

UC Irvine, Fall 2019  
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**PHIL 4**  
**Introduction to Ethics**

Webpage To Follow

**Syllabus Version:** May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (I will be regularly updating the syllabus, so please make sure you have the latest version, which will be posted on Canvas).

**Course Overview:** This course provides a general introduction to ethics, one of the core topics of philosophy. It provides a comprehensive overview of ethics, and as such covers central topics in normative ethics, applied ethics, and meta-ethics. We will be covering such topics as death and the meaning of life, ethics and religion, and particular normative moral theories like Aristotelian virtue ethics. **Please note that this course is 100% online.** This means that there are no timetabled class hours for the course whatsoever. In particular, although the discussion groups have a timetabled hour attached to them (this is done automatically I'm afraid, so we can't get rid of them), this course is completely flexible, and hence you are not required to attend your discussion group at a particular time (see below for more details about how discussion groups work). Instead, you will be engaged in the virtual learning environment that we have created here, with lots of educational resources uploaded to enable you to complete this course (such as recorded mini-lecture videos and so on).

**Teaching Assistants:**

- TBC

**Prerequisites:** There are no prerequisites for this course.

**Requirement for Philosophy Major/Minor:** Philos 4 satisfies a requirement for the B.A. degree in

philosophy, the minor in philosophy, and the minor in humanities and law.

**General Education Category IV:** Philos 4 satisfies the General Education Category IV (Arts and Humanities). General Education Category IV courses expand the student's sense of diverse forms of cultural expression, past and present. Students develop their critical capacity as they discover how meaning is created and experience is variously interpreted.

**Learning Outcomes:** After completing Philos 4, successful students should be able to do the following:

- Demonstrate knowledge of some of the main views, concepts, and theories in philosophy in their historical and cultural context.
- Demonstrate a critical recognition of the philosophical approaches to the formation of culture.
- Demonstrate imaginative, creative, and reflective abilities by articulating philosophical insights.
- Present effectively in writing an extended argument on a topic of philosophical importance. Articulate counter-arguments to one's own position. Ask questions to clarify problems further.
- Demonstrate awareness of the complexity of issues and of the necessity of examining issues from many different perspectives. Demonstrate openness and intellectual humility by approaching philosophical problems in a spirit of inquiry.

**Course Website:** All course content will be available via the course website on Canvas. The class is organized in modules (or course topics), with roughly (but not always) two modules for each week of the course. For each module there will be lots of content pages, with written content, recorded videos, and links to readings and other media, and there will also be quizzes, which are based on the content pages.

**Timezone:** Please note that for all the deadlines for this course the relevant timezone is for the US west coast.

**Internet Access:** You are responsible for verifying that internet access at your location is reliable.

**User Account:** To participate in the online aspect of this course, you must log in via your UCI user account.

**Prerecorded Mini-Lectures:** The course has numerous short ‘mini-lectures,’ that is, short videos featuring the instructor discussing the material covered in that module. There will also be additional mini-lectures in support of the learning objectives of the course, such as mini-lectures on essay writing.

**Readings:** There are readings assigned for each module, mostly taken from the textbook, *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), edited by Christopher Bennett. This book is widely available from bookstores, including as an e-book. It is also available, both physically and as an e-book, from the library, so you don’t need to purchase if you don’t want to. Note that for all the topics we are covering here, you will find lots of useful additional readings in the two main (and completely free) online philosophy encyclopedias: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu>) and the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://www.iep.utm.edu>). (While both of these resources are good, the former tends to be superior to the latter). You are expected to read the material carefully and critically. For general guidance on reading a philosophy text and writing a philosophy essay, I will be supplying additional readings and a short mini-lecture.

**Small Group Discussion Board Assignments:** Each week, you will be asked to work with a small group of your peers to respond to open-answer questions based on the course materials. A list of questions is provided below—it is entirely up to you which question or questions you wish to focus on. Participation in these discussion boards counts for 25% of your final grade. To receive full participation points, you will need to (i) post a substantive response to the open-answer questions by **Thursday, midnight, of that week**, and (ii) provide critical feedback to at least two of your peers by **Sunday, midnight, of that week**.

You will have an opportunity to earn up to 3% for your participation in weekly discussion boards, up to a maximum of 25% overall. Note that your lowest two scores in the discussion forums will be dropped when determining your final grade.

**Grading Rubric:**

- 1% for crafting an original response to the prompt.
- 1% for providing meaningful feedback to posts from classmates (per piece of feedback provided, up to a maximum of 2%).

A substantive post is generally >100 words and introduces a new idea or is a meaningful response to another person's post. When responding to another person's post, please either expand the thought, add additional insights, or respectfully disagree and explain why. Remember that we are after reasons and arguments, and not simply the statement of opinions.

**Communication:** The main means of communication in this course are discussion boards and email. The discussion boards produce a record that can be used like a FAQ. Ask us anything. We will send course announcements to the official course mailing list, so you should check your email regularly. Note that this mailing list goes to the email address that the registrar has for you. If you prefer to read your email on another account, you should set your account to forward your email to your preferred account. To reach the professor and the teaching assistants regarding questions that are personal in nature, please use the email addresses or the phone numbers listed above. For questions related to the course, use the discussion board.

**Quizzes:** Each week you will be asked to answer some multiple-choice quizzes that concern the topics covered in that week. In addition, there is also a course comprehension quiz, which essentially just asks questions to make sure you have read and understood this syllabus, and a bumper quiz at the end of the course (for which you will be given a bit more time to complete). Note that with the exception of the course comprehension quiz you have only one attempt at each quiz, so make sure you are prepared! I'll be giving you lots of time to complete each quiz, so do make sure that you complete it. Each correct answer in a quiz is worth 1 point. Note that the quizzes vary in size—this just reflects that fact that some topics are more amenable to quizzes than others. Don't forget that the final quiz—which you will have longer to complete—will be a bumper quiz on the course as a whole. The formula for working out how your correct quiz answers translate into your percentage for this part of the course will be as follows: we will ignore your weakest two quiz scores (bar your scores for the comprehension quiz and the bumper quiz). This means that you could miss two quizzes and still get full marks (though naturally you will raise your chances of getting full marks if

you complete everything).

**Papers:** You will write two papers of 1000-1500 words each. You will find a list of essay questions and the relevant deadlines in the appendices below. **The papers must be submitted to <http://turnitin.com> ONLY—your TA will provide you with the relevant details.** If you have questions about the essays, then please don't hesitate to contact either your TA or myself. We are also willing to give feedback on essay plans (no more than one page), though naturally you will need to do this well in advance of the essay deadline. **Please note that in the interests of fairness, neither I nor the TAs will provide feedback on essay drafts.** Essays don't need to use a particular style of formatting or referencing. All that is important is that they are clearly written throughout (and full references are given somewhere, where appropriate).

### **Grading:**

The breakdown for the 100% over the course is as follows:

- Quizzes: 25%

(NB. Your lowest two quiz scores are automatically dropped when calculating your grade for this segment of the course, **not including the comprehension quiz, for which you need to get 100%, and the bumper quiz at the end of the course**).

- Discussion board assignments: 25%

(NB. Your lowest discussion score is automatically dropped when calculating your grade for this segment of the course).

- First paper: 25%
- Second paper: 25%

### **Policies**

#### **Respect:**

This class involves significant online discussion of topics on which you and your classmates may have differences of opinion. You may also have opinions that differ from those of the instructors. Please be respectful of classmates, the professor, and teaching assistants at all times.

#### **Academic Honesty:**

Please familiarize yourself with UC Irvine’s academic honesty policy (<http://honesty.uci.edu>). The consequences of academic dishonesty (e.g., course failure and not learning the material) are not worth the small artificial benefits to your grade and the impugning of your character. The penalty for any violation of academic integrity—including but not limited to plagiarism—is failure for the course and a letter recording the violation sent to the Associate Dean for Curriculum and Student Services in the School of Humanities. Note that submitting work for assessment that you have previously submitted for assessment is also a case of academic misconduct. If you have questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, it is always better to ask than to guess.

### **Grading Scale:**

I follow the standard UCI grading scale.

A+ = 96.5%	A = 93.5%	A- = 90%
B+ = 86.5%	B = 83.5%	B- = 80%
C+ = 76.5%	C = 73.5%	C- = 70%
D+ = 66.5%	D = 63.5%	D- = 60%
F = Less than 60%		

### **Late Penalties:**

For all assessed work, for each day, or part of the day, that the assessment is late we will deduct one grade (e.g., a one-day late penalty means that A+ goes down to A, B- goes down C+, and so on). If you have a good excuse for being late—and please note that a good excuse doesn’t mean ‘I forgot about the deadline’, or ‘I left it to the very last minute and my computer broke down’, and so on—then it is important that you get in touch with both myself and your TA ASAP to explain the situation.

## SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1

#### Topic 1:       **INTRODUCING ETHICS**

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), Introduction.

**Watch:** 'Introducing Ethics Mini-Lecture', MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** 'Introducing Ethics Mini-Lecture', MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for this mini-lecture are posted in Canvas).

#### Topic 2:       **DEATH AND THE MEANING OF LIFE**

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 1.

**Watch:** 'Death and the Meaning of Life Mini-Lecture Part 1', MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** 'Death and the Meaning of Life Mini-Lecture Part 1', MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** 'Death and the Meaning of Life Mini-Lecture Part 2', MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** 'Death and the Meaning of Life Mini-Lecture Part 2', MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** 'Death and the Meaning of Life Mini-Lecture Part 3', MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** 'Death and the Meaning of Life Mini-Lecture Part 3', MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** 'Death and the Meaning of Life Mini-Lecture Part 4', MP4 version available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** 'Death and the Meaning of Life Mini-Lecture Part 4', MP3 (audio only) available

on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Death and the Meaning of Life Mini-Lecture Part 5’, MP4 version available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Death and the Meaning of Life Mini-Lecture Part 5’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for all these mini-lectures are posted in Canvas).

### Questions for Discussion Forum

- ❑ Do we have a duty to work out where we stand on ethical issues? Why can’t we just defer to experts like we do in other domains (like theoretical physics)?
- ❑ What is *moral relativism*? Why might people be attracted to it? Is it plausible?
- ❑ What is *moral scepticism*, and how is it different from moral relativism? Is it any more (or less) plausible than moral relativism?
- ❑ What is the three-way distinction between normative ethics, applied ethics, and meta-ethics? Can you give an example of an applied ethical debate?
- ❑ Is your death bad *for you*, specifically, or only (at most) for others? Why might someone claim that it isn’t bad for you?
- ❑ If death isn’t bad for the person concerned, then does this mean that we shouldn’t grieve their passing? Would such grieving then be solely about you, and not about the person who has died?
- ❑ We don’t care that we didn’t exist for a long time before we were born. Does it follow that we shouldn’t care that we will cease to exist after we die?
- ❑ Can you be harmed even after your death (e.g., if someone tells lies about you)? If so, does that mean that the ‘badness’ of death can’t just be understood in terms of your own suffering?
- ❑ What is the distinction between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* goodness? Can you give an example of each?
- ❑ How might we make sense of the ‘badness’ of death by arguing that while it is not intrinsically bad, it is extrinsically bad?
- ❑ Why is Sisyphus’s life held to be meaningless? Is it?

- ❑ What is the perspective known as *sub specie aeternitatis*? Why might life seem meaningless when viewed from this perspective?
- ❑ Would God's existence *necessarily* confer meaning on our lives? If not, why not?
- ❑ What is the distinction between *final* and *instrumental* (or *non-final*) value? Can you give an example of each?
- ❑ How does the distinction between final and instrumental value differ from the intrinsic/extrinsic goodness distinction? Can you give an example of something that is finally valuable but not intrinsically good?
- ❑ How might we make sense of the meaning of life in terms of final value?
- ❑ What is *hedonism*? How does *ethical hedonism* differ from *psychological hedonism*?
- ❑ What is *utilitarianism*, and why is it a form of hedonism?
- ❑ How would an ethical hedonist account for the meaning of life? Could one lead a life full of pleasure that was nonetheless meaningless? Would appealing to 'higher' pleasures make any difference here?
- ❑ What is the *experience machine*? Is a life lived in the experience machine meaningful?
- ❑ What is *eudaimonia*? What are the *virtues*? What role does the latter play in the former?
- ❑ Why according to virtue ethics is a life lived in the experience machine meaningless?
- ❑ How might a virtue ethics account for the meaning of life?

## WEEK 2

### Topic 3: WHICH LIVES COUNT?

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 2.

**Watch:** 'Which Lives Count Mini-Lecture Part 1', MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** 'Which Lives Count Mini-Lecture Part 1', MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** 'Which Lives Count Mini-Lecture Part 2', MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** 'Which Lives Count Mini-Lecture Part 2', MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** 'Which Lives Count Mini-Lecture Part 3', MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Which Lives Count Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for all these mini-lectures are posted in Canvas).

### Questions for Discussion Forum

- ❑ What does it mean to say that the special value of human lives is reflected in how they are ‘not disposable’? Does this reflect a special value?
- ❑ Are human lives intrinsically valuable? If so, in virtue of what? (Is it our uniqueness, perhaps, or our autonomy, or something else?)
- ❑ If human life is intrinsically valuable, then does that mean that one can never morally kill a human being? If not, why not?
- ❑ Do we have a *right* to life? If so, then what implications might this have?
- ❑ Does the special value of human life relate to how we are *persons* (i.e., with the capacity to live genuinely autonomous lives, to have hopes and dreams, and so on)?
- ❑ How might accounts of the special value of human beings relate to the value of animals? For example, if personhood is what’s important, then doesn’t that mean that animals lack a special value (and doesn’t this justify, for example, our using them for food)?
- ❑ What does it mean to say that animals are *replaceable* in a way that human beings are not? Is it true?
- ❑ What is *euthanasia*? How might thinking of personhood as determining the special value of human beings legitimize euthanasia in certain situations?
- ❑ What is *abortion*? How might thinking of personhood as determining the special value of human beings legitimize abortion? Is the *potentiality* of the foetus for personhood relevant here?
- ❑ What does it mean to say that human life is *sacred*, and how is this a stronger claim than the thesis that human life has special value?
- ❑ What is *deontologism*, and how is it different from *consequentialism*?
- ❑ Why would a deontological approach to the wrongness of killing entail that it would be better to not kill someone even if killing them would save twenty other lives? What would the consequentialist say about such a case?

### WEEK 3

**Topic 4: HOW MUCH CAN MORALITY REQUIRE US TO DO FOR ONE ANOTHER?**

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 3.

**Watch:** ‘How Much Can Morality Require Us To Do For Each Other? Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘How Much Can Morality Require Us To Do For Each Other? Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘How Much Can Morality Require Us To Do For Each Other? Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘How Much Can Morality Require Us To Do For Each Other? Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘How Much Can Morality Require Us To Do For Each Other? Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘How Much Can Morality Require Us To Do For Each Other? Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for all these mini-lectures are posted in Canvas).

**Questions for Discussion Forum**

- ❑ Is my moral obligation to others the same regardless of their geographical distance from me? If so, then doesn't that mean that I have overwhelming moral obligations (to potentially millions of people worldwide)?
- ❑ Could our moral obligations be instead relative to such factors as geographical proximity (e.g., such that we have a greater moral responsibility to help those in need in our neighbourhoods than we do on the other side of the world)?
- ❑ Do those in need have a *right* to be helped? If so, does it follow that our moral obligations to others cannot be influenced by such factors as geographical proximity?

- ❑ Describe Judith Jarvis Thomson's 'violinist' case. Is the person in this case who is hooked-up to the violinist under a moral obligation to help him out? Or would it merely be morally good of them (though not morally required) to do so?
- ❑ What are the intended implications of the violinist case for the debate about abortion? In particular, why does this case purport to show that the question of whether the foetus is a person doesn't determine whether abortion is morally permissible?
- ❑ What implications might the violinist case have for our moral obligations to others more generally?
- ❑ In what way are most pregnancies disanalogous to the violinist case? How might this disanalogy weaken Thomson's argument?
- ❑ Are there also disanalogies between the violinist case and our relationship to the global poor? For example, are we responsible for there being global poverty in a way that the protagonist in the violinist case is not responsible for being hooked-up to a violinist?
- ❑ Consider the proposal that we are morally obligated to help everyone in need only so long as we can do so in a way that isn't onerous. Is this proposal defensible? If not, why not?
- ❑ What is utilitarianism? Why might the utilitarian hold that we are always morally obligated to help others in need so long as the cost to us in doing so is not greater than the good we thereby bring about? What problems might such a proposal face?
- ❑ What is *self-determination*? Do we have a right to self-determination? How might the idea that self-determination has a special value enable us to limit, in a principled way, the demands made upon us by morality? Is this limitation principled?
- ❑ What is the distinction between *positive* and *negative responsibility*? How can we recast the debate about the demandingness of morality in terms of the limits of negative responsibility?

## WEEK 4

### Topic 5: UTILITARIANISM

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 4.

**Watch:** 'Utilitarianism Mini-Lecture Part 1', MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** 'Utilitarianism Mini-Lecture Part 1', MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Utilitarianism Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Utilitarianism Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Utilitarianism Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Utilitarianism Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for all these mini-lectures are posted in Canvas).

### Questions for Discussion Forum

- ❑ What is *utilitarianism*? Why is this proposal a form of *consequentialism*?
- ❑ How is utilitarianism different from straightforward *hedonism*? What does utilitarianism mean by the *hedonic calculus*?
- ❑ Why do consequentialist views like utilitarianism entail that any action can be morally permissible in the right circumstances?
- ❑ What is *retributivism*? Why might a utilitarian argue that punishments should avoid, where possible, harming the offender? What, instead, would the point of punishment be for the utilitarian?
- ❑ Why might a utilitarian hold that they are not under any general moral obligation to keep their promises? If true, why might that make utilitarianism self-defeating?
- ❑ Why does utilitarianism seem to have a problem accounting for friendship, and in particular the special obligations that we seem to have to our friends? Do they?
- ❑ What is the distinction between *rule* and *act utilitarianism*? How does rule utilitarianism avoid some of the problems facing utilitarianism? What problems facing the view does it not deal with?
- ❑ How might rule utilitarianisms accommodate the notion of *rights* (and why might act utilitarianism struggle to accommodate this notion)? Does it capture why we believe that human beings have certain fundamental rights?

## WEEK 5

### Topic 6: KANTIAN ETHICS

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 5.

**Watch:** ‘Kantian Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Kantian Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Kantian Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Kantian Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Kantian Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Kantian Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Kantian Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 4’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Kantian Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 4’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for all these mini-lectures are posted in Canvas).

### Questions for Discussion Forum

- ❑ What is *deontology*, and how is it different from consequentialism?
- ❑ What does Kant mean when he says that all human beings should be treated as *ends in themselves*, and not *means to an end*?
- ❑ Why does Kant think that what grounds our special moral status—what ensures our dignity as persons—is our capacity for *autonomy*?
- ❑ Explain how a Kantian ethic and a utilitarian ethic would respond in different ways to the moral difficulty posed by slavery.
- ❑ How, for Kant, does our autonomy manifest itself in terms of both a *positive* and a *negative* freedom? What does Kant mean by this?
- ❑ Why is lying always wrong, according to Kant? In particular, how does this claim follow from the main theses of a Kantian ethic? Is such a view sustainable?
- ❑ Why is it important, according to a Kantian ethic, that one acts *out of duty* and not merely in accordance with it? How is this different to a utilitarian ethic?
- ❑ What is Kant’s *categorical imperative*? What’s categorical (rather than *hypothetical*) about it?
- ❑ What is the *golden rule*, and how does it differ from Kant’s categorical imperative?

- ❑ What does Kant mean when he says that requirements of morality are also requirements of rationality?

## WEEK 6

### Topic 7: ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE ETHICS

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 6.

**Watch:** ‘Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for all these mini-lectures are posted in Canvas).

### Questions for Discussion Forum

- ❑ What is *eudaimonia*? What are the *virtues*? On the Aristotelian view, what role is the latter meant to play in the former?
- ❑ How might we distinguish between morality and ethics? Why might this distinction be important to understanding an Aristotelian virtue ethic?
- ❑ Why are emotions important to the motivation of action on the Aristotelian view? How is this different from the Kantian claim that one should act out of duty and not merely accordance with it?
- ❑ What does Aristotle mean when he says that our emotions are not *first nature*, but they feel as

such because they are *second nature*? Why does it follow that we can train-up our emotional responses in the development of virtue?

- ❑ How do one's virtues reflect one's fundamental values? Give some examples to illustrate your points.
- ❑ How do virtues differ from mere skills? How are these differences meant to account for the final value of the virtues?
- ❑ According to a Kantian ethic, morally good actions arise out of the right principles, while for a utilitarian ethic morally good actions have the right consequences. What does an Aristotelian ethic claim, and how does it differ from these two proposals?
- ❑ What is the *golden mean*, and how does it enable us to identify a virtue?
- ❑ Is it a problem for an Aristotelian ethic that it doesn't offer much in the way of concrete practical moral guidance (in the way that a Kantian or utilitarian ethics does)?

### **FIRST ESSAY WRITING PREPARATION**

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Philosophy?* (Routledge, 2016), Appendix: How To Write a Philosophy Essay.

**Watch:** 'How to Write a Philosophy Essay Mini-Lecture', MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** 'How to Write a Philosophy Essay Mini-Lecture', MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for this mini-lecture are also posted in Canvas).

## **WEEK 7**

### **Topic 8: ETHICS AND RELIGION**

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 7.

**Watch:** 'Ethics and Religion Mini-Lecture Part 1', MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** 'Ethics and Religion Mini-Lecture Part 1', MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Ethics and Religion Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Ethics and Religion Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Ethics and Religion Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Ethics and Religion Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for all these mini-lectures are posted in Canvas).

### Questions for Discussion Forum

- ❑ What is *nihilism*? Why might someone hold that without God nihilism is inevitable? Would they be right to do so?
- ❑ What is meant by *ultimate justice*? Does an objective morality demand ultimate justice? If so, why might this require there to be a God? Does it?
- ❑ Does an objective morality demand that there is an objective moral authority? If so, then is God the only kind of entity that could play this role? What would the Kantian say is the source of an objective morality?
- ❑ What is the *design argument* for the existence of God? Is it plausible?
- ❑ What is the *cosmological argument* for the existence of God? Is it plausible?
- ❑ What is the *problem of evil*? Why does this raise a difficulty for the existence of (a perfectly good) God?
- ❑ What is the *Divine Command Theory* of morality?
- ❑ What is the *Euthyphro problem*, and how does it create difficulties for divine command theory?

## WEEK 8

### Topic 9: MORALITY AS CONTRACT

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 8.

**Watch:** ‘Morality as Contract Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Morality as Contract Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP3 (audio only) available on

Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Morality as Contract Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Morality as Contract Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Morality as Contract Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Morality as Contract Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for all these mini-lectures are posted in Canvas).

### Questions for Discussion Forum

- ❑ What is life like in the ‘*state of nature*’, according to Hobbes? Is Hobbes right that people are in their nature *egotistical*?
- ❑ What is the *social contract* that Hobbes sets out, and how it supposed to help us avoid the terrible fate of living in a state of nature?
- ❑ Why does Hobbes hold that we have tacitly consented to the social contract? Is he right? (Is it even possible to *tacitly* consent to a contract?)
- ❑ How is social contract theory meant to provide a rational foundation for morality, even while granting that morality is a social construction? Is it successful in this regard?
- ❑ What is the *Leviathan* that Hobbes describes, and why does he think that it is necessary?
- ❑ What is the free-rider problem, and how does it affect the Hobbesian view? Does it pose a seriously difficulty for the position?
- ❑ What does Rawls mean by the *veil of ignorance*, and how is this notion meant to help us identify what a just society looks like?
- ❑ Why does a Rawlsian account of a just society struggle to capture the way in which we are often *partial* in our moral judgements (e.g., in how we are more concerned to help those in need who are closest to us)? Is this a problem for the view?
- ❑ Is it psychologically possible to reason under a veil of ignorance as Rawls maintains?
- ❑ How plausible is it that if we do reason under a veil of ignorance that we will converge on a particular conception of a just society? How might we end up with competing conceptions

of a just society?

## WEEK 9

### Topic 10: CRITIQUES OF MORALITY

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 9.

**Watch:** ‘Critiques of Morality Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Critiques of Morality Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Critiques of Morality Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Critiques of Morality Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘Critiques of Morality Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘Critiques of Morality Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for all these mini-lectures are posted in Canvas).

### Questions for Discussion Forum

- ❑ Why does Marx hold that there is nothing natural about our fundamental moral convictions, and that in fact they are the product of forces of which we are entirely unaware? What forces does he have in mind?
- ❑ Why would a Marxist be suspicious of the contemporary moral/political focus on rights and liberties? How would they critically interpret such a moral/political focus?
- ❑ What does Marx mean when he claims that morality is inherently *bourgeois* and a product of *false consciousness*? Is he right to do so?
- ❑ Is Marx critical of all morality, or only a bourgeois morality? Could there be a Marxist account of a ‘morality of the future’ once we overcome the inherent class conflicts within

capitalist society? Would there be any need for morality in such a future society, if Marx is right?

- ❑ Why does Nietzsche hold that morality is a means by which the ordinary impose their will over the exceptional, and thereby enforce mediocrity?
- ❑ What does Nietzsche mean when he argues that morality arises out of *ressentiment*? Does it?
- ❑ What are the two main elements of the ‘morality of the weak’, according to Nietzsche? How are they meant to undermine and frustrate the will of those who are exceptional?
- ❑ Why does Nietzsche argue that the ‘death of God’ leads to both a crisis and an opportunity?
- ❑ What are the main points on which Marx and Nietzsche are in agreement in their respective critiques of morality? (Try to list at least three points of agreement).
- ❑ Have capitalist societies made *moral progress* since (say) the second world war? How might this issue be relevant to evaluating Marx and Nietzsche’s critiques of morality?
- ❑ To what extent could it be argued that Marx and Nietzsche’s critiques of morality effectively presuppose a Kantian or utilitarian conception of morality? How might one appeal to virtue ethics to respond to these critiques?
- ❑ What does Hume mean when he argues that morality is something that we *project* onto objective reality, rather than being part of reality itself?
- ❑ What is *moral expressivism*, and what does it say about the nature of moral claims?
- ❑ In what sense is Hume’s moral expressivism more radical in its treatment of moral claims than the critiques of morality offered by Marx and Nietzsche?

## WEEK 10

### Topic 11: SO WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED ETHICS?

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Ethics?* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 10.

**Watch:** ‘So What is This Thing Called Ethics? Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘What is This Thing Called Ethics? Mini-Lecture Part 1’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘What is This Thing Called Ethics? Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘What is This Thing Called Ethics? Mini-Lecture Part 2’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

**Watch:** ‘What is This Thing Called Ethics? Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘What is This Thing Called Ethics? Mini-Lecture Part 3’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for all these mini-lectures are posted in Canvas).

### Questions for Discussion Forum

- ❑ What is *moral relativism*, and how does it offer one (radical) solution to the problem of *moral disagreement*?
- ❑ What is *moral scepticism*, and how is it different from *moral relativism*?
- ❑ What is the distinction between *moral knowledge scepticism* and *moral truth scepticism*? How do these two forms of scepticism respond to the problem of moral disagreement? How are these approaches different from the response to the problem of moral disagreement offered by moral relativism?
- ❑ Why is moral expressivism committed to moral truth scepticism?
- ❑ Why is moral relativism *not* a way of respecting the moral claims of those who you disagree with?
- ❑ Is moral disagreement a good motivation for moral relativism? If so, then does the existence of *moral agreement* offer a motivation *against* moral relativism? Can there be *moral progress*, and if so, does that mean that moral relativism must be false?
- ❑ What is Mackie’s *argument from queerness* against moral objectivity? Is it compelling, do you think?
- ❑ What is Mackie’s *argument from relativity* against moral objectivity? Mackie argues that there are only two credible explanations for the diversity found in our moral judgements, and that neither of them are plausible. What are these explanations, and is Mackie right to dismiss their plausibility?
- ❑ What is the distinction between *moral realism* and *moral anti-realism*? How might a moral anti-realist nonetheless claim that there is such a thing as an objective morality?

- ❑ What is a *moral error-theory*, of the kind defended by Mackie? Why is it a form of moral anti-realism? How does it differ from moral expressivism?
- ❑ What is it about a Kantian ethics that ensures that morality is objective? Why is a Kantian ethics nonetheless a form of moral anti-realism? Why is such a proposal known as *constructivism*?
- ❑ How does an Aristotelian virtue ethics, like a Kantian ethics, claim that there is an objective morality even while endorsing moral anti-realism? How might the analogy with colour be useful in this regard?
- ❑ What is *moral epistemology*? What is the distinction between *moral cognitivism* and *moral non-cognitivism*?
- ❑ Why is the moral expressivist and the moral knowledge skeptic committed to moral non-cognitivism? What is the crucial difference between the kinds of moral non-cognitivism endorsed by these two proposals?
- ❑ How does the very idea of *moral experts* suggest that moral cognitivism must be true? If there are moral experts, then does it follow that there is nothing wrong in entirely forming our moral opinions by deferring to their judgements (as we often do with regard to experts in other realms, like science)?

## SECOND ESSAY WRITING PREPARATION

**Reading:** *What is This Thing Called Philosophy?* (Routledge, 2016), Appendix: How To Write a Philosophy Essay.

**Watch:** ‘How to Write a Philosophy Essay Mini-Lecture’, MP4 available on Canvas.

**Or Listen:** ‘How to Write a Philosophy Essay Mini-Lecture’, MP3 (audio only) available on Canvas.

(NB. The powerpoints for this mini-lecture are also posted in Canvas).

## Appendix 1: Essay 1

**Details:** This essay is due **TBC**. It should be between 1000-1500 words. It must be submitted to <http://turnitin.com>—details for submission will follow in due course from your TA. Please select a question from the list below, and make sure to clearly state the question you are answering at the start of your essay.

### Questions:

- What is the ‘perspective of eternity’, and what relevance, if any, does it have for the problem of the meaning of life?
- Are human beings intrinsically valuable? If so, why? If not, then what moral consequences does this have (e.g., does this mean that, say, cannibalism is morally permissible)?
- Is my moral obligation to help someone in need on the other side of the world exactly the same as my moral obligation to help someone in need right in front of me? If not, why not? If so, then what moral consequences does this have?
- What is the difference between act and rule utilitarianism? Is either preferable to the other?
- Why does Kantian ethics hold that there is something inherently wrong about lying? Is this a problem for the view, do you think?
- What do virtue ethicists mean when they say that morality is a matter of *virtuous character*? Are they right to emphasize the importance of character in this way?

## Appendix 2: Essay 2

**Details:** This essay is due **TBC**. It should be between 1000-1500 words. It must be submitted to <http://turnitin.com>—details for submission will follow in due course from your TA. Please select a question from the list below, and make sure to clearly state the question you are answering at the start of your essay.

### Questions:

- Does one need to appeal to God and religion in order to make sense of an objective morality?
- What is the Euthyphro dilemma, and what problem does it pose for divine command ethical theory?
- Describe, and critically evaluate, at least one version of the social contract theory of morality.
- What is the prisoners' dilemma, and what, if anything, does it tell us about the relationship between pursuing our own self-interest and engaging in social cooperation?
- What is moral expressivism, and how does it differ from a moral error theory? In what sense are these views forms of moral anti-realism?
- What is moral relativism, and what kinds of considerations motivate such a view? Are any of these considerations persuasive?