

Ethical Theory

Fall 2004

Phil 363

Objective

Our goal is to understand and evaluate the most important theories and ideas in ethics. We will begin with an examination of topics in metaethics, asking questions about the meaning of moral language, the justification of moral claims, and the connection between morality and self-interest. We will then consider the three main normative ethical theories: utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue theory. These are theories which purport to tell us what we should do or how we should be. We will critique these theories using historical and contemporary sources.

Contact information

Professor: Jeffrey Moriarty

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Office hours: Monday and Wednesday, 9:50 a.m. – 10:50 a.m., and by appointment.

Course webpage: <http://www.csulb.edu/~jmoriart>. Here you will find the syllabus, notes, paper topics, and study questions.

I may have reason to email you during the semester. Because I have access only to your CSULB email address, you must either occasionally check that address, or set it up so that it forwards messages to the account you normally use. You are responsible for making sure you receive any information I send via email.

Meeting times and places

2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m., Monday and Wednesday. LA1 – 304.

Required Text

Moral Philosophy, 2nd edition, ed. George Sher (Thomson).

Assignments

1. Two quizzes: 10% each.
2. Reading response: 5%.
3. Discussion paper: 15%. 2-3 pages.
4. Critical paper: 30%. 4-5 pages.
5. Final exam: 30%. This exam will be cumulative, but weighted toward material covered after the two quizzes.

Check the schedule of readings for assignment due dates. Assignments that are turned in after the end of class will count as one day late.

I recognize the difficulty of speaking up in class, but it is important to your learning experience. And doing so will be rewarded. Excellent participants will be given up to 3% extra credit toward their final grade.

Reading response

I will give you detailed instructions for the papers when we get closer to the due date. The reading response is a 1-page response to the reading on 9/15. Identify Ayer's main thesis, and offer one criticism of it.

Accommodation policy

It is the student's responsibility to notify me in advance of the need for accommodation of a disability.

Attendance policy

Attendance will not be taken, nor will it count as part of your final grade. Experience has shown, however, that good grades are strongly correlated with regular attendance.

Cheating policy

If you cheat on a test or plagiarize all or even part of a paper, I will give you an 'F' for the course. I am very serious and completely inflexible about this. If you do not know what cheating or plagiarism is, it is your responsibility to inform yourself. See the CSULB course catalog, p. 87, for definitions of these terms.

Late policy/missed exam policy

I recognize all and only the standard excuses for missing an exam and/or turning in a paper late, as provided for in the University's attendance policies. If you are unaware of what these are, it is your responsibility to inform yourself. Check out the CSULB course catalog, p. 75. Documentation for your excuse (e.g., a physician's note) will be required.

If you know you will be absent on the day of an exam, arrange to take it before that day. If you do not, and your absence is excused, you will be allowed to take a make-up exam. If your absence is unexcused, you will not be given a make-up.

For each day a paper is late, it will be marked off 4%. Note, days that class doesn't meet and weekend days are still days. So, if a paper is due on a Friday, and you turn it in on the following Monday, it will be marked off 12%.

Withdrawal policy

The university's withdrawal policy will be followed strictly. I have posted a copy of it here: <http://www.csulb.edu/~jmoriart/withdrawal.html>.

Readings

Below is a *tentative* list of readings. These are subject to change, depending on time and class interest. You are expected to have completed the relevant readings *before* class meets.

Part I: Metaethics

Week 1: Introduction

8/30: No reading.

9/1: Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism."

Week 2: Morality and self-interest

9/6: No class. Labor Day.

9/8: Gauthier, "Morality and Advantage."

Week 3: The meanings of moral terms

9/13: Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives."

9/15: Ayer, "The Emotive Theory of Ethics." **Reading response due.**

Week 4: Meaning and justification

9/20: Hare, "Freedom and Reason."

9/22: Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values."

Week 5: More on justification

9/27: Same.

9/29: **Quiz #1.**

Week 6: Defenses of objectivism

10/4: Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism."

10/6: Nagel, "Value."

Part II: Normative ethics

Week 7: Utilitarianism

10/11: Mill, "Utilitarianism."

10/13: Nozick, "The Experience Machine."

Week 8: Utilitarianism

10/18: Rawls, "Classical Utilitarianism."

10/20: Kagan, "Constraints." **Discussion paper due.**

Week 9: Utilitarianism

10/25: Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism."

10/27: Kant, "Morality and Rationality"

Week 10: Deontology

11/1: Same.

11/3: Nelson, "Kant's Moral Philosophy."

Week 11: Deontology
11/8: Rawls, "A Theory of Justice."
11/10: **Quiz #2.**

Part III: Critique

Week 12: Virtue theory
11/15: Wolf, "Moral Saints."
11/17: Aristotle, "The Nature of Moral Virtue," pp. 476 – 485.

Week 13: Virtue theory
11/22: Same.
11/24: No class. Thanksgiving is tomorrow.

Week 14: Virtue theory
11/29: Nietzsche, "Beyond Morality." **Critical paper due.**
12/1: Same.

Week 15: The good life
12/6: Epicurus, "The Good Life."
12/8: Summary and review.

Final exam: Monday, December 13th, 12:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.