

PHIL 102: Ethics

Summer 2017, 245 STB, 10-11:50 mtwrf

Instructor: Jon LaRochelle
Office Hours: Thursday 1-3p
Office: Susan Campbell 158
4 Credits

What is a good life? What makes a virtuous person? What are our responsibilities to others?

These are some basic questions of ethics. In this class, we will be thinking through these and related questions using historical and contemporary resources in philosophy. Ethics is concerned with both thought and conduct; so, we will be concerned with not only how we should *think* about the good, but what that means for what we should *do*!

As with any class on such a large topic, I've had to make choices about what to include and what not to include. There is way more to cover than we'll have time to get to in 4 weeks. *Please* feel free to follow up with me if there's a topic that really peaks your interest, or if you want to know more about what we *haven't* covered, and I would be happy to point you to other readings.

The course breaks into four week-long units.

The first week covers classic texts in ethics. We'll discuss the "big 3" schools of ethics: virtue, utilitarianism, and deontology.

The second week covers feminist ethics. We will discuss the relationship between feminism as a political project and moral theory, the challenges presented by feminist theorists to traditional moral theory, and care ethics as a substantive challenge and/or addition to the "big 3" discussed in the first week.

The third week will take a sustained look at Jane Addams's *Democracy and Social Ethics*. This unit will allow us the opportunity for more sustained engagement with *one* thinker, in contrast to the survey undertaken in the rest of the class. Lecture will provide some historical context so that we can engage the book *in its time and place*, rather than simply as an ahistorical ethical theory, and examine its continued relevance today.

The fourth week will turn to insurrectionist ethics. This unit pushes the boundaries of ethics fully into the political, exploring the ethical complexities of activism and resistance to oppression.

Texts

Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902/2002)
[All other texts will be available online]¹

¹ If the course materials present an undue financial burden for any reason, please let me know.

Class Format

The class will combine elements of discussion and lecture. Generally speaking, there will be a lecture the day *before* a given reading, providing context and preparing students to get as much as possible out of the (often challenging) readings. You will then be expected to post discussion questions to Canvas, as preparation for a discussion during the first half of class.

Learning Objectives

- 1) To develop an introductory understanding of ethics.
- 2) To improve critical thinking through engagement with challenging texts in philosophy.
- 3) To cultivate the ability to convey complex ideas in writing.

Assignments

- 1) Participation: 20%
- 2) First Paper: 20%
- 3) Second Paper: 20%
- 4) Third Paper: 20%
- 5) Final Paper: 20%

Attendance – You are allowed two absences, no questions asked. After that, each absence will result in a loss of 2 points on your final grade.

Participation – Discussion questions are due 9a before the class for which a reading is assigned, and should demonstrate careful intellectual engagement with the assigned reading. Questions that draw connections to other readings or to current events are especially encouraged. I will assign a participation grade of 0 (poor), 1 (good), or 2 (exemplary) on Canvas after class. The grade will be for your discussion question and class participation combined.

Papers – The papers will be 3-4 pages each, and engage some aspect of the week's readings. I will provide a prompt every Thursday in class and online, though students are encouraged to propose alternative topics during office hours after class on Thursday.

Grading

The course will follow the [Undergraduate Grading Rubric for the Philosophy Department](#).

Class Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction to Ethics

Monday – Introduction, In-class writing assignment

Tuesday – Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Books 1+2

Wednesday – Kant, “The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative”

Thursday – Mill, “What Utilitarianism Is”

Friday – Paper Workshop

Saturday -- **First Paper Due 5pm.**

Week 2 – Feminist Ethics

Monday – Young, “Five Faces of Oppression”

Tuesday – Holiday

Wednesday – Lindemann, “What is Feminist Ethics?”
Thursday – Gilligan, “Moral Orientation and Moral Development”
Held, “The Ethics of Care as Moral Theory” [supplemental]
Friday – Paper Workshop
Saturday -- **Second Paper Due 5pm.**

Week 3 – Democracy and Social Ethics

Monday – Addams, Introduction and Chapter 1
Tuesday – Addams, Chapters 2 and 3
Wednesday – Addams, Chapter 4
Thursday – Addams, Chapters 5 and 6
Friday – Paper Workshop
Saturday -- **Third Paper Due 5pm.**

Week 4 – Insurrectionist Ethics

Monday – Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”
Tuesday - MLK, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
Wednesday – Wells, “Southern Horrors”
Thursday - Alfred, “First Words” and “The Ethics of Courage”
Friday – Paper workshop and Final Discussion
Saturday – **Fourth Paper Due 5pm.**

Accessibility

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.