

Moral Philosophy

Syllabus Précis
(Temple, Fall 2007)

Instructor: Dr. Aaron Smuts

Description

The goal of this course is to introduce students to the central areas of moral philosophy. We will engage with classic writings from figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant, and Mill by reading primary sources and examining contemporary articles engaged with the problems presented in the classic text. One of our aims is to understand the historical roots of the major issues discussed in contemporary ethical theory. Students will gain an understanding of utilitarian, deontological, and virtue-based normative ethical theories. In addition, moving beyond the traditional scope of similar courses, we will explore issues in meta-ethics, axiology, and moral psychology. Questions that will be addressed include: What makes an action morally right? Why should I be moral? Can morality be grounded in religion? Do moral claims state facts and if so can they be true? What constitutes a good life?

Texts

1. Russ Shafer-Landau, editor. *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* (Blackwell; 2007).

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Ethics

Topic I: Value

Week 2: Hedonism — “Introduction” (pp. 281-285); John Stuart Mill, “Hedonism”; Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine”

Week 3: Hedonism and Desire Satisfaction — Fred Feldman, “The Good Life: A Defense of Attitudinal Hedonism”; James Griffin, “The Informed Desire Account”

Week 4: Lives and Worlds — Derek Parfit, “What Makes Someone's Life Go Best”; W. D. Ross, “What Things are Good?”

Topic II: Why be Moral?

Week 5: Egoism — “Introduction” (pp. 143-146); Plato, “The Immoralist's Challenge”; Lester Hunt, “Flourishing Egoism”

Week 6: Moral Rationalism — Readings: Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”; Russ Shafer-Landau, “Moral Rationalism”

Topic III: Status of Morality

Week 7: Anti-Realism — Readings: “Introduction” (pp. 3-8); David Hume, “Of the Influencing Motives of the Will” and “Moral Distinctions Not Derived from Reason”; J. L. Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values”.

Week 8: Realism — Readings: Russ Shafer-Landau, “Ethics as Philosophy: A Defense of Ethical Nonnaturalism”; Michael Smith, “Realism”

Topic IV: Ethics and Religion

Week 9: “Introduction” (pp. 237-240); Plato, “Euthyphro”; Robert Adams “A New Divine Command Theory”; Erik Wielenberg, “God and Morality”

Topic V: Normative Ethical Theories

Week 10: Consequentialism — “Introduction” (pp. 453-457); John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism; R. M. Hare, “What is Wrong with Slavery?”

Week 11: Rule Consequentialism — J. J. C. Smart, “Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism”; Brad Hooker, “Rule-Consequentialism”

Week 12: Deontology — “Introduction” (pp. 521-525); Immanuel Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals; Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Killing, Letting Dies, and the Trolley Problem”

Week 13: Virtue Ethics — Readings: “Introduction” (pp. 663-667); Aristotle, “The Nature of Virtue”; Martha Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach”