

FALL 2007

PHIL 301: ETHICS

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Clough 402
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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

General Description: The field of ethics is quite large, but it generally concerns the goods (or goals) and standards (or norms or guidelines) that guide human action and interaction. **Central questions** include: What is the human good, i.e., the good unique to humans that best represents their highest fulfillment? What are the marks of good character? What are the criteria for right and wrong action? What differentiates good consequences from bad? Can (or should) norms be applicable universally? What role, if any, do emotions play in ethical deliberations?

In addressing these questions, we will focus our study on the central ethical norms of **four systems**: ethics of excellence (represented by Aristotle and Aquinas), deontology (represented by Kant and Feinberg), utilitarianism (as formulated by Bentham and Mill), and ethics of care (represented by Noddings). Our approach will be structured both historically and topically. Especially in ethics, a theory/practice split is deeply problematic. An ethical position that is judged theoretically sound but suspect (or unrealistic) in its application misses the point of ethics: to live well or rightly. We will thus integrate “theoretical” concerns (about issues of the nature and justification of ethical criteria) with “practical” concerns (about specific courses of action or responses to moral problems) – especially in Group Work.

Main Course Goals:

- To develop a sophisticated and insightful understanding of the criteria that guide and govern meaningful human action and interaction, with special attention to the arguments for (and against) these criteria. The course will explore different orientations by focusing on the *arguments* and *applications* of key ideas or norms of four general ethical systems (noted above).
- To become adept at applying the criteria of these systems to concrete (usually) contemporary issues, recognizing the importance of checking “theory” with “practice,” and vice versa
- To successfully work in groups as you discuss, apply, and evaluate criteria and issues

II. COURSE OUTLINE:

A. Our Moral Status: Moral Progress

B. The Golden Rule

C. The Ethics of Excellence

1. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
2. Aquinas, selections from *Summa Theologica* (supplement)
3. Rosa Parks and excellence

D. Deontology:

1. Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*
2. Rights (Feinberg supplement)

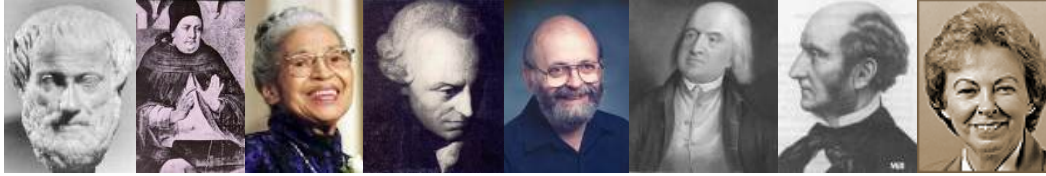
E. Consequentialism:

1. Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*
2. Mill's *Utilitarianism* and *On Liberty*

F. The Ethics of Care

1. Noddings' *Caring*

G. Group Presentations



III. REQUIRED BOOKS:

- Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. Sarah Broadie & Christopher Rowe
- Immanuel Kant: *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. Lewis White Beck.
- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* and *On Liberty* (also includes Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*)
- Rosa Parks & James Haskins, *Rosa Parks: My Story*
- Mappes & Zembaty, *Social Ethics*, 7th edition

There will also be some shorter readings distributed in class.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Prep/Partic	= 10%
Group Work	= 60%
2 Exams	= 30%

A. Preparation & Discussion Participation (10%): *Quality* participation is vital to your learning and is expected throughout the semester. First, you should **prepare** carefully for class; this means actively reading (see “Reading Philosophy”) and reflecting on the day’s assignment (noting key definitions & arguments and formulating questions) *prior* to class. Such preparation will help you listen with understanding and actively participate in class discussion.

Discussion participation involves (i) carefully listening to, questioning, and responding to the views of others, and also (ii) contributing your own views, questions, and reactions to the readings and class discussion. I take note of the “ripple effect” of your comments; i.e., I consider whether your comments help advance our discussion. It’s valuable when your contribution responds to that of others or when it elicits feedback from your classmates. Your goal shouldn’t be simply to participate regularly (dominating class discussion is not good), but to be attentive to the comments raised in class (not just the professor’s) and to develop insightful and sophisticated questions or comments that help us delve more deeply into our topics.

You are expected to **attend** all classes. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for all material covered and assignments distributed or collected. Since attendance is a precondition for participation, I don’t distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. (If you’re not present, you can’t contribute.) If you miss more than **3** classes (the equivalent of a week of classes), your preparation/participation grade will drop 1/3 letter grade per additional missed day. *Also*, you are expected to contact me so we can discuss your attendance.

Assessment

To gauge your **preparation** and understanding of material, I will occasionally give *homework, quizzes, or in-class writing exercises* designed to (i) test your understanding of the reading, &/or (ii) help you crystallize your thinking on a relevant class issue. The chief criteria used in evaluating this work will be **clarity** and **accuracy**. I will comment on your work but typically not assign a numerical grade; instead I will assign + (excellent work), √ (good work), – (problematic work), or 0 (no work) to indicate the quality of your work. These exercises are an important part of your ongoing development. Use them to test your understanding and recognize them as a source of feedback from me. I’ll consider the profile of your work in this area (did you do them all, did you improve, etc.) in determining this part of the grade.

Missed work in this category can be made up *only* when you have discussed the matter with me *prior* to the beginning of the class you miss. Each student is allowed *one* make-up, but make-up material must be completed by the beginning of the next class meeting.

When determining your **discussion participation** grade, I will look at the *quality* and *pattern* of your participation over the course of the semester. Its *quality* will be gauged in terms of its (i) **clarity**, (ii) **insight & sophistication**, and (iii) “**ripple effect**.” In assessing the *pattern* of your work, I will look at (i) **consistency**, (ii) **effort**, and (iii) **improvement** and **progress** (or regress) you have made in critically discussing materials throughout the semester.

If you are concerned about your performance in either of these areas, please don't hesitate to talk with me.

B. GROUP WORK (60%): Philosophical thinking requires your active engagement in learning and testing the ideas and methodologies involved. The following is designed to promote such engagement.

Group Work: Given that ethics has the complexities of human interaction as one of its dominant dimensions, we will work in groups on 5 different occasions (see calendar for these) on current ethical issues such as hunger and homelessness, terrorism, environmental protections, the right to marry, the right to die, etc. (Readings will come from the *Social Ethics* volume.) An entire class period will be devoted to each group work project; questions will be assigned for the group to answer during that period. The primary goal of group work is for you to *actively* and *effectively* work with other students in exploring and assessing the details of ethical theories and issues.

Each of you will be assigned to a group of 3 or 4 students; group membership will remain the same throughout the semester. Group work will consist of the following 3 items:

(1) **Meeting write-ups (4 @ 6%):** After each group meeting, a formal write-up of the group's final answers to assigned questions will be due. Each member of the group will be responsible for the final composition and submission of one of the 4 graded write-ups, but all members are to fully contribute to, review, and ultimately pledge each of them. All members of the group will receive the *same grade* for *this* work.

NOTE: Since an integral part of these assignments is participation in group discussion, this work cannot be effectively made up. There will thus be **no make-up** for this work. Students absent from a group meeting will receive no credit (a “0”) for the work associated with that meeting (i.e., both items 1 & 2, resulting in a “0” for that 12% of the final grade). If you miss a group meeting due to what the professor judges to be truly *extenuating* circumstances (ordinary illness is *not* a likely example of this), you can still contribute to the group work *if* you (a) discuss the matter with the professor *as soon as possible* (in advance of the class meeting – unless this is genuinely impossible) to determine whether your case counts as an extenuating circumstance, (b) get your answers to your group in advance of the class meeting (NOTE: the answers you provide your group must be substantial and complete), *and* (c) further participate in preparing the group work for that assignment. All of these conditions must be met.

Students who miss for extenuating reasons (and so who meet conditions a-c) may receive *partial* credit for that particular group work assignment (75% of that Write-Up *and* Evaluation [your absence will make it difficult to assess evaluate the group's behavior with much detail]), for a total of **9%** of the final grade, rather than the usual 12%. When addressing your own behavior in your Group Evaluation, be sure to assess your reasons for missing class and your subsequent actions.

Students may earn the additional **3%** of that group work assignment by writing a 3-4 page paper on *either* the relevance of contingency to the moral life *or* on some matter concerning justice. A more precise topic will be *assigned* by the professor, depending on

your circumstances. The paper will be shared with the member's group and graded by the professor.

(2) **Group evaluation (4 @ 6%)**: In addition to meeting write-ups, you will each assess your group's interaction for each meeting in light of the criteria of the four main ethical systems we will study. (So, for one assignment, you will use deontological criteria to assess how your group functioned, utilitarian criteria for another, and qualities of excellence for yet another. More detailed assignments will be given at the appropriate time.) Each person will do his/her own work for the group evaluation and receive his/her *own grade*. You may talk with one another about this exercise, but you must generate your own thoughtful response to the assignment.

I don't wish to undermine the integrity of group work by assigning individual grades here, but I do believe that privacy and consultation with your own conscience are both common features of our moral experience and also integral elements of group work.

(3) **Group final presentation (12%)**: As the culminating experience of group work, each group will present in class a position on the ethical criteria it finds most plausible, and how those criteria should be applied to an issue it thinks vitally important. Disagreements within the group may exist and can be addressed in the presentation. Each group will present its position to the class during the final days of the semester and then revise it in light of class discussion. All group members will receive the *same grade* for this presentation. More details will be provided at the appropriate time.

Though specific criteria will be provided for these assignments, the general criteria used are: (i) **insight** and **sophistication** in understanding the relevant issue and its implications, (ii) success in **relating** ethical criteria to issues, (iii) **clarity**, **focus** (success in synthesizing the group's work), and **organization**.

C. EXAMS (2 @ 15%): Exams challenge you in ways that other assignments don't (specifically, by posing specific questions that require you to demonstrate mastery of a range of material during a limited time period). We will have a midterm and a final, probably consisting of a mix of objective, short-answer, and essay questions. The final will have a cumulative essay question.

V. MISCELLANEOUS:

• **Film Viewing**: In addition to the 9/11 video, we will likely view one or more films related to course content. One candidate is the first 4 hours of Alex Haley's "Roots." More information will be provided later.

• **Successful Classroom**: In working through examples, we will cover a number of controversial issues. I hope you will take these seriously and have the courage to subject all views (including your own) to critical scrutiny. If you feel uncomfortable doing so, please come talk with me. I strongly encourage you to contribute your insights, criticisms, and bafflements, since we typically learn better when we are actively involved with the material. In our class everyone has a right to express a genuine opinion, curiosity or criticism, but no one has a right to put one down.

Respect towards all members of the class and to course content is the key. I work hard to generate a setting in which we can be honest and critical, but my efforts are minimal without your individual contributions. **Impediments** to a successful classroom include tardiness, cell phones, disruptive talking, lethargy, excessive absences, and leaving the classroom before the end of the

hour. We are biological creatures, but since we also have a relative mastery over our bodies, please take care of your biological needs before class.

• **Grading Criteria:** See “Grading Criteria for Written Work” handout for specifics. My scheme is the following:

	B+	87-89
A		84-86
A-	B-	80-83 etc.

• **Computer Component:** You are responsible for any notes, assignments, etc. that I send out via e-mail. In addition, you are expected to check documents left in our folder on the Academic Server (at [\\Fileserver1\acad_dept_pgm\Philosophy\Shade_Patrick\Public\PHIL 301](#)). Included are: (1) readings that are handed out, (2) study questions (for some readings), and (3) biographies of the philosophers studied. Please consult this folder, and let me know if you have problems accessing it or finding materials. I will announce new documents that need to be read; if you are absent, you are responsible for reading these. If you’re unfamiliar with computer use, please check with the computer staff. They’ll be happy to help you.

• **Honor Code:** The Honor Code stipulates that all the work you submit is to be your own. You are encouraged to discuss topics and assignments with your classmates, but the work you hand in must be your own, i.e., formulated and written in your own words and style reflecting your own thoughtful treatment. Group work meeting write-ups and the group final presentation are exceptions to this stipulation in that they are products of your specific group’s work and thoughtful treatment (and not simply your own). Even so, if you incorporate materials that are *not* your own (as an individual or a group) in assignments, these must be properly cited. If you have questions, ask.

• I’ll be glad to help in any way I can, so don’t hesitate to darken my doorway.

This syllabus is subject to revision (but don’t worry; I’ll discuss any changes with the class before I make them).

ETHICS CALENDAR

S: Supplemental materials

Monday	Wednesday	Friday
	8/22 Getting started (S)	8/24 The Golden rule (S)
8/27 Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> I (pp. 95-110)	8/29 Aristotle’s <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> II-III.5 (pp. 111-132)	8/31 Aristotle’s <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> III.6-12 (pp. 132-141); IV.6-9 (pp. 154-158); V.1-7 (pp. 158-169)
9/3 Labor Day	9/5 Group Work on 9/11 (View video on Tuesday, 9/4 at 7 & 10 PM in Clough 300)	9/7 Aristotle’s <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> VI.5 (pp. 179-181); VII.1-4, 8-10; (pp. 189-196, 201-203); VIII.1-6 (pp. 208-215)
9/10 Aristotle’s <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> VI.6-7 (pp. 181-182); X.1, 4-9 (pp. 241-2, 245-258) [tentative due date for 9/11 assignment]	9/12 Aquinas on Charity (S)	9/14 Aquinas on Law (S)

9/17 Aquinas on Law (S) (cont.) Rosa Parks, <i>My Story</i> Chpts. 1-7	9/19 Rosa Parks, <i>My Story</i> Chpts. 8-12 Group Work 1	9/21 Kant's <i>Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. vii-xxiv, 3-22
9/24 Kant's <i>Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. vii-xxiv, 3-22 [tentative due date for Grp 1 assignment]	9/26 Kant's <i>Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 22-41	9/28 Kant's <i>Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 41-63 (Recommended: pp. 63-73)
10/1 Feinberg on Duties and Rights (S)	10/3 Deontology examples Group Work 2	10/5 Norms of justice and contemporary court issues
10/8 Midterm review [tentative due date for Grp 2 assignment]	10/10 Pleasure and Pain: hedonism	10/12 MIDTERM EXAM
10/15 FALL BREAK	10/17 Bentham's <i>Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> Chpts 1-3 (pp. 17-40)	10/19 Bentham's <i>Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> Chpts 4-5 (pp. 41-51)
10/22 Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> Chpts 1-2 (pp. 181-202)	10/24 Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> Chpts 3-4 (p. 203-15)	10/26 Mill's <i>On Liberty</i> Chapter 3 (pp. 131-146) & 4 (partial, pp. 147-151)
10/29 Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> Chapter 5 (pp. 41-63)	10/31 Consequentialism examples Group Work 3	11/2 Noddings' <i>Caring</i> Chpt 1
11/5 Noddings' <i>Caring</i> Chpt 2 [tentative due date for Grp 3 assignment]	11/7 Noddings' <i>Caring</i> Chpt 3	11/9 Noddings' <i>Caring</i> Chpt 4
11/12 Noddings' <i>Caring</i> Chpt 5	11/14 Care examples Group Work 4	11/16 Practical & theoretical challenges to caring
11/19 Care, justice, and happiness [tentative due date for Grp 4 assignment]	11/21 Thanksgiving Break	11/23 Thanksgiving Break
11/26 Presentation planning	11/28 Presentation Day 1	11/30 Presentation Day 2
12/3 Presentation Day 3	12/5 Final Arguments and Review	