

ETHICAL THEORIES

University of Houston, Spring 2022
ILAS 4350-20719, Interdisciplinary Problem Solving

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Course Description

This capstone course helps students to achieve a meaningful synthesis of their three distinct minors. It is centered on substantive social “problem-solving” methodologies as applied through the particular minors completed by each student. Students will thus work on a research project that comprehensively integrates their chosen minors. This Senior Seminar is individually customized around each student’s specific program of study.

This semester, the course focuses on mainstream ethical theories, such as *objectivism*, *subjectivism*, *deontology*, *constructivism*, *Rawls’s theory of justice*, *virtue ethics*, *consequentialism* (including utilitarianism), and (applied) *theories of evil and injustice*.

Time, Place, Policy

The course will be offered as a hybrid class with face-to-face and asynchronous components. The face-to-face part will take place on Tuesday (2:30-4 pm) in the Old Science Building, room 116. The online platform for the asynchronous part of the class is *Blackboard Learn*. There, you can also find all the relevant information about the course, including the syllabus, readings, and links for paper submission. Finally, the teaching assistant (Dr. Tierney) organizes weekly office hours by appointment (in person or on Microsoft Teams) to clarify the class subjects. In addition, Dr. Oliva organizes two seminar meetings with students to review the class materials during the semester.

Requirements and Assessments

Part of the course consists of presenting, reading, and writing about the assigned readings. These readings will provide the background knowledge you require for the final research paper, representing the course’s real purpose. Below is the breakdown of your final grade.

(a) *20% Attendance and Readings’ Presentation* (the in-person part of the class) - Students must present (15-20 minutes) and discuss one assigned reading during the semester. The instructor will distribute this task to students in alphabetic order, freeing them to switch the assignments and dates. It is mandatory to communicate to the instructor any schedule change one week in advance. Further, students must attend two seminars (to be scheduled) with Dr. Oliva.

(b) *20% Short Papers on the Readings* (the asynchronous part of the class) - On Thursday, students must submit a brief paper (500 words) on the due class materials (see the schedule below). The link for these submissions is available on Blackboard Learn.

(c) *40% Research Paper* - Write a research paper (4000 words) on any ethical issue that comprehends your three minors. Dr. Tierney will supervise the preparation of your essay. Hence, make sure you keep in contact with him throughout the semester. Use Blackboard Learn for all your submissions. Late submissions will be penalized but accepted within one week. Detailed guidelines about how to write your final paper are available on Blackboard Learn.

(d) *20% Research Paper Presentation* - Each student will present the research paper before a committee at the end of the class period. The grade will be the average of all the committee members. Due to Covid-19, further instructions and changes might follow.

Writing Support

The UH Writing Center works with undergraduates enrolled in any course who would like help with their writing. Whether you need support with any part of your paper or check your final draft, the UH Writing Center can complement the class assistance with additional aid. To learn more about one-on-one consultations or to book an appointment, visit the [Writing-Center-Webpage](#). Here is the link for CLASS’s students: [UH-Writing-Center](#).

University Policies

You must comply with the university policies about ethics and academic honesty. See the following links and read their documents thoroughly: [Student-Conduct-Policy](#) and [Academic-Honesty](#). For counseling and psychological services, visit [CAPS](#). Finally, you can request special accommodations here: [Adjustments/Auxiliary-Aids](#). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the University of Houston has issued extraordinary policies listed at the end of the syllabus.

Schedule

Jan 18	Introduction to Ethics
Jan 20	Brink, "Introduction" to <i>Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics</i> (1-37)
Jan 25	Sayre-McCord, "Moral Realism" (Copp, 39-63)
Jan 27	Mackie, "Introduction: Outline of Hume's Theory" (1980: 1-6)
Feb 1	Mackie, "Morality not Based on Reason (<i>Treatise</i> III i 1)" (1980: 51-63)
Feb 3	Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values" (1990: 15-49)
Feb 8	Ayer, "Critique of Ethics and Theology" (102-19)
Feb 10	Wright, "The Foundations of Morals" (258-88)
Feb 15	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (29-33, 36-8, 46-52)
Feb 17	Korsgaard, "The Normative Question" (1-48)
Feb 22	Korsgaard, "Reflective Endorsement" (49-89)
Feb 24	Hill, "Kantian Normative Ethics" (Copp, 480-512)
Mar 1	O'Neill, <i>Constructivism in Ethics</i> (1989: 206-18)
Mar 3	Rawls, "Justice as Fairness" (1-19)
Mar 8	Rawls, "The Veil of Ignorance" (118-23)
Mar 10	Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right?" (16-47)
Mar 15-17	Spring Holiday
Mar 22	Aristotle, "Human Good" (3-19)
Mar 24	Shafer-Landau, "Virtue Ethics" (252-71)
Mar 29	Mill, "Utilitarianism" (115-40)
Mar 31	Crisp, "What Utilitarianism Is" (95-112)
Apr 5	Shafer-Landau, "Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions" (117-32)
Apr 7	Card, "Introduction: The Atrocity Paradigm" (3-26)
Apr 12	Kekes, "Introduction: The Problem and the Approach" (1-9)
Apr 14	Nietzsche, "The First Essay: Good and Evil, Good and Bad" (10-34)
Apr 19	Hatab, "The First Essay: Good and Evil, Good and Bad" (37-68)
Apr 21	Leiter, "A Commentary on the First Essay" (155-77)
Apr 26	Singer, "About Ethics" (1-15)
Apr 29	Singer, "Equality and Its Implications" (16-47)
Apr 30	Singer, "Climate Change" (216-37)

Bibliography

The course has no textbook. All the readings are available on Blackboard Learn. See below the complete bibliography for this course.

- Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*. Dover, 1952.
- David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Moral Realism." In David Copp (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2006: 39-63.
- Roger Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism*. Routledge, 1997.
- Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality. An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Thomas E. Hill Jr., "Kantian Normative Ethics." In David Copp (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2006: 480-504.
- John Kekes, *The Roots of Evil*. Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Yale University Press, 2002.
- Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*. Routledge, 2015.
- John L. Mackie, *Ethics. Inventing Right and Wrong*. Penguin, 1990.
- John L. Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*. Routledge, 1980.
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason. Explorations of Kant's Critical Philosophy*. Cambridge UP, 1989.
- William D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*. Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- John P. Wright, *Hume's A Treatise of Human Nature. An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.