Spring 2-1-2005

PHIL 200E.01: Ethics - The Great Traditions

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Recommended Citation

https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi/10117
1. Course Description:

This class will familiarize students with four of the most influential ethical theorists in the western ethical tradition. The reading for the course is made up of texts by Aristotle, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill. We will be reading primary sources rather than commentaries on these authors. Be warned that some of this reading is extremely difficult! Often I may have to point you in the direction of the key ideas since it is easy to miss them first time around. But these texts are considered “classics” for good reason. The ideas they contain are important. They have stood the test of time and still largely define the territory in western ethical theory. A careful study of these influential thinkers, if you are prepared to put in the work, can be extremely rewarding.

2. General Expectations:

I expect you to come to class having carefully read the material assigned for that day. Each day during lecture, I will seek student opinions on various topics and may pick out individuals to answer certain questions. While a class this size is not primarily a discussion class, please be prepared to interact where possible and bring your own questions and concerns to the floor. I also expect you to contribute positively to the community of learning to which we will all belong this semester. This means being respectful and kind towards those around you in the class, including myself. I expect you to attend class, to not disrupt those around you unnecessarily, and to stay for the duration of the class. In return, I will put every effort into bringing the material alive and making this course interesting.

I also expect complete academic integrity at every point of the course. Any academic dishonesty will lead to an automatic F grade in the class and a meeting with the appropriate academic authorities.
3. Texts:


4. Reading Assignments (*provisional*):

**Week 1** (Jan 25, 27) INTRODUCTION AND ARISTOTLE (xiii, 1-4, 7-8).

**Week 2** (Feb 1, 3) ARISTOTLE: The Highest Good and Human Function (8-18, 18-25).

**Week 3** (Feb 8, 10) ARISTOTLE: Virtues of Character and Thought (25-30, 40-66, 67-69, 86).

**Week 4** (Feb 15, 17) ARISTOTLE: Friendship, Pleasure, Happiness (119-130, 148-150, 153-165). ***Test 1***

**Week 5** (Feb 22, 24) HUME: Reason and Sentiment, Subjectivism and Egoism. Appendix (82-88, 88-93).

**Week 6** (Mar 1, 3) HUME: Sentiment, Benevolence, Utility (13-16, 16-26, 38-51)

**Week 7** (Mar 8, 10) HUME: Catalogue of Qualities (51-72, 2-6)

**Week 8** (Mar 15, 17) REVISION AND ***Test 2***

     SPRING BREAK

**Week 9** (Mar 29, 31) KANT: *A priori ethics*, Universal law, Lying (1-5, 7-17, 63-67)

**Week 10** (April 5, 7) KANT: Categorical Imperatives (19-32, 32-44)

**Week 11** (April 12, 14) KANT: Autonomy and Heteronomy (44-48) ***Test 3***

**Week 12** (April 19, 21) MILL: The Principle of Utility and Mill’s responses to objections (vii-viii, 1-5, 6-26)
Week 13 (April 26, 28) MILL: Proof and Ultimate Sanction of the Principle of Utility (27-34, 35-41)

Week 14 (May 3, 5) MILL: Capital Punishment and objections to Utilitarianism (65-71, ix-xiv) AND REVISION

FINAL EXAM. (Test 4)
Tuesday May 10th (1.10 – 3.10pm)

5. Course Requirements:

a) There will be four tests, one after the discussion of each theorist. Each test will involve written answers to a number of questions on the recent reading and lecture. Tests 1 and 3 will be 30 minutes long and will each focus on one theorist (15 points each). Tests 2 and 4 will be one hour in duration and will cover the two most recent theorists. Tests 2 and 4 will include a question that asks for comparisons between those two theorists (25 points each).

b) Attendance, participation, and scholarly attitude will account for 10% of your grade (10 points). This part of the grade will be measured in part by unannounced in-class quizzes which will require no preparation on your part other than to be up-to-date with the reading and to be thinking about the lecture. These quizzes can not be made up. If there is some legitimate reason why you need to miss a class, please let me know by e-mail before class if possible. If you cannot let me know before class, please e-mail me after class and bring some form of verification for your absence to the next class.

c) Outside talk (10 points). Throughout the semester there are numerous talks and events on campus that touch on ethical issues. You are required to attend at least one of these talks for this class. You have complete freedom as to which talk you choose to attend. However, I require that you turn in a one page outline of the talk that includes a discussion of the position one of our ethical theorists (Aristotle, Hume, Kant, or Mill) would take on the issue.

6. Additional remarks:

I encourage you to use both my own and the Teaching Assistant’s office hours. We are available to help you with this class. It is a good idea to use us as much as you need. Five or ten minutes can sometimes really help to clarify things.
If you have any physical or learning disability that may make it hard for you to complete the requirements of this class, let me know right away and I will be happy to make appropriate accommodating arrangements.

Finally, I ask you to contribute to the best learning environment possible as we share time together this semester. A large class like this may not be the ideal way to study philosophy. However, with your help, we can make this course challenging, interesting, and – I hope – useful to you in your intellectual development.