

Introduction to Ethics

Professor: Paul Forrester

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Office Hours: Before or after class, or by appointment.

Dates: Session A, May 29 - June 30, 2023

Course Mode: Online

Meeting Times: MW 1.00-4.15

Distributional Requirements: Humanities

I. Course Description

The aim of this course is to familiarize students with some of the basic debates in theoretical ethics, with an eye to how these debates bear on applied contexts. No previous experience in philosophy is required. Among the topics we will discuss are the following:

- The nature of well-being and what it is to lead a good life.
- The distinction between the right and the good.
- Standard arguments for and against the three main ethical theories: consequentialism, deontology and virtue ethics.
- The existence, nature and limits of rights to life, property and self-defense.
- The moral obligations of individuals, businesses and states.

Students can expect to leave the course with a good understanding of these topics. Equally important, students will develop their reasoning, writing and communication skills throughout the course.

Each session will be divided into three 55-minute chunks, with two 10 minute breaks in between. This will give us a chance to break up a very long course meeting. Usually, in the first section, I will lecture about the topic, in the second section, you will be broken up into smaller groups to debate a topic, and in the third, we will have a discussion together. Students are encouraged to email me if they would like to set up a time to meet outside of class.

II. Course Structure

Assignments

There are five types of assignments for this course.

1. **Reading Responses (15% of grade)**: 24 hours before the start of each class, the student will submit a response to the readings of less than 150 words. This should not summarize the readings, but rather, the student should ask critical questions about the readings or raise an objection to what the author has argued. These should be sent to my email: paul.forrester@yale.edu.
2. **Attendance and Participation (10% of grade)**: There are only 10 sessions in this course, so students are expected to attend and participate in each session. Students should avoid other distractions while in class and give full attention to lecture and discussion.
3. **Paper 1: (20% of grade)**: the student will write a 1,500 word paper on a pre-assigned prompt. This paper is due by 11:59pm on June 6.
4. **Paper 2: (30% of grade)**: the student will write a 2,500 word paper on a pre-assigned prompt. This paper is due by the start of class on June 26.

5. Final Exam (**25% of grade**): We will have an in class final exam during the last session. I will release 8 possible essay questions and students will choose 4, giving students about 45 minutes to write each essay. The exam is open book and open notes.

Readings

All readings will be made available through canvas, including the following textbook:

- The Routledge Companion to Ethics

III. Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Well-being

Class 1: Three theories of well-being

- Chapter 54 (Heathwood)
- Selection from Nozick “Anarchy, State and Utopia” on the experience machine.
- Parfit *Reasons and Persons* Appendix I “What makes someone’s life go best?”

Class 2: Advanced papers on well-being

- Heathwood: “Desire satisfactionism and Hedonism”
- SKIM: Hurka: “The Parallel Goods of Knowledge and Achievement”

Week 2: Consequentialism

Class 3: The right and the good; consequentialism

- Mill “Utilitarianism”

Class 4: Evaluating consequentialism

- Smart and Williams “Utilitarianism: For and Against”

Week 3: Deontology and Virtue Ethics

Class 5: Deontology and Rights

- Chapter 56 (Campbell)
- Judith Thompson “A Defense of Abortion”

Class 6: Virtue, Contractualism, Natural Law

- Chapter 40 (Slote)
- Chapter 41 (Contractualism)
- Chapter 42 (Natural Law)

Week 4: Applications 1

Class 7: Property Rights and Distributive Justice

- Chapter 58 (Clayton on Distributive Justice)
- Rawls “A Theory of Justice” selections
- Nozick “Anarchy, State, and Utopia” pages 149 - 197
- Locke “Second Treatise of Government” Chapter 5

Class 8: Commodification

- Selections from Satz: “Why Some Things Should not be for Sale”

- Selection from Brennan and Jaworski: “Markets without Limits”
- John Mackey and Milton Friedman: “Rethinking the Social Responsibility of Business”

Week 5: Applications 2 and Final

Class 9: Animal Ethics

- What’s Wrong with Speciesism? (Kagan)
- Eating Animals the nice way (McMahan)
- The Moral Problem of Predation (McMahan)

Class 10: FINAL EXAM

- The exam questions will be distributed at the beginning of class.

IV. Resources

Resources on Writing Philosophy Papers

1. Jim Pryor’s Writing Guide: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

- This is in many ways the best guide to writing philosophy papers. We will discuss it in class.

2. Stephen Yablo’s Writing Guide: <http://www.mit.edu/~yablo/writing.html>

Yale Summer School Resources

<https://summer.yale.edu/>

Misc.

Academic Integrity

- You are expected to maintain high standards of academic integrity. One component of this is, of course, fully adequate acknowledgment and citation of sources used in your written work. For helpful guidelines and advice, see <http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism>

Accessibility and inclusion:

- If you have a documented learning disability, please let me know as soon as possible and contact the Student Accessibility Services to make sure your needs are being met. Here is the website of the office of student accessibility: <https://sas.yale.edu/>
- In this course I aim to welcome diverse perspectives on the course’s readings and topics. Our primary goal in each meeting will be to join with students in creating an open and inclusive environment for the pursuit of doing good philosophy together. Here is the website of the diversity and inclusion office: <https://your.yale.edu/community/diversity-inclusion/office-diversity-and-inclusion>