

# PHIL 152: Recent Ethical Theory

## SPRING 2013

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### Course Information

Class Meetings: MW 12:00-1:15pm, SQU 325  
Instructor: Prof. Christina Bellon  
Office Hours: M2:00-3:00pm, MND 3000; by appointment.  
Contact: MND 3000, 278-4759, [www.csus.edu/indiv/b/bellonc](http://www.csus.edu/indiv/b/bellonc). Please keep all course related communications within Blackboard Messaging.

**A Note on Availability: Other than during scheduled office hours, communication will be answered generally within one working day. After 5pm M-F or on the weekend, do not expect a response until the next business day.**

### Catalogue Description

Major topics in ethical theory with attention to their contemporary formulation, including such topics as utilitarianism vs. rights-based theories and the dispute over the objectivity of ethics.

### Course Summary

This course is primarily designed around contemporary developments in the dispute over the nature of ethics. As such it will offer an opportunity to explore both normative and meta-ethical issues on the nature of moral philosophy, moral theories, ethical value, and moral propositions. The focus is on the major schools of 20th Century meta-ethics: intuitionism, emotivism, subjectivism, moral skepticism, objectivism, realism, rationalism, and naturalism. Each of these schools or approaches embraces unique claims and assumptions about the nature of ethical value, the metaphysics involved in its existence or non-existence, the epistemology of moral propositions and judgements about moral value, and the features of the moral agent as both knower of moral propositions, maker of judgements, and agent in the world.

### **Warning!**

***This is an UPPER division course, designed primarily for PHIL majors and advanced non-majors with some prior experience in ethics. Students will be expected to read considerable amounts of complex and technical material, write cogently and lucidly on difficult theoretical issues, and to come prepared to participate thoughtfully in class discussion. For students who have never taken an ethics class before, I would recommend postponing taking this course until you have attained some familiarity with introductory ethics. The Philosophy Department has several such courses on offer each semester.***

### Required Texts

There are no assigned texts to purchase for this class. As such, your outlay of cash should be minimal. However, this does not mean there are no assigned readings. On the contrary! All assigned readings are available as PDF documents in electronic form at our course site in SacCT.

Please note that these articles are copyrighted and are intended for your use in this class only. You should download the documents and bring them to class for discussion.

Assigned readings amount to 2-3 articles (approx 50 pages) per week, occasionally more, infrequently less. You are expected to read all the material assigned for the start of each course segment. You are responsible for reading ahead and keeping pace with class discussion as we progress through the material.

### Learning Outcomes

ASPIRATION/OBJECTIVE	PRACTICAL GOALS	ASSESSMENT TOOLS
Develop competence in philosophical and ethical language and literature, especially as these arise in contemporary theoretical discussions	<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 assessment.</li> <li>2. Content in each of:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Written essays</li> <li>b. On-line discussion</li> <li>c. In-class essays</li> <li>d. Discussion questions</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 in response to specific questions;</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. Written essays</li> <li>b. On-line discussion</li> <li>c. In-Class essays</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Substance, structure, and delivery of the discussion posting and in-class essays.</li> </ol>
Develop an appreciation of the relation between theoretical and sometimes highly abstract ethical concepts and analyses of the practice of living a good life.	Accurately describe and distinguish the central elements of each theoretical issue and relate these to various metaphysical and epistemological concerns.	Responses to essay questions designed to elucidate the relation of theory to practice.

### Evaluation

Students will be evaluated by several means. These will include a series of short in-class analytic essays, three philosophical analyses, and on-line discussions. The course is graded on the basis of 100pts (1pt = 1%).

***ALL assignments and essays are administered within SacCT. Print or hand submitted copies will not be accepted, except for work assigned and completed in class. All assignments must be completed in the appropriate assignment or assessment area in SacCT.***

## GRADING SCALE

<b>A</b> Outstanding (96pts and above)	<b>A-</b> Very Good (90-95pts)
<b>B</b> Range Satisfactory (80-89pts)	<b>C</b> Range Minimally Satisfactory (70-79pts)
<b>D</b> Range Poor (60-69pts)	<b>F</b> Unacceptable (below 60pts)
This is based upon a 100 pt scale with 1pt = 1%	

### *Technology Component*

Please note, this course includes a significant SacCT component. Essay assignments can be found there, as well as required group discussion, and general calendar and class notification options. You will need a saclink account to participate in this component of the course. Technical problems must be addressed to the SacLink Help Line @ 278-7337.

### *A Note on Participation*

As this is an upper division class, it should be taken as an opportunity for you to enhance your communication skills. I strongly encourage you to come regularly, do the readings ahead of time, and participate in class discussions and activities. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class.

### *Analytic Exercises (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. Your best 10 scores will count toward your grade.

### *Philosophical Analysis (4 x 15pts = 60pts)*

You will be required to write and submit four formal philosophical analyses, each of which will consist of a 2000 word (double spaced, normal font & margins) explication and critique of the an assigned article from the textbook. Detailed instructions and requirements are found in the assignment area of SacCT. ***You must submit all four philosophical analyses for grading to complete the course. Failure to do so will result in a grade of F for the course.***

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

Every student will be required to contribute at least 12 times to the on-line discussion, including at least three times to each of the four discussion topics. Each student is also expected to read and follow the discussions of their class-mates. Contributions may consist of:

- (i) asking 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 12 contributions to on-line discussion by the end of semester (with at least three postings to each of the four course sections). Further, *each student must have read at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  (three-quarters) of the available contributions of their fellows to qualify for a satisfactory grade of C- or better (regardless of how many submissions they have made).*

### *Bonus Opportunities*

Throughout the semester, students will have the opportunity to earn bonus points by attending specified events and writing an analysis of it. Details and Instructions can be found in the Bonus Opportunities area of the SacCT course content. Students can earn up to a maximum of 5 bonus points in this way.

## **Course Policies**

### *EXPECTATIONS*

#### **Attendance**

Regular attendance is expected from all class participants. Disruptions, rudeness and private discussions, including cell phone disruptions, will not be tolerated. This means while in class, you should be focused on classroom activities and material. 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 unless being used explicitly for class activities.**

**Diversity and Respect:** CSUS attracts a diverse population of students, faculty and staff with a wide range of cultural norms, lifestyles, beliefs and backgrounds. Opinions may vary on many issues, but students and faculty in this class will be expected to converse and debate in a respectful and tolerant manner.

This class will only be rich if everyone feels free to express her/his views and personal understanding of the course material. Because this is a philosophy class, and philosophy prompts us to think in ways that may be unfamiliar, let us all be mindful and respectful of each other's opinions. Everyone has a responsibility to make the classroom environment a place where we can respectfully agree to disagree, and perhaps even settle some long unsettled questions.

### *LATE ASSIGNMENTS*

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. If you know you will not be able to meet a due date, it is your responsibility to consult with the

instructor before the assignment is due. ***When submitting any assignment in SacCT, ALWAYS check its status to ensure it was submitted. Do not merely hit "submit" and leave. It is your responsibility to ensure your assignment was submitted accurately and timely. Do not wait for the instructor to ask you about it or for a "0" to appear in your grade column!***

**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!

### *PLAGIARISM/CHEATING*

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). 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/AcademicHonestyPolicyandProcedures.htm>

### *REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION*

Students who have a documented disability (visible or invisible) and require accommodation or assistance with assignments, tests, attendance, note taking, etc., must see the instructor by the ***end of the third week of semester*** so that arrangements can be made. Failure to notify and consult with the instructor by this date may impede her ability to offer you the necessary accommodation and assistance in a timely fashion. Also be sure to consult with the Services to Students with Disabilities (Lassen Hall) to see what other campus services and accommodation options are available for you. All information will remain confidential.

Students with other types of accommodation requirements, such as English as a second language, are invited to discuss them with the instructor to facilitate understanding and the best learning experience for all. All information will remain confidential.

## Weekly Schedule

Week	Topic	Readings and Assignments
Ja 28	Welcome & Introduction	
<b>Unit 1: Theoretical Context: Through a Glass Darkly</b>		
Ja 30	A Brief History of Ideas on the Good	Socrates/Plato, excerpts from <i>Republic</i> , <i>Euthyphro</i> ; Aristotle, excerpts from <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> ; Hume, excerpts from the <i>Treatise, Of the Standard of Taste</i> ; Kant, excerpts from <i>Metaphysics of Morals</i> .
Fe 4-6	The Problem(s) of Morality	Frankena, "The Concept of Morality," Baier, "Extending the Limits of Moral Theory."
Feb 11-20	The state of the contemporary debate	Korsgaard, "Realism and Constructivism in 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Moral Philosophy," Habermas, "On the Cognitive Content of Morality," Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail." <b>Philosophical Analysis 1 due noon on Monday, Fe 25, on Rawls, "The Independence of Moral Theory."</b>
<b>Unit 2: Ethical Cognitivism: Think first, act later</b>		
Fe 25-27	Must (Can) we be reasonable?	Nelkin, "Two Standpoints and the Belief in Freedom," Singer, "Freedom from Reason," Haji, "Freedom and Practical Reason."
Mar 4-6	Objectivity: So it is written...	Hare, "Objective Prescriptions," Conly, "The Objectivity of Morals and Subjectivity of Agents," Sen, "Positional Objectivity."
Mar 11-13	Moral Realism: Oh, there it is...	Dancy, "Two Conceptions of Moral Realism," Foot, "Moral Realism and Moral Dilemma," Werner, "Ethical Realism." <b>Philosophical Analysis 2 due noon on Monday, Mar 18, on Railton, "Some Questions About the Justification of Morality."</b>
<b>Unit 3: Ethical Non-Cognitivism: Don't think, just do</b>		
Mar 18-20	Moral Skepticism and Error Theory: Ooops...	Mackie, excerpt from <i>Ethics</i> (1977), Tolhurst, "The Argument from Moral Disagreement."
<b>Spring Break – March 25-29, Cesar Chavez Day April 1 – no classes, campus closed.</b>		
Ap 3-10	Emotivism: Ouch, bad....Mmmmm, good.	Ayer, "Critique of Ethics and Theology," Harrison, "Can Ethics Do Without Propositions?"
Ap 15-17	Intuitionism: Seems to me...	Strawson, "Ethical Intuitionism," Fuss, "Conscience." <b>Philosophical Analysis 3 due noon on Monday, Mar 18, on Enoch, "How is Disagreement a Problem for Realism?"</b>
<b>Unit 4: Ethical Naturalism</b>		
Ap 22-24	Going natural, everyone's doing it.	Copp, "Why Naturalism?" Foster, "Ethical Naturalism Revisited," Held, "Moral Subjects: The Natural and the Normative."
Ap 29-Ma 1	Ethics evolves, as do we... and slugs	Ayala, "The Difference of Being Human: Morality," Arnhart, "Feminism, Primatology, and Ethical Naturalism," Harnden-Warwick, "Psychological Realism, Morality and Chimpanzees."
Ma 6-8	Morality – What is it?... Again?	Korsgaard, "Evolution of Morality," Singer, "Ethics and Intuitions."
Ma 13-15	Review and Closing Discussions	
Ma 20-24 Exam Week – No classes. <b>Philosophical Analysis #4 Due at noon on Wednesday, May 22, Time Certain. Discussion Topics "Naturalism" closes.</b>		