

PHLB07-Happiness and Freedom-Introduction to Moral Philosophy

Instructor: Dr. Dustin Stokes
Section: PHLB07H3 LEC01; Fall Term
Lectures: M 9:00-11:00/W 9:00-10:00 BV264
Office: HW325
Office Hours: M 11-12/or by appointment
Contact: d.stokes@utoronto.ca

Course description

This an introductory course on moral philosophy. We will distribute our time across three sets of issues.

CHALLENGES TO MORALITY

Here we consider a number of questions that present a challenge to the view that there are moral truths: some facts about the right thing to do. What is the relationship between ethics and a belief in God? What if there is no God: does this mean there are no moral rights and wrongs? Different cultures have different ethical practices; does this imply that no one can be right or wrong? What is the nature of moral disagreement? Can we reconcile personal happiness with moral obligation?

NORMATIVE ETHICAL THEORIES

What is the appropriate constraint on moral action? That is, by what method do we decide what actions are right and wrong? Is it consequences of action that matter? Are there some rules that determine what we ought to do? Should we attempt to have a certain kind of (virtuous) character? What is our obligation to our society?

HOW DOES AN INDIVIDUAL LIVE A GOOD LIFE?

After considering all of the above, we will spend the final few weeks of the course questioning how an individual person—you!—can live happily while still attempting to do the right thing. How selfless must we be? What is the role of friendship in the ethical life? And how much of what we do is really under our control, rather than just a matter of luck?

Course materials

Course readings:

- *Exploring Ethics*, Steven M. Cahn (Oxford University Press 2009)
- All remaining readings will be available in PDF on the course blackboard website.

The portal may be accessed via:

<https://portal.utoronto.ca/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp> (You must login using your UTORid and password. Then find our course: PHLB07 Happiness and Freedom. Then click 'Content', then 'Course readings').

All remaining course materials are available online via the course blackboard site. Lecture materials, essay assignments, announcements, and other information will also be made available on this site. Please check the site regularly.

Assignments/Requirements:

30% Short paper 1	DUE 20 OCT (Questions assigned 13 Oct)
30% Short paper 2	DUE 17 NOV (Questions assigned 10 Nov)
40% Final exam	TBA

The short papers might also be thought of as take-home exams. You will be given a short list of questions, from which you will choose and respond to one. The questions will be distributed in class, and the papers are to be submitted the following week at the start of class. Your responses should be concise and to the point, and should be approximately 750-1250 words.

The final exam will be comprehensive and essay-style, but like the short papers, you will have choices between questions. More details later.

General:

This is a writing intensive course. All of the work/examinations will be written. Your papers will be graded not only on content, but also on grammar, writing mechanics, style, etc. The UTSC writing centre can be found online here:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/~ctl/twc/index.html>

I also recommend this for writing philosophy papers:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. You should familiarize yourself with the university guidelines and policies on academic integrity:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/resourcesforstudents.html>

Late work/exams are allowed only with the submission of an official University of Toronto Medical Certificate or a letter from your registrar (or other university authority).

Unexcused late work will NOT be accepted. No exceptions.

If you require special test-taking or note-taking accommodations, please see me.

Reading/lecture schedule:

*You are expected to have readings completed **prior** to the lecture date for the respective readings.

**EE=Reading in Cahn's *Exploring ethics*

@=Reading online on course blackboard site

@@=Reading in H. Gensler, *Ethics, A Contemporary Introduction*, Routledge
(available in electronic format though UT libraries)

M 13/09 *Introduction*

W 15/09 *Ethical questions and why they matter: Starting assumptions*

CHALLENGES TO MORALITY

M 20/09 *Religion and the objectivity of moral value*

READ: Cahn, 'God and Morality'-EE

Plato, 'Euthyphro' - <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyphro.html>

W 22/09 **READ:** 'God and objective morality: A debate'-@

- M 27/09 *Culture and ethics*
READ: Benedict 'Defending cultural relativism'-@@
 Rachels, 'The challenge of cultural relativism'-EE
- W 29/09 *Challenges to ethical relativism cont.*
- M 04/10 *Anti-realism and subjectivism*
READ: Stevenson, 'The nature of ethical disagreement'-EE
 Hume readings-@
- W 06/10 *The truth value of moral judgements?*
READ: Mackie, 'The subjectivity of value'-@
- M 11/10 NO CLASS-THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY
- W 13/10 *Egoism, hedonism, and happiness*
READ: Cahn and Murphy, 'Happiness and immorality'-EE
 Nozick, 'The experience machine'-@

NORMATIVE ETHICAL THEORIES

- M 18/10 *Consequentialism*
READ: Mill, 'Utilitarianism'-EE
 JJC Smart, 'Defending Utilitarianism'-@@
- W 20/10 *Criticism of Utilitarianism*
READ: Williams, 'Against Utilitarianism'-@@
 SHORT PAPER 1 DUE
- M 25/10 *Deontological ethical theory*
READ: Kant, 'The categorical imperative'-EE
 O'Neill, 'Kantian approaches to some famine problems'-@
- W 27/10 *Further criticizing Kantian deontology*
READ: Nozick, 'The rationality of side constraints'-@
- M 01/11 *Aristotle's virtue theory*
READ: Aristotle, 'The Nature of Virtue'-EE
- W 03/11 *Contemporary virtue ethics*
READ: Slote, 'Agent-Based Virtue Ethics'-@
- M 08/11 *Justice and the social contract*
READ: Hobbes, 'The social contract'-EE
 Rawls, 'A theory of justice'-EE
- W 10/11 *Civil disobedience*
READ: M.L. King Jr., 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail'-EE

HOW DO WE LIVE A GOOD LIFE?

- M 15/11 *Altruism and personal happiness*
READ: Singer, 'Famine, affluence, and morality'-EE
 Arthur, 'World hunger and moral obligation...'-EE
- W 17/11 *How good should/can we be?*
READ: Wolf, 'Moral saints'-@
 SHORT PAPER 2 DUE
- M 22/11 *Moral theory and individual persons*
READ: Stocker, 'The schizophrenia of modern ethical theories'-@
- W 24/11 *Sympathy vs. duty*
READ: Bennett, 'The conscience of Huckleberry Finn'-@

M 29/11 *Free will and moral responsibility*
 READ: Nagel, 'Moral luck' -@
W 01/12 *Free will and moral responsibility cont.*

M 06/12 *Course summary*

Resources:

Many of the readings will be primary sources. Needless to say, much of this material will be challenging. You might find some of the following resources helpful.

-For introductory texts on ethical theory, try *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, R. Shafer-Landau (Oxford University Press 2009); *Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction*, H. Gensler (Routledge 1998).

-For general philosophy resources, I suggest both *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1999) ed. Audi, R. and *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1994) ed. Blackburn, S. Online, try the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu/>