

SYLLABUS

This course is an introduction to moral theory. We will be going straight to the classics -- a few of the best books *ever* written on moral theory: Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals and Mill's Utilitarianism. These four books have had an incredible impact on western culture. Over the semester, however, we will be studying them not as influential historical documents but as living contributions to an on going search for an understanding of morality. Thus, the arguments and views presented in the books will be our focus, not their impact through history. Our aim will be to understand and come to grips with the theories of morality they articulate and defend.

We will be concerned primarily with two questions: (1) What really matters? and (2) What is involved in answering (1)? In general, worries about the second question arise from worries about the first; and answers to the second usually commit us to answers to the first. In fact, the questions are really far more entangled than they are distinct. So we won't be taking the questions in order; instead we will jump back and forth between the two. In coming to grips with these two very general questions we will focus on three fundamental, but slightly more specific, questions: (i) What does morality demand? (ii) Under what conditions are we responsible for our success or failure in living up to these demands? and (iii) What connection is there between our being moral and our living a good (satisfying, fulfilling) life? The first calls for a theory of morality, the second requires a theory of moral responsibility, and the third asks for an answer to an age old question: why should I be moral? We will, pretty much, be taking them in reverse order.

The course will meet for lectures Monday and Wednesdays at 11 am in the lecture hall, and for discussions on Fridays in the rooms and at the times for which you registered. Everyone should register for a Friday discussion section in addition to the lecture. Attendance in discussion sections is required.

Please note the scheduled dates for the exams and written assignments. Because of the size of the class, we will not be making special arrangements to accommodate travel plans for Spring break, the holidays, etc.

ASSIGNED TEXTS:

1. Plato, The Republic (Reeve revision of Grube's translation)
2. Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics (Irwin's translation)
3. Mill, Utilitarianism
4. Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals (Ellington's translation)

REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS:

Two short in class exams – January 26th and April 13th (10% of grade)

Essay Exam – February 9th (25% of grade)

Mid-Semester Paper -- due, in draft, on March 5th, and in final form, on March 9th. (25% of grade)

Two Critiques -- these will be comments and suggestions written by you on a classmate's work. The first is due on March 7th. The second is due on April 27th. (5% of grade)

Final Exam -- This exam will be on May 7th at 12 noon and will have two components: (i) a take home essay (which is the final version of the essay due in draft on April 25th) and in class test (30% of grade).

Class Participation -- This will be determined on the basis of participation in class discussions and contributions to the web discussion forum (5%). Dialogue is absolutely crucial to philosophy. So come to class prepared to ask (and answer) questions and to participate in class discussions!