

## Contemporary Ethical Theory

### **Description:**

Contemporary ethical theory is concerned with two areas of inquiry that are largely independent of one another: meta-ethics and normative ethics. Meta-ethics is concerned with the nature of morality and moral judgments, and involves questions such as whether moral judgments are true or false, whether they are ultimately objective or (on the contrary) subjective or relative, what role intuition plays in making moral judgments, and whether they can be established by the same sorts of considerations that are taken to establish empirical or scientific claims. Meta-ethics is also concerned with psychological questions such as what sort of motivation (if any) must be present when a person makes a moral judgment. Meta-ethical theories are largely neutral on the question of what is moral or immoral; instead, they are theories about what sort of activity (or practice, or enterprise) morality is, independent of one's specific views about right and wrong.

In contrast, normative ethics is concerned with right and wrong, along with other evaluative concepts such as good and bad, and virtuous and vicious. A wide variety of theories about these concepts have been proposed: theories based on the consequences of acts or the consequences of the general acceptance of certain kinds of moral rules; rule-based theories that eschew a consequentialist basis; theories derived from Kant's ethics; theories based on the social-contract tradition of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau; right-based theories, whether left-leaning or libertarian; theories building on Aristotle's virtue-based approach to ethics; and theories derived from feminist, Continental, and pragmatic perspectives. Normative-ethical theories are largely neutral on meta-ethical issues, being concerned instead with articulating their own distinct moral principles.

This course will survey both meta-ethics and normative ethics, devoting approximately equal time to each. We will read most of Hugh LaFollette's edited anthology *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, along with some other writings. Assignments will include two 1,200-word papers, revisions of them, and two tests.

**Class schedule:** Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays, 11:00–11:50, in 3097 Wescoe Hall (enrollment code 35303)

### **Meeting with me and contacting me:**

The location of my office is 3071 Wescoe Hall. I will have office hours on Tuesdays at 1:00–1:50 and Fridays at 12:00–12:50, but you should feel free to come by my office at any time. I anticipate being in and around my office most Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; and although in rare cases I may have to ask you to come back at another time, in general I will be happy to speak to you at your convenience. You are also quite welcome to make an appointment with me, by e-mailing me at the address given above. Please note that I tend to use e-mail only for scheduling appointments and handling logistical matters, not for substantive discussions of course material.

### **Grading and assignments:**

At the end of the course, I'll give you a grade between A and F. The grades A, B, C, and D are given specific interpretations in KU's University Senate Rules and Regulations, which I adhere to. Article 2 of those rules and regulations—"Academic Work and Its Evaluation"—contains a section called "The Grading System" (at <https://documents.ku.edu/policies/governance/USRR.htm#art2sect2>), which says that an A should be given for achievement of outstanding quality, a B for achievement of high quality, a C for achievement of acceptable quality, and a D for achievement that is minimally passing, but of less than acceptable quality.

What letter grade I give you will depend on the final average of the scores you get on the various assignments in the course (which I'll outline below). I'll use the following scale to convert your final average to a letter grade. (For an explanation of how I arrived at these numbers, see the "Plus/Minus Grading" document on my web site.)

<u>final average</u>	<u>letter grade</u>
93.50 and above	A
90.00 through 93.49	A-
86.50 through 89.99	B+
83.50 through 86.49	B
80.00 through 83.49	B-
76.50 through 79.99	C+
73.50 through 76.49	C
70.00 through 73.49	C-
66.50 through 69.99	D+
63.50 through 66.49	D
60.00 through 63.49	D-
59.99 and below	F

Most (if not all) assignments will be graded numerically, rather than with letter grades, and you can also use this scale to interpret the numerical scores you get in this course during the semester.

Here are the factors that will determine your overall grade, and their weights (in percentages):

<u>assignment</u>	<u>weight (percent)</u>
1 paper 1, version 2	13
2 paper 1, version 3	13
3 test 1	20
4 paper 2, version 2	13
5 paper 2, version 3	13
6 test 2	20
7 highest paper grade	4
8 highest test grade	4
total	100

Further information about these assignments will be provided as the course progresses.

***Course materials:***

Some course documents, including this syllabus, will be available on the web site for the course, the URL of which is the following:

<http://web.ku.edu/~utile/courses/ethicaltheory2>

(If you don't want to type in this whole thing, you can stop after 'utile'—at which point you'll be at my personal web site—and then follow the links to the web site for this particular course.)

Most of the readings mentioned below—all the ones not marked '(Bb)'—are contained in the following book:

*The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, edited by Hugh LaFollette (Wiley-Blackwell, 2000)

I have asked the bookstore to order this book. It should also be easily obtainable from other sellers, such as Amazon. In addition to buying the book, you might find it convenient to note that the book can also be viewed online. Go to

<http://catalog.lib.ku.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?bbid=3098074>

and then click on ‘Connect to electronic text. -- (Source: NetLibrary)’. You should not regard this as a substitute for buying the book, but it may be a useful resource sometime when you want to check something in the book but don’t have your own copy of the book handy.

There are also some readings not contained in that book, and I will try to give you copies of them in class. They are marked ‘(Bb)’ below and will be provided on the course Blackboard site in PDF files. All of them except the one written by me are contained in the following book:

*The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, edited by David Copp (Oxford University Press, 2006)

I have not asked the bookstore to order this book, but you can buy it separately if you are so inclined. Whether you buy the book or not, you might find it convenient to note that it can also be viewed online. Go to

<http://catalog.lib.ku.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?bbid=6606785>

and then click on ‘Connect to electronic text. -- (Source: Oxford scholarship online. Philosophy)’. Again, you should not regard this as a substitute for having hard copies of these readings, but it may be a useful resource.

You should note that every item of assigned reading should be read with care and alertness, and *several times*. I suggest at least the following for most items: skimming it to get a sense of its overall structure and the author’s main priorities, then reading it extremely closely, and then reading it with normal intensity.

***E-mail distribution list:***

I’ve had the KU computer folks set up an e-mail distribution list for the course, and its address is the following:

[phil670\\_35303fa10\\_dl@mail.ku.edu](mailto:phil670_35303fa10_dl@mail.ku.edu)

I’ve had it set up so that not only I, but also you, can use it, so that you can communicate with everyone in the class (including me) whenever you have a reason to do so.

In general, I’ll try to mention everything important (whether substantive or procedural) in class. But at times, I may use the e-mail distribution list to send you information that you will be responsible for having or acting on, so it is your responsibility to make sure that you read mail that I send to this list. You can do this by making sure that you (1) have an e-mail address, (2) are registered for the course (because this list is updated every night to reflect current enrollment, taking account of drops and adds), and (3) read your e-mail. There is one complication that you should be aware of: if you have both an Exchange e-mail address (e.g., so-and-so@ku.edu) and a non-Exchange e-mail address (e.g., so-and-so@gmail.com), and you prefer to receive e-mail at the latter address, then mail sent to the e-mail distribution list for the course will not necessarily go to it, even if you have registered it with KU as your primary e-mail address. (This is a known problem with the KU distribution-list system.) To deal with this problem, either check your Exchange account as often as you check your non-Exchange account, or arrange for mail sent to your Exchange account to be forwarded to your non-Exchange account. For more information on this problem and how to solve it, see the Distribution List Primer (<http://www.email.ku.edu/dlists/primer.shtml>) and look at the answer to the second question: “Some of the people on my list say they’re not getting my list mail. Why?”

Also in regard to this list, note that you cannot send e-mail to this list just by sending a message to its address. You also have to send your message *from an authorized e-mail account*. Normally, that is whatever account you use to receive e-mail sent to this list. So, even if you receive mail sent to this list by having your KU e-mail forwarded to (e.g.) your Gmail account, you should not count on being able to use the e-mail list (as a sender) from your Gmail account. You may have to send your message from your Exchange account.

***Academic misconduct:***

I take academic misconduct, especially cheating on tests and plagiarizing papers, extremely seriously, and am generally disposed to impose the harshest available penalties when it occurs. KU’s policy on academic integrity is in article 2, section 6 of the University Senate Rules and Regulations (<https://documents.ku.edu/policies/governance/USRR.htm#art2sect6>).

***Disability accommodation:***

If you have a disability for which you may be requesting special services or accommodations for this course, be sure to contact Disability Resources (<http://www.disability.ku.edu>), at 22 Strong Hall or at 864-2620 (V/TTY), if you have not already done so, and give me a letter from that office documenting the accommodations to which you are entitled. Please also see me privately, at your earliest convenience, so that I can be aware of your situation and can begin to prepare the appropriate accommodations in advance of receiving the letter from Disability Resources.

***Illness and attendance:***

You will notice, above, that there is no attendance or class-participation component as a determinant of your grade in this class. This is because I don't want to encourage you to come to class when you are ill and might infect others. If you have a contagious illness, please protect your classmates from the risk of catching it from you.

**Schedule:**MondayWednesdayFriday*August 20*

course introduction

**Part I: Meta-Ethics (and some normative ethics)**

<i>August 23</i> Michael Smith, "Moral Realism"	<i>August 25</i> Smith, continued	<i>August 27</i> Simon Blackburn, "Antirealist Expressivism and Quasi-Realism" (Bb)
<i>August 30</i> Simon Blackburn, "Relativism"	<i>September 1</i> Blackburn, continued	<i>September 3</i> Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Command Theory"
<i>September 6</i> no class (Labor Day)	<i>September 8</i> Jeff McMahan, "Moral Intuition"	<i>September 10</i> McMahan, continued
<i>September 13</i> Elliott Sober, "Psychological Egoism"	<i>September 15</i> Philip Kitcher, "Biology and Ethics" (Bb)	<i>September 17</i> Kitcher, continued
<i>September 20</i> Eggleston, "Utilitarianism" (Bb), and Brink, "Some Forms and Limits of Consequentialism" (Bb), to p. 398	<i>September 22</i> no assigned reading; paper 1, version 1 due; peer review of papers	<i>September 24</i> paper 1, version 2 due; no class (CLAS meeting)
<i>September 27</i> Brink, continued	<i>September 29</i> no class (meetings about paper 1)	<i>October 1</i> no class (meetings about paper 1)
<i>October 4</i> paper 1, version 3 due; Brad Hooker, "Rule-Consequentialism"	<i>October 6</i> reserve / review for test	<i>October 8</i> test 1

**Part II: Normative Ethics (continued)**

<i>October 11</i> F. M. Kamm, "Nonconsequentialism"	<i>October 13</i> Kamm, continued	<i>October 15</i> no class (fall break)
<i>October 18</i> Thomas E. Hill, Jr., "Kantian Normative Ethics" (Bb)	<i>October 20</i> Hill, continued	<i>October 22</i> Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Contractarianism"
<i>October 25</i> Sayre-McCord, continued	<i>October 27</i> Hillel Steiner, "Moral Rights" (Bb)	<i>October 29</i> L. W. Sumner, "Rights"
<i>November 1</i> Sumner, continued	<i>November 3</i> Michael R. DePaul, "Intuitions in Moral Inquiry" (Bb)	<i>November 5</i> DePaul, continued
<i>November 8</i> Michael Slote, "Virtue Ethics"	<i>November 10</i> no assigned reading; paper 2, version 1 due; peer review of papers	<i>November 12</i> paper 2, version 2 due; Alison M. Jaggar, "Feminist Ethics"
<i>November 15</i> William R. Schroeder, "Continental Ethics"	<i>November 17</i> no class (meetings about paper 2)	<i>November 19</i> no class (meetings about paper 2)
<i>November 22</i> paper 2, version 3 due; Hugh LaFollette, "Pragmatic Ethics"	<i>November 24</i> no class (Thanksgiving break)	<i>November 26</i> no class (Thanksgiving break)
<i>November 29</i> James P. Sterba, "Toward Reconciliation in Ethics"	<i>December 1</i> reserve / review for test	<i>December 3</i> test 2
<i>December 6</i> review of test	<i>December 8</i> review of course	<i>December 10</i> no class (Stop Day)

***end-of-semester information:***

Test 2 is last assignment of the course. There is no final exam.

If you would like to retrieve any work that you have turned in, but have not yet had returned to you, please retrieve it by December 31, 2011. After that date, I may discard unclaimed work from this semester.