I. Course Description

Is an action good or bad because of its anticipated results or regardless of these results? Is it ever right to kill one person to save five? Is relativism true? Is abortion wrong?

This course is an introduction to philosophical ethics, the part of philosophy that is concerned with right and wrong, good and bad, virtue and vice. We will focus on those historical philosophical theories of these topics that have been most influential in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, as well as consider their relevance to practical ethical problems in contemporary life.
The English word “ethics” derives from the Greek word for character (ηθος, or ethos) reflecting the ancient Greek philosophers’ concern with the question “What kind of character should a person aspire to develop?” The English word “moral” derives from the Latin word for mores, or customary ways of acting. Ethical or moral questions should concern all of us, not only philosophers. Moral philosophers, however, take questions such as these to define their field of study. Today, that field of study includes pursuing both the ancient Greek question and related questions, among them: “What is the right thing to do in a particular situation and why?” “What is morally required of me, to whom and why?” “Is it in my own interest to do the right thing (or to be moral, or to have a good character)?” The answers to such questions provide ethical/moral standards, or norms, for evaluating our own and others’ characters, actions, and (perhaps) emotions. Moral philosophers engaged in the systematic study of the content of such standards, their source, and their justification are engaged in the study of normative ethics.

Sometimes we might find ourselves wondering about more abstract questions about ethical standards themselves, such as whether they are universal in applying alike to all human beings or, instead, relative to particular cultures or subgroups of human beings. One might also wonder whether such standards are “objective” or “subjective” (e.g., is saying that stealing is wrong more akin to reporting the fact that the cat is on the couch or to expressing one’s preference for vanilla ice cream?). Are there objective moral truths and, if so, how we can know them? These are among the questions that are the subject of what philosophers call meta-ethics (because in asking such questions one is asking about the status of ethical claims themselves).

Finally, philosophers sometimes distinguish between meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. Typically, they mean to signal by the latter a narrower focus (than that of normative ethics) on what one should do in some particular, morally significant circumstances. Examples of questions of applied ethics include whether and to what extent we are morally obligated to help eradicate poverty or global warming, whether war may be justly conducted (and, if so, when and how), what is the moral status of abortion and the death penalty, whether affirmative action is fair, what our duties of informed consent are in medicine, and so on.

In this course we will join some prominent moral philosophers – historical, as well as contemporary – in reflecting on ethical questions. The major portion of the course will examine three influential historical traditions in normative ethical theory and their implications for applied ethical problems: (1) Aristotle and contemporary neo-Aristotelian ethics; (2) Immanuel Kant and contemporary Kantian ethics; and (3) John Stuart Mill and contemporary utilitarian consequentialism. Finally we will touch on some topics in meta-ethics.
II. Course Goals and Objectives
The goals of the course are to provide students with no previous background in philosophy with an introduction to philosophical ethics and to equip them to critically read, evaluate, discuss, and write philosophical prose, as well as to engage in the activity of philosophy themselves. Within the context of these goals, our specific objectives will be to:

1. Understand the historical sources and main features of three traditions of ethical theory: Aristotelian, Kantian, and Utilitarian
2. Think, discuss, and write critically about the contributions of each of these traditions to our understanding of ourselves as moral beings
3. Think, discuss, and write critically about the application of each of the traditions to some specific ethical problems
4. Familiarize ourselves with some key meta-ethical questions, as they pertain to the theories we study

III. Writing Intensive Designation
This is a Writing Intensive Course. You will write three essays (of approximately 1250 words each), each of which counts for 1/3 of your final grade. You will turn in drafts for the first two essays and receive written comments back before you submit a revised version. The grade for each of these first two essays will be the average of the grade on the draft and the grade on the revision. You will submit just a final version of the third essay.

IV. Required Texts (available at Bookstore)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
<th>Price New/Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. GROUNDWORK OF METAPHYSICS OF MORALS</td>
<td>KANT</td>
<td>9781107401068</td>
<td>$20.99 / $15.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. NICOMACHEAN ETHICS</td>
<td>ARISTOTLE</td>
<td>9780872204645</td>
<td>$16.00 / $12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. UTILITARIANISM</td>
<td>MILL</td>
<td>9780872206052</td>
<td>$6.50 / $4.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (New/Used):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$43.49 / $32.62</td>
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4. Electronic copies of course readings available online via the course Moodle site. All such readings are hereafter listed as [OL]

Please ensure your access to the readings in class by bringing the appropriate text and/or a printout or electronic device (i.e., laptop or tablet) for access to online readings at: https://ay17.moodle.umn.edu/course/view.php?id=639

You are likely to find many of the readings difficult, perhaps even obscure, on a first reading. (Recall that in some cases we are reading texts translated from foreign languages and dating back centuries B.C.E.!) I ask that you thus be patient with your authors and yourselves, schedule time to read the assignments carefully, and to trust that I would never assign you to read something that I wasn’t confident was important to think about.
V. Course Expectations

Salutations
I request that undergraduates please refer to me as “Professor Mason.” I ask that each student likewise inform me as to how they prefer I address them; my default will be to refer to you by your first name as listed on your course registration.

Preferred contact
For substantive philosophical discussion, email is a poor substitute for real-time, face-to-face conversation. I thus encourage you to discuss philosophy with your peers outside of class and to schedule time to do so with me, as well. I ask you to limit your use of email to occasions where you need to ask some question of fact, or convey some fact, that you otherwise would be unable to ask/convey. When sending email, preface the subject line of your email like so: “PHIL3311: [insert brief subject clue here].”

Appointments
I hold regular office hours on Mondays 3:05-5:05.

Attendance, lateness and class participation
All students must attend all classes, arriving promptly and having mastered the course readings sufficiently to intelligently participate. I will sometimes call on students in class, so please be prepared. Please don’t be worried about saying something “stupid” if called on. It is important to promote discussion on the topics of the course and, provided you’ve done your work, you have no reason to fear being called on. In the event that you do miss class, it is your responsibility to follow up with one of your fellow students to cover what you missed and to provide evidence of a documented excuse, in order to avoid adverse effects on your grade (see Missed assignments).

Electronic devices
The only use of electronic devices I permit is that of using a laptop or tablet for accessing course readings and taking notes. NO TEXTING, NO TWEETING, NO EMAIL CHECKING, NO BUZZFEEDing, ETC. is permitted. If your phone must remain on for legitimate reasons (e.g., childcare responsibilities), please set it to vibrate/silent mode and quietly excuse yourself from the classroom to answer.

Regarding note-taking, you may be interested to learn of the cognitive benefits of taking notes by (long)hand: [http://chronicle.com/article/The-Benefits-of-No-Tech-Note/228089/]
Food/Drink
Please limit any in-class eating or drinking that prevents you from participating fully in discussion.

Written assignments
Because this course meets the undergraduate Writing requirement, I require you to complete a series of short papers. Your TA will provide comments on drafts of the first two papers with an eye to helping you improve your philosophical writing.

The University Center for Writing provides writing support free of charge to any member of the University community.

Missed assignments and Accommodations
All students must complete all assignments by their due dates, unless accommodations are formally arranged.

“The University of Minnesota views disability as an important aspect of diversity, and is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

• If you have, or think you have, a disability in any area such as, mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the DRC office on your campus (UM Twin Cities - 612.626.1333) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

• Students with short-term disabilities, such as a broken arm, can often work with instructors to minimize classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, students should contact the DRC as noted above.

• If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact your instructor early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in the course.

• If you are registered with the DRC and have questions or concerns about your accommodations please contact your (access consultant/disability specialist).

Additional information is available on the DRC website: UM Twin Cities - https://diversity.umn.edu/disability/ or e-mail UM Twin Cities - drc@umn.edu with questions.”

I will excuse late assignments only in the case of documented illness or tragedy. I will record all other late assignments as reduced one full letter grade per class meeting transpired (e.g. from A to B if handed in after due date and before the following class meeting; from A to C if handed in after due date and before second class meeting thereafter; and so on).

I also will reduce paper grades for absences or lack of preparation/participation.

I will assign no make-up work, extra-credit work, or incompletes.
Time commitment

According to University policy:

"one credit represents, for the average University undergraduate student, three hours of academic work per week (including lectures, laboratories, recitations, discussion groups, field work, study, and so on), averaged over the semester, in order to complete the work of the course to achieve an average grade. One credit equals 42 to 45 hours of work over the course of the semester (1 credit x 3 hours of work per week x 14 or 15 weeks in a semester equals 42 to 45 hours of academic work). Thus, enrollment for 15 credits in a semester represents approximately 45 hours of work per week, on average, over the course of the semester."

Formally, therefore, this 4-credit course should require an average of 12 hours of work per week to achieve an average grade: 3.3 classroom hours and 8.7 hours of out-of-class hours each week in a fifteen week term. This makes for a total of 180 hours of work for this class over the course of the semester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-class hours</th>
<th>Approx. 49.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading/viewing hours</td>
<td>Approx. 94.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(avg. 6.3/week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1 hours (review, writing, revision)</td>
<td>Approx. 12 (8 draft; 4 rev)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2 hours (review, writing, revision)</td>
<td>Approx. 12 (8 draft; 4 rev)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 3 hours (review, writing)</td>
<td>Approx. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total hours</td>
<td>Approx. 180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You should not take this course if you cannot make this time commitment. I understand that we all have commitments and responsibilities that compete for our time outside the classroom. However, as your professor, my priority is to help you achieve course goals and objectives; I likewise expect you to make your education your priority.

**Academic honesty**

“You are expected to do your own academic work and cite sources as necessary. Failing to do so is scholastic dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. (Student Conduct Code: [http://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf](http://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf)] If it is determined that a student has cheated, the student may be given an "F" or an "N" for the course, and may face additional sanctions from the University. For additional information, please see: [http://policy.umn.edu/education/instructorresp](http://policy.umn.edu/education/instructorresp). The Office for Student Conduct and Academic Integrity has compiled a useful list of Frequently Asked Questions pertaining to scholastic dishonesty: [http://www1.umn.edu/ooci/integrity/student/index.html](http://www1.umn.edu/ooci/integrity/student/index.html). If you have additional questions, please clarify with your instructor for the course. Your instructor can respond to your specific questions regarding what would constitute scholastic dishonesty in the context of a particular class-e.g., whether collaboration on assignments is permitted, requirements and methods for citing sources, if electronic aids are permitted or prohibited during an exam.”

**Overview of operative policies and procedures**

Finally, familiarize yourself with the 11 policies governing all University courses: [https://policy.umn.edu/education/syllabusrequirements-appa](https://policy.umn.edu/education/syllabusrequirements-appa)

**VI. Course Assignments and Grading**

**Papers**

Those taking the course for a grade must complete three short papers (i.e., of approximately 1250 words, exclusive of notes, or approximately 5 pp.). I will assign paper topics but I’ll allow (indeed encourage) you to propose a topic of your own for the final paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper 1 topic distributed</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1 draft due</td>
<td>Week 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1 draft returned</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1 final due</td>
<td>Week 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1 final returned</td>
<td>Week 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2 topic distributed</td>
<td>Week 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2 draft due</td>
<td>Week 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2 draft returned</td>
<td>Week 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paper 2 final due Week 11
Paper 3 topic distributed Week 11
Paper 3 independent topics due Week 12
Paper 3 topics returned Week 12
Paper 3 due TBA, 5 p.m.

Please note there will be no exam scheduled for the course.

**Assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1 draft and revision (approx 1250 words)</td>
<td>1/3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2 draft and revision (approx 1250 words)</td>
<td>1/3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 3 (approx 1250 words)</td>
<td>1/3*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The primary criteria for grading the papers include general clarity of expression, demonstrated understanding of the significance of the relevant text, ability to articulate a philosophical topic, and quality of the arguments for one’s own conclusions regarding the topic at hand. These qualities, in addition to creativity and insight, characterize the best philosophical prose.

* Because this course employs the Socratic method, class attendance and participation are not included as a separate grading component but are mandatory. Students with unexcused absences will be asked to drop the course. Those students who decline will see their subsequent paper grade reduced by one full letter grade (e.g., A to B) for each unexcused class absence.

I will assign final grades understanding the quality grades as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.000 - Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.000 - Represents achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.000 - Represents achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>1.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>1.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.000 - Represents achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Represents achievement that is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I strongly encourage all students unfamiliar with the norms of philosophical research, writing, and citation practices, to get in touch with our subject librarian for advice regarding the same:

Susan Gangl
s-gang@tc.umn.edu

VII. Further Study
Research sources
Philosophical resources available on the Internet range from the top-rate to the worthless. A necessary skill in using the Internet for research purposes, then, is distinguishing good sources from bad. If you find yourself wanting a general overview of a philosophical topic, one source I highly recommend is the free, on-line Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. For more advanced information searching, I recommend the Philosopher’s Index, databases of articles from a large collection of philosophy journals, some of which are freely available through the library’s website. Both of these resources, in addition to other approved resources, are available through the University’s Philosophy Resources Page:
https://www.lib.umn.edu/subjects/rqs/168
VIII. Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1:
Introduction to the Course and Topic
What is moral philosophy? What is its value? Overview of the field. A contemporary example.

Readings
• Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality” [OL]

Week 2:
Challenges to Morality
Are moral standards relative to a culture? Do we always act from self-interested motives? Are moral truths the commands of a divine being? If so, what are the possibilities for moral disagreement and moral progress?

Readings
• James Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism” [OL]
• Joel Feinberg, “Psychological Egoism” [OL]
• Plato, from Euthyphro [OL]

Weeks 3, 4, 5:
John Stuart Mill and Utilitarianism
What are the key features of Mill’s Utilitarianism as an ethical theory? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What are its implications for practical ethical problems?

Readings
• J.S. Mill, Utilitarianism
• Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism” [OL]

Assignments
• Paper 1 topic distributed week 3
• Paper 1 draft due week 4
Weeks 6, 7, 8:
Immanuel Kant and Deontology
What are the key features of Kant’s ethical theory? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What are its implications for practical ethical problems?

Readings
• Immanuel Kant, selections from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*
  ○ The Nagel reading is available through University Library via the JSTOR online article repository. Please access it yourself.

Assignments
• Paper 1 draft returned week 6
• Paper 1 final due week 7
• Paper 1 final returned week 8
• Paper 2 topic distributed week 8

Weeks 9, 10, 11:
Aristotle and Eudaimonism
What are the key features of Aristotle’s ethical theory? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What are its implications for practical ethical problems?

Readings
• Aristotle, selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*
• Martha Nussbaum, “Non-relative virtues” [OL]
• Rosalind Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion” [OL]

Assignments
• Paper 2 draft due week 9
• Paper 2 draft returned week 10
• Paper 2 final due week 11
• Paper 3 topic distributed week 11
Weeks 12, 13, 14, 15:

Meta-ethics

Is saying that pleasure is good more akin to reporting the fact that the earth is round or to expressing one’s preference for chocolate ice cream? If moral language expresses our emotions or preferences, can there be genuine moral disagreement or progress? Are there objective moral truths and, if so, what connection—if any—do they have to how we are motivated to act?

Readings

- G. E. Moore, selections from *Principia Ethica* [OL]
- Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms” [OL]
  - The Foot reading is available through the University Library via the *Philosopher’s Index*. Please access it yourself.

Assignments

- Paper 5 independent topics due week 12
- Paper 5 topics returned week 12
- Paper 5 due TBA, 5 p.m.