

# PHIL 112 History of Ethics

**Instructor:** Dr. Christina Bellon  
**Class Meets:** TR 9:00-10:15; Mendocino 3009.  
**Office Hours:** M 11:00-1:00pm, W 11:00-noon; by appointment.  
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## **CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION**

This course consists of *an investigation of the main approaches to ethics in Western moral philosophy with an emphasis on Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant and Mill*. This course satisfies General Education Area C3: Introduction to the Humanities and the Advanced Study Writing Intensive requirements. This course is also approved for the Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies Program. Prerequisite: Passing score on the WPE/WPJ or ENGL 109W/109M (absolutely no exceptions).

## **Course Description**

This course offers students an overview and introduction to the philosophical study of ethics. Several questions will form the focus for the semester's study. These include: Are values relative to cultures, societies or individuals, or do some transcend these differences? Are values subjective and emotional or are they objective and rational? What is the relation between facts and values, values and principles or rules, and actions? How can we live good lives and be good people?

This course will offer to students some useful tools and insights, as well as the opportunity to apply these, to answer these questions as well as some questions of their own which may subsequently arise. Among these tools are a variety of theories, complete with their own terms and concepts, rankings of values, and list principles for right and good action. Among these, we will examine three of the major ethical theories: Utilitarianism (I ought to do what brings the greatest happiness), Duty Ethics (I ought to do my duty), and Virtue Ethics (I ought to do what makes me a good person).

Insofar as each of these theories offers us the means to answer those central questions of ethics, they also raise questions of their own: are my interests the only ones I should be concerned with? How do I figure the greatest happiness? What are my duties and where do they come from? What are my rights and where do they come from? What makes a person's character good or bad?

Please be aware this is a writing intensive course, and as such students will be required to engage in considerable writing exercises. Students should be prepared to write significant

amounts of cogent and clear text on often difficult conceptual material. As there are 4 required essays for this course, you should anticipate writing at least one essay every three weeks.

**Note!**

**This course contains a substantial on-line component via SacCT, including on-line assignments, discussions, and course material. This will require you to have regular and reliable access to computing facilities. It is also recommended that students regularly bring their laptops and assigned readings to all class meetings.**

**GENERAL EDUCATION CRITERIA**

This course satisfies General Education Requirements for Advanced Study by requiring students to spend considerable time writing and revising essays. *Students are required to write not less than 5,000 words of clear and logical prose.* See the following description of assignments for more detail.

This course satisfies General Education Requirements Area C3: Introduction to the Humanities in the following ways:

1. By (i) study of the major historical approaches to ethical questions and problems, from Ancient Greek and Roman to Enlightenment era traditions; and by (ii) offering students an opportunity to discuss (intellectually and personally) both the principal ethical ideas of these periods and their broader historical context (including the dominant ethical practices of the times), and by (iii) considering contemporary criticisms and development of these ideas, *fosters in students the development of an understanding of and an appreciation for the diversity of the human community and condition.*

2. While theoretical ethics often seem removed from matters of social and economic diversity, this course will emphasize the important connection between theory and experience by reflecting on the relation of ideas to historical events (not least of which are social, economic and political). For example, we will consider ancient Athenian customs and practices regarding women and slaves to better understand the appeal of Plato's and Aristotle's ethics; to add context to the enlightenment morality of Locke, Hume, Kant, and Mill we must understand the significant intellectual and social influence of European nationalism and colonization of Asia and Africa, as well as of the Americas. The bulk of the contemporary readings stem from concerns about gender, race/ethnicity, and class differences as they arise in moral practice and critical evaluation. In this and other ways, this course also *presents the contributions and perspectives of women, persons from various ethnic, socio-economic, and religious groups, gays and lesbians, and persons with disabilities.*

**TEXTS**

Readings are available on SacCT as pdf files (the whole set is available as a zip file for easier downloading). There is no text to purchase. Please be sure to bring your copies of the readings to each class period.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

ASPIRATION/OBJECTIVE	PRACTICAL GOALS	ASSESSMENT TOOLS
Develop competence in philosophical and ethical language and literature, especially the historical origins and transformations of ethical theories.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Accurately describe and distinguish between a variety of ethical concepts, theories, and positions;</li> <li>2. Express one's own ethical judgements in a cogent and clear fashion;</li> <li>3. Engage in cogent and respectful discussion of difficult and sometimes controversial issues;</li> <li>4. Analyse specific ethical arguments for consistency and credibility (including one's own).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pre and Post course open-ended question/assessment.</li> <li>2. Content in each of:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Essays</li> <li>b. on-line discussion</li> <li>c. in class discussion</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
Develop written and oral communication skills, especially as those are associated with argumentative writing and public speaking.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Writing competently in concise, precise and well developed logical style;</li> <li>2. Expression of a point of view through the formulation of a coherent and consistent argument;</li> <li>3. Presentation of an exposition of text in a coherent manner to an audience of peers.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Quality of the form (essay structure, logic) and mechanics (syntax, grammar) of each of:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. essays</li> <li>b. on-line discussion</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Substance, structure, and delivery of in-class and on-line discussions.</li> </ol>
Develop an appreciation of the diversity of the human condition, as this is reflected in ethical theories, formulated at different epochs, in diverse historical contexts and by a diversity of individuals.	Accurately describe and distinguish the central elements of each ethical tradition, against its historical and cultural context.	<p>Discussion of similarities and divergences between classically "western" ethical traditions and various "non-Western" (i.e., Eastern Asian, Arabic) ethical traditions in each of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. essays</li> <li>b. on-line discussion</li> <li>c. class participation</li> </ol>

## EVALUATION

Evaluation of your progress toward the development of the above listed objectives, will be conducted by several means. The following assignments comprise the whole of the requirements for this course. This course is based upon a 100 pt scale with 1pt = 1%.

### Grading Scale

<b>A</b> Outstanding (96pts and above)	<b>A-</b> Very Good (90-95pts)
<b>B</b> Range Satisfactory (75-89pts)	<b>C</b> Range Average (60-74pts)
<b>D</b> Range Poor (50-59pts)	<b>F</b> Unacceptable (below 50pts)
This is based upon a 100 pt scale with 1pt = 1%	

### ***Ethical Analyses (20pts)***

At least 10 times during the semester, you will be given a question at the beginning of class which will prompt you to reflect on some aspect of the assigned reading. You will have approximately 10 minutes in class to write and submit a response. These prompts will serve to focus discussion for the class period. These submissions will be graded as excellent (A: 2.0), good (B: 1.75), satisfactory (C: 1.5), unsatisfactory (D: 1.0) on a two-point scale. Failure to submit a response during the class period assigned will result in a zero grade (F: 0). No make-ups, no late submissions.

### ***Essays (60pts)***

These are three required essays and one optional essay for this course. Each essay is due on the date indicated in the schedule below. You must submit all three required essays to complete the course. The optional essay may be written to replace a lower grade on one of the four required essays. Each essay will be written in response to an assigned question which will be made available in SacCT at least 7 days prior to the due date. Each essay is worth 20pts. Essays are to be submitted electronically, through SacCT in response to the assigned question.

As this is a writing intensive course, you are required to write a minimum of 5000 words of cogent and clear text, over the whole of the semester. Each essay will be roughly 4-5 pages in length (1200-1500 words), with exact word requirements indicated in the assignment. Word count requirements **do** include quotations, so be careful not to use extensive quotations for ideas you can and ought to be able to express in your own words. Word counts **do not** include citations, titles, headers. **Each essay must include an accurate word count (these will be verified prior to grading)**. Essays which do not meet the specified requirements will be refused and you will be required to rewrite and resubmit the essay for grading. Late penalties will be applied during this process.

***Failure to submit all three required essays will result in a failing grade of F for the course!***

***It is your responsibility to ensure your essay was properly submitted and received within SacCT. Essay assignments must be submitted online in SacCT in the appropriate "Assignments" area. Hard copy submissions will not be accepted. Emailed submissions will not be accepted. DO NOT SUBMIT ATTACHMENTS. TYPE YOUR ESSAYS INTO THE "SUBMISSION AREA" USING THE "HTML CREATOR". ESSAYS SUBMITTED AS ATTACHMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.***

### ***On-Line Discussion (20pts)***

Every student will be required to contribute at least 20 times to the on-line discussion, including at least four to each of the five course sections. To complement the writing requirement in the essays, you will be required to write a total of at least 1000 words of cogent and clear text in the course of your on-line discussions. This means each of the entries must be at least 50 words long (approximately one paragraph – e.g.: this paragraph is 125 words long). Discussion

sections will remain open for the period during which the topics are discussed in class, and will be closed 7 days following the last date for the topic. Each student is also expected to read and follow the discussions of their class-mates.

Contributions may consist of:

- (i) asking and proposing an initial response to philosophical questions which probe the reading and engage in further explication and analysis of the text,
- (ii) responding thoughtfully to someone else's question,
- (iii) suggesting connections between this reading and other course material,
- (iv) bring current events and other empirical facts/evidence to bear on the reading.

All of this must be conducted in the effort to better understand the texts and to further our appreciation of the material's strengths and weaknesses. Polemics, ideological shortcuts, and other rather thoughtless and unscholarly contributions will not satisfy this requirement and should be resisted. Proper on-line etiquette is expected; violations will not be tolerated.

Each student must have made a total of 20 contributions to on-line discussion by the end of semester (with at least four to each of the five course sections). **Further, each student must have read at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  (three quarters) of the available contributions from their fellows in each topic to qualify for a satisfactory grade of C or better (regardless of how many submissions they have made).**

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **LATE ASSIGNMENTS POLICY**

All assignments are due at the date and time specified in the assignment. Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 10% per calendar day (not merely class period) beginning with the due date. After three late days, acceptance of the assignment is at the instructor's discretion. No extensions, no exceptions. It is your responsibility to know the due dates and to plan accordingly. Leaving an assignment until the day or two prior is risky and makes you more vulnerable than you already are to factors and events in the universe beyond your control!

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Regular attendance is expected and encouraged from all class participants. Attendance will be taken each class period. Sleeping, using a cell phone, reading a newspaper, doing assignments for other classes, or otherwise engaging in disruptive or disrespectful behavior will be met with a loss of  $\frac{1}{2}$ pt (per incidence) from the final course grade. All cellular devices and iPods/music players must be turned off during class.

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offences which will not be tolerated in this class. Assignments in which plagiarism or other forms of cheating are found will at the least be graded at 0 (not just an F) and may include an F in the course. ALL incidents of cheating and

plagiarism will be reported both to the Department Chair and to the Judicial Officer in the Office of Student Affairs for possible further administrative sanction. ***It is your responsibility to know and comply with the University's Academic Honesty Policy*** <http://www.csus.edu/umannual/student/UMA00150.htm>.

## DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

If you have a documented disability (visible or invisible) and require accommodation or assistance with assignments, tests, attendance, note taking, etc., please notify the instructor by the end of the third week of classes so that arrangements can be made.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Au 31 Welcome and Introductions

Se 2 History of Ethics -- A brief synopsis; see Learning Module 1 in SacCT.

### Section 1: Plato: Morality of the Soul (LM2)

Se 7-9 Plato on Virtue and the Gods

Read: *Euthyphro*

Se 14-23 Plato on the Nature of the Good

Read: *Republic*, Bk I, II, VI, VII

**Se 30 (Th) Essay #1 due at Noon -- on Plato.**

### Section 2: Aristotle: Ethics Naturalized and Habituated (LM3)

Se 28-Oct 7 Aristotle on Happiness and Character

Read: Excerpts from *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk I, II-III iv, & X; *Politics*, Bk, I.

Oct 12-14 Aristotle, Criticisms and Development

Read: Grene, "An Implicit Premise in Aristotle's Ethics;" and Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion."

**Oct 21 (Th) Essay #2 due at Noon -- on Aristotle.**

### Section 3: Hume: Morality of Passion, Reason and Experience (LM4)

Oct 19-21 Hume on the Moral Sentiments

Read: Excerpts from *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section 1-3, Appendix.

Oct 26-28 Hume's Ideal Observer

Read: *Essay on Taste*

### Section 4: Kant: Doing Your Duty Makes You Free (LM5)

No 2-9 Kant on Duty, Imperatives and Freedom

Read: Excerpts from *Metaphysics of Morals*, Sec 1, 2, 3.

**No 11 Veteran's Day – Campus closed.**

**No 16-17 (T/W) Fall Ethics Symposium at Cosumnes River College – No class. Bonus event.**

No 18-23 Kant, Criticisms and Development

Read: Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil;" and Kerstein, "Treating Others Merely as Means."

**No 25-26 Thanksgiving – Campus closed.**

**De 2 (Th) Essay #3 due at Noon-- on Kant.**

**Section 5: Mill: Ethics of Consequences and Utility (LM6)**

No 30-Dec 2 Mill, Utilitarian Ethics

Read: Excerpts from *Utilitarianism*, Ch 1, 2, 4; *On Liberty*, Ch 1.

Dec 7-9 Mill, Criticisms and Development

Read: Shaver, "The Appeal of Utilitarianism;" Lenman, "Utilitarianism and Obviousness."

**De 16 (Th) *Optional Essay #4 due at Noon -- on Mill.***

***This is a time sensitive deadline 12:00 p.m.; no lates, no extensions, no exceptions.***

**No Final Exam.**

ORIGINAL