.

Description

Moral thought and judgment are ubiquitous parts of life. All of us accept, assert, and interrogate moral claims. These include claims about the moral qualities of actions (that they are right or wrong, say), policies or principles (that they are fair or unfair, etc.), and persons (that they acted well or badly or that they have good or bad moral character). Moral philosophy is the intellectual endeavor in which we attempt to systematize, analyze, and rationally evaluate these claims. For example, what (if anything) explains what makes various actions wrong? Can morality's requirements be captured by a rule (or set of rules)? What can morality legitimately ask of us? What is the relationship between moral character and right action?

Such questions are the province of *moral theory*, and it is through the study of three prominent traditions in moral theory that our inquiry in this course will be conducted. These traditions include consequentialism (utilitarianism more specifically), Kantianism, and virtue theory. We will elaborate and critically analyze these theories in light of both moral theory's theoretical aim (to identify the underlying features of acts, persons, and values that make them right or wrong, good or bad, etc.) and its practical aim (to identify a procedure that can properly guide moral deliberation and decision making). We will also strive to identify each theory's main advantages, the objections commonly leveled at them, as well as some characteristic replies to these objections provided by the theories' defenders.

Course and program learning objectives

By the conclusion of the course, students should be able to

1. Explain the goals and motivations of philosophical theorizing about morality
2. Articulate the principal features of several widely discussed philosophical theories of morality
3. Critically analyze these theories, identifying their strengths and weaknesses in meeting the theoretical and practical aims of moral theories
4. Describe how these theories can be applied to evaluate the morality of actions, policies, or individuals

The Philosophy Department has as its learning outcomes for its programs that they will improve students' abilities in the following areas:

- [1] **Skills in Reasoning:** Ability to identify theses in other's work and one's own; identify and evaluate reasons relevant to theses; identify and evaluate background concepts, distinction, and assumptions; identify and evaluate objections; charity in interpreting others' positions.
- [2] **Skills in Written and Oral Presentation:** Clarity in overall organization of ideas; clarity at sentence/paragraph level of expression.
- [3] **Skills in Research:** Ability to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources; ability to work with major research resources in philosophy; ability to work with library resources.
- [4] **Breadth of Content:** Familiarity with development of historical Western tradition; familiarity with various branches of philosophical investigation; familiarity with critical analyses of Western tradition; familiarity with variety of philosophical traditions or approaches.
- [5] **Depth of Content:** Ability to make connections across branches of philosophical investigation; proficiency with major primary sources; ability to produce creative work.

In addition, I have established two general learning goals I hope to focus on in this course:

1. **Ability to think abstractly, systematically, and theoretically:** Ability to compare and contrast phenomena, ability to state principles relevant to some phenomenon, ability to apply standards for evaluations to general principles or claims.
2. **Ability to respond thoughtfully and constructively to critical feedback:** Ability to see one's work as 'in progress', ability to treat negative feedback as friendly rather than adversarial, capacity to notice patterns in the critical feedback one receives, habit of planning how to incorporate critical feedback into subsequent work.

Prerequisites

PHL309 is an upper-division course required of all Philosophy majors at the university.

- While there are no formal prerequisites, successfully completing some combination of Introduction to Philosophy, Critical Thinking, Ethical Problems in Contemporary Life, Logic I, and the Philosophy Proseminar would certainly be optimal preparation.
- Non-majors are of course welcome to enroll. However, the course will be taught at a level of rigor and sophistication that assumes students have some background in the main techniques and problems of philosophy. This is not an introductory philosophy course, and as such, no special efforts will be taken to provide this background to those who lack it.

I encourage students who are concerned about their readiness for this course to discuss this matter with me as soon as possible.

Expectations of You (and Your Instructor)

Reading Philosophical readings are dense and difficult. I *assume* that you will arrive at each class meeting having made a sustained, sincere, and serious attempt to read and comprehend fully the assigned material. I *do not assume that you do comprehend that material fully* — in fact, I assume that you will have questions about the assigned material, questions that I am happy to address during class, by e-mail, or face to face. My expectation is that once we have the opportunity to discuss the assigned readings in class you will return to re-read materials with which you struggled. I encourage you to consult the ‘Tips on reading philosophy’ available in the ‘Assigned readings’ area of Blackboard for further guidance.

Workload To give you a sense of the expectations associated with this course: Recent research indicates that students most effectively develop the skills of critical thinking, logical reasoning, etc., in courses that require at least 40 pages of reading per week and at 15 pages (about 6,000 words) of writing per term. This course will reflect such expectations. Furthermore, research indicates full-time students (those who spend 12 or more hours per week in the classroom) are maximally successful when they spend about 2 hours preparing and studying for every one hour they spend in the classroom. That means that for this class (which meets about 3.5 hours per week), you should set aside about 7 hours per week to prepare and study — about one hour per day.

Respect This is a course in moral philosophy and one of the fundamental moral values upon which this course is based is respect. I will treat you with respect in this course, and expect you to do the same for me and your fellow students. What this means in practice is (at a minimum):

For me:

1. I will arrive on time and prepared for each class meeting scheduled on the syllabus.
2. I will adhere to the schedule of readings, assignments, etc., on our class syllabus. If for some reason changes to the syllabus are necessary, I will give you prior notification of these changes.
3. I will take student questions and comments seriously and attempt to address them as helpfully as I can within the constraints of class time.
4. I will keep my scheduled office hours, or provide advance notice if this is not possible.
5. I will grade and provide feedback on written assignments within a reasonable time (nearly always 5-7 days) and provide you an adequate explanation of your grade.
6. I will treat you as an adult. Part of what this means is taking your philosophical opinions seriously. Taking your opinions seriously is not equivalent to endorsing them. I will assume that you have put some thought into your opinions, and so I will hold you accountable (both positively and negatively) for them, praising you and challenging you as appropriate.
7. I will respect your time and not give you “busy work” that does not enable you to progress toward meeting the course learning objectives.
8. I will respond to your communications in a timely manner in light of my other commitments and responsibilities.

9. I will welcome, acknowledge, thoughtfully consider, and (when feasible and warranted) act on feedback that you provide me concerning how the course can be changed to better meet your needs and better help you learn.

For you:

1. You will respect the opinions of your classmates, and respond to them with seriousness, courtesy, and charity.
2. You will show up to class regularly and on time. You recognize and take responsibility for the obstacles that erratic attendance presents for your own personal academic success.
3. You will read the material assigned for class prior to the meeting at which we are scheduled to discuss it.
4. You will take responsibility for turning in assigned work on time.
5. You will respect my time and the time of your fellow students by helping to make our time together as productive and conducive to learning as possible.

Your electronic devices

There will be some in-class activities for which an Internet-enabled device (phone, laptop, tablet, etc.) will be extremely valuable. Outside of these activities, however, I generally discourage the use of such devices in class. There is ample evidence that (a) the use of such electronic devices is incompatible with your own learning (see <http://bit.ly/1ihJUxL>), (b) nearly everyone overestimates their ability to ‘multitask’ with electronic devices (see <http://bit.ly/1ScqdoY>), and (c) the use of such devices is distracting to others and disrupts their efforts to learn (see <http://bit.ly/1Hf0ZzC>). I encourage you to keep these considerations in mind as you decide whether use of your devices is maximally conducive to the learning of yourself and others.

Texts

We will engage in careful reading of our texts in class, so **please have them available**.

Required:

- Cahn and Forcehimes, *Principles of Moral Philosophy*. (**NOTE:** This textbook is accompanied by a set of online student resources (quizzes, discussion questions, etc.), available at <http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780190491000/stu/>. I will not be making explicit use of these, but I would welcome your using them to check your understanding and comprehension of the readings in this textbook.)
- Other required readings will be made available in class or via Blackboard. I recommend printing a copy of the Blackboard readings and placing these in a 3-ring binder.

Learning groups

Students in this course will be randomly assigned to 4-person learning groups. These groups will be used for various in-class activities. You are also encouraged to use these groups to exchange drafts of papers, study for exams, etc.

Evaluation and requirements

Your grade for this course will be determined by the following six components:

1. **PARTICIPATION:** Your grade for this component will be determined by the three other members of your learning group. They will *anonymously* evaluate you based on your level of participation, the relevance of your contributions, your preparedness to participate in class

activities, and your engagement with others in the class. Students who either (a) do not complete their evaluations of other students, or (b) provide evaluations that (in your instructor's estimation) are lacking in detail will receive a zero for this component. (Note that other students failing to evaluate your participation will not affect your grade for this component.) Your grade for this component will be determined by averaging the grades given to you by your student evaluators (however, I reserve the right to modify these grades in cases where there is a significant divergence, i.e., more than a full grade level difference between the grades). These evaluations are due to me via Blackboard by Monday, March 12, 10 am. Please note that any attempts to identify or collude with your evaluators will result in a zero for this grade component. **(10% of quarter grade)**

2. **THEORY EVALUATION MATRIX:** This assignment, now available on Blackboard, requires you to evaluate the three families of theories we investigate in this course according to six standards. The assignment is due via Blackboard by Wednesday March 14, 10:00 am. **(14% of quarter grade)**
3. **THEORY APPLICATION PROJECT:** This assignment, now available on Blackboard, requires you to consider how the three families of theories would approach and attempt to address an ethical issue that you identify. The assignment is due via Blackboard by Wednesday March 14, 10:00 am. **(14% of quarter grade)**
4. **DEPTH OF KNOWLEDGE:** Your depth of knowledge is evaluated based on a **term paper (30% of quarter grade)** The requirements and process for this paper are as follows:
 - (a) Your paper must provide a reasoned defense of a distinct substantive thesis in moral theory. For further details on what is expected in these papers, see 'Paper requirements and resources' on Blackboard. That area contains a number of other documents to help you in developing your papers, including examples of past student papers. All papers are to be submitted via Blackboard.
 - (b) Please note that you may submit a draft paper at any time during the term. Drafts submitted by 10 am, Thursday, March 15, will receive an evaluation rubric. Drafts submitted by 10 am, Tuesday, March 6, will receive an evaluation rubric as well as written feedback. You are also welcome to discuss your papers with me during office hours; however, I won't provide feedback on drafts that are not submitted other than through Blackboard.
 - (c) In order to receive a grade for your term paper, you are required to give a 6-minute oral presentation. The audience for your presentation will be your instructor and three other students. These presentations will occur on Monday, March 12, and Tuesday, March 13. Additional details about the schedule of presentations, as well as the expectations for these presentations, will be provided in mid-February.
 - (d) Final papers, to be revised in light of feedback from your oral presentation, will be due via Blackboard by Friday March 16, 10 am.

One way students improve their writing is by seeing others' writing and the feedback provided on it. To that end, I have made available via Blackboard several strong papers from past quarters so that other students can view them. I will also post papers from this quarter as I receive them. *These papers will be anonymized.* However, if you **decline** to have your work made available to other students, please notify me by e-mail by January 8.

5. BREADTH OF KNOWLEDGE:

Your breadth of knowledge will be evaluated based on the *unit exams*, which are now available via Blackboard. Each unit exam addresses one of the three theoretical traditions we are addressing in this course. You may take these exams up to *three times*, but your grade for this component will be calculated by summing the scores of your *last attempt* for each exam. A grading scale for the unit exams is available on Blackboard. The exams will be available until Wednesday, March 14, 8:00 pm. (30% of quarter grade) Please note that there will be *review sessions* for each of our theory units; check the schedule below for dates and times.

6. SELF-EVALUATION: You are required to submit a self-evaluation. More details about this will be provided later, but in the self-evaluation, you will describe your progress in meeting the course learning objectives and (if you so desire) argue for the grade you believe you should receive for the course. The self-evaluation will be graded pass/fail, and will be due Friday, March 16, 5 pm, via Blackboard. (2% of quarter grade)

- If *extraordinary* circumstances arise that make it unusually difficult for you to meet the class requirements, please contact me so we can discuss the possibility of alternative arrangements.

Electronic resources

We will be using Blackboard (<https://blackboard.cpp.edu>) in support of the in-class activities in this course. In order to use Blackboard, you will need to know your university Intranet ID and password. You should be checking the Blackboard site several times weekly for updates on course activities, etc. We will also make use in class of an online tool PollEverywhere. I would encourage you to visit the site to familiarize yourself with how it works.

Varia

- Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be addressed according to Cal Poly policies, available at <http://www.cpp.edu/~studentconduct/academic-integrity-resources/academic-integrity.shtml>.
- The copyright for these course materials is held by the instructor; any attempt to distribute or sell this material without instructor authorization is in violation of that copyright.
- Students with learning or other disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss their needs and possible accommodations.

Schedule of practices and readings

Please complete the readings for the class meetings listed below *before* the meeting.

- PMP refers to *Principles of Moral Philosophy*
- Bb refers to materials made available on Blackboard.
- Unless specific page numbers are indicated, you are responsible for the entirety of the assigned article or source.

SCHEDULE OF COURSE TOPICS, EVENTS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

<i>DATE</i>	<i>TOPICS</i>	<i>ASSIGNED READINGS</i>
We Jan 3	Course introduction: Why moral philosophy?; The aims and aspirations of moral theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “How to Succeed in PHL 309” (Bb) • Timmons, “Introduction to Moral Theory” (Bb)
Mo Jan 8	Introduction to Utilitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selections from Utilitarianism Applications Bin (details provided in class We Jan 3)
We Jan 10	Introduction to Kantianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selections from Kantianism Applications Bin (details provided in class Mo Jan 8)
Mo Jan 15	No class meeting — university holiday	<p><i>Recommended activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Get a jumpstart on the theory application assignment</i> • <i>Read ahead on utilitarianism and Kantianism, with possible term paper topics in mind</i> • <i>See if attending the unit review sessions fit your schedule (see below)</i>
We Jan 17	Introduction to virtue ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selections from Virtue Ethics Applications Bin (details provided in class We Jan 10)
Mo Jan 22	Utilitarianism: The debate over well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eggleston, “Utilitarianism,” pp. 452-56 (Bb) • Bentham, <i>Introduction to the Principle of Morals and Legislation</i>, ch. 1 (PMP 189-191) • Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> through PMP 201 • Kagan, “Well-being” (PMP 253-60) or Shaw, <i>Contemporary Ethics</i>, ch. 2 (Bb)
We Jan 24	Defending consequentialism; Cataloging the classic objections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (PMP 206-211, 215-18) • Eggleston, “Utilitarianism,” pp. 456-57 (Bb) • LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (Bb) • Shaw, <i>Contemporary Ethics</i>, ch. 4 (Bb)
Mo Jan 29	No class meeting — instructor away	<p><i>Recommended activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Continue to work on the theory application assignment</i> • <i>Keep homing in on paper topics</i> • <i>See if attending the unit review sessions fit your schedule (see below)</i>
We Jan 31	No class meeting — instructor away	<p><i>Recommended activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Continue to work on the theory application assignment</i> • <i>Keep homing in on paper topics</i> • <i>See if attending the unit review sessions fit your schedule (see below)</i>
Mo Feb 5	The contemporary debate over consequentialism:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Williams, “A critique of utilitarianism” (PMP 271-79)

	Integrity, separateness of persons, and demandingness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lomasky, “A refutation [sic] of utilitarianism,” (Bb) pp. 267-76
We Feb 7	Rule-consequentialism; Consequentialism wrap up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eggleston, “Utilitarianism,” pp. 453-54 (Bb) • Lomasky, “A refutation [sic] of utilitarianism,” (Bb) pp. 276-77 • Smart, “Extreme and restricted utilitarianism” (Bb)
Fri Feb 9	UTILITARIANISM UNIT REVIEW SESSION: 9:30-11:00, 1-319B	
Mo Feb 12	Kant and the search for the Categorical Imperative UTILITARIANISM UNIT REVIEW SESSION: 4:00-5:30, 1-319B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> (PMP 90-106) • Glasgow, “Kant’s principle of universal law,” pp. 152-156 (Bb) • Foot, “Morality as a system of hypothetical imperatives” (PMP 541-547)
We Feb 14	Kant’s Formula of Universal Law (elaboration and criticisms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, “Kantianism” (PMP 127-141) • Glasgow, “Kant’s principle of universal law,” pp. 156-165 (Bb) • Kleingeld, “Contradiction and Kant’s formula of universal law” (Bb)
Mo Feb 19	Kant’s Formula of Humanity (elaboration and criticisms); Kant’s system of duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> (PMP 106-112) • Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Humanity” (PMP 161-176) • Baron, “Kantian ethics” (Bb)
We Feb 21	Other challenges for Kantian ethics; Introducing virtue ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagan, “Kantianism” (PMP 141-144) • Annas, “Virtue ethics” (PMP 372-381)
Fr Feb 23	KANTIANISM UNIT REVIEW SESSION: 9:30-11:00, 1-319B	
Mo Feb 26	Aristotle’s virtue ethics KANTIANISM UNIT REVIEW SESSION: 4:00-5:30, 1-319B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (PMP 353-364)
We Feb 28	Right action and action guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Louden, “Some vices of virtue ethics” (Bb) • Hursthouse, “Normative virtue ethics” (PMP 382-391) • Johnson, “Virtue and right” (PMP 392-402)
Mo Mar 5	Relativism and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nussbaum, “Non-relative virtues” (Bb) • Appiah, “The case against character”

We Mar 7	Course carousel: What should we believe about morality? VIRTUE ETHICS UNIT REVIEW SESSION: 4:00-5:30, 1-319B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakey, “Why moral education should involve moral philosophy” (Bb) • Steinbauer, “Ethics versus morality” (Bb) • Garlikov, “The point of studying ethics” (Bb)
Fri Mar 9	VIRTUE ETHICS UNIT REVIEW SESSION: 9:30-11:00, 1-319B	
Mo Mar 12, 10 am	Participation evaluations due via Bb	
Mo Mar 12, 1:00-6:00	Student oral presentations	
Tu Mar 13, 9:00-2:00	Student oral presentations	
We Mar 14, 10 am	Theory matrix evaluation and theory application project due via Bb	
We Mar 14, 8 pm	Last availability for unit exams	
Friday Mar 16, 10 am	Deadline for paper submissions	
Fr, Mar 16, 5 pm	Self-evaluations due via Bb	