

# Introduction to Ethics

PHL 103w  
The Pennsylvania State University  
Fall Semester, 25 Aug – 12 Dec 2014  
MWF 11.15a-12.05p, 251 Willard Building

## Instructor: Christopher Moore

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Office Hours: W 1.15-2.15p, F 12.15-1.15p, and by appointment

## Required Texts

Plato, *Protagoras* (Hackett, 978-0872200944)  
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford World's Classics, 9780199213610)  
Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (Dover Thrift, 9780486298238)  
Joseph Butler, *Five Sermons* (Hackett, 9780915145614)  
David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* (Hackett, 9780915145454)  
Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Hackett, 9780872201668)  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* (Vintage, 9780679724629)

## Course

This course studies seven of the most insightful, plausible, and readable books about ethics in the history of western philosophy. They are about ethics because their authors take up some of the following topics:

- the characteristics of the most estimable, most choice-worthy, or most successful life
- the means, help, effort, and thinking by which we may become good people
- the actions we ought to take responsibility for, and those we may blame on nature
- the meaning and source of our putative obligations to other people
- the power of reason and imagination to overcome selfishness and moral blindness

We will investigate the reason these topics deserve the title “ethical,” and the way they pertain to our lives, whether as everyday matters or at unavoidable points of crisis. By reading the best books on ethics, we will acquire the vocabulary, conceptual distinctions, and images that will help us to identify and describe our own ethical intuitions. Our study of these books will also help us learn ways to argue for various appealing ethical positions that we may discover we have already (unconsciously) accepted or have (thoughtlessly) dismissed. In general, the course, its assigned reading, our thrice-weekly discussions, and the attendant writing assignments aim to help

students acquire the skills needed to interpret, articulate, explain, defend, critique, create, and accept views about the best ways for humans, and oneself, to live and act.

## **Class time**

Class days will vary between large-group discussion of our authors' arguments and the context of their philosophizing; small-group discussion of particular passages of the readings, where students will take responsibility for interpreting, analyzing, reconstructing, generating examples and counter-examples, and evaluating the ethical views; and explicit practice in editing and writing academic prose, sometimes effected through the students' reading aloud of their prepared papers and our responding to them, and sometimes through in-class quick-writes.

## **Participation**

You are expected to arrive in class on time every day, write out complete notes, pay attention to your peers and the instructor, and take responsibility for the conversation, offering your ideas, responding to others' ideas, and asking well-formulated questions. Repeated absences, tardiness, or disengagement will be grounds for a lowering of your course grade by up to two letters, at the instructor's discretion; please talk with me if you are concerned that this may apply to you.

## **Papers**

This course assigns detailed prompts for seven short papers. Some of these papers will have revisions or multiple parts. Your scores on this work will constitute your course grade (minus any grade reductions). The effort of composing and reworking your papers will be among the most important philosophical work you will do this semester. Each paper requires careful reflection on the entirety of the related reading and on the course lectures and discussions. Because of the challenge and concision required by each paper, you will also have to edit and streamline your papers repeatedly. I will distribute paper prompts at least a week before the respective paper is due. I am happy to meet in office-hours to discuss your ideas, organization, or comments.

All papers are to be written in 12 point Times New Roman, with 1" margins all around, 1.5 spaced, and on only as many sides of paper as are assigned. In the "header" area of your document, include your name, Phil 103w, name of assignment, and date. At the top of your essay include an informative title of your choosing. Double-sided printing is appreciated but not required. Failure to format assignments correctly will result in your paper being returned to you with no grade. I will accept no more than one paper late in the semester, with prior permission, at a penalty of one grade letter per day late, and with a maximum lateness to be discussed between us.

The score of each paper depends on the quality of writing, thinking, reading, and, if relevant, revision that it displays. I list a few examples of quality in each area:

- **Writing:** clear and appropriate organization; definite thesis; absence of spelling, grammatical, and usage errors; and responsiveness to the prompt.
- **Thinking:** coherent argumentative structure; exactitude of discussion and avoidance of ambiguity or vagueness; sensitivity to nuance, difference, and value; creative and imaginative interpretation; sympathetic presentation of opposing or parallel views.
- **Reading:** evidence of having read the entire work with care; attention both to detail and general thrust of the work; charitable reconstruction of the author's claims.
- **Revision:** conscientious response to every comment provided; incorporation of any further discussion of topic in class; self-generated improvement of content/form.

Paper 1: on *Protagoras*, 1p, with a revision from instructor comments [20pts]

Paper 2: on *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2pp [20pts]

Paper 3: on *Meditations*, several pages [20pts]

Paper 4: on *Five Sermons*, multiple pages, with six parts [40pts]

Paper 5: on Hume's *Enquiry*, 1p, with revision from peer comments [20pts]

Paper 6: on Kant's *Grounding*, 1p, with revision from peer comments [20pts]

Final Paper: topic announced later, 5pp [60pts]

## Quizzes

I may assign one-to-five-point quizzes at the beginning of selected class-periods to ensure complete and conscientious reading of the assigned texts. Consistently poor results on these quizzes will have a deleterious effect on your course grade. Such quizzes may not be rescheduled.

## Logistics

### Grades

A 187-200 – Extraordinary

A- 180-186

B+ 174-179

B 167-173 – Good

B- 160-166

C+ 154-159

C 147-153 – Acceptable

C- 140-146

D+ 134-139

D 127-133 – Minimal pass

D- 120-126

F 000-119 – Fail

### Technology

Please check class-related emails each weekday, and respond within a day. I will do the same. I will email you additional handouts if I do not distribute paper copies. Please check with fellow students to ensure you have not missed any handouts.

Under no conditions may you look at or touch a mobile device during the class period, unless you request and I grant permission before that class; failure to follow this rule may result in a multi-letter lowering of your course grade.

### Accessibility

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) located in Boucke Building Room 116 at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit their web site at [equity.psu.edu/ods/](http://equity.psu.edu/ods/). I should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.

### Cheating

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for this course shall be grounds for failing the entire course and communication of dishonesty to the College. This includes, but is not restricted to, any plagiarism on any paper. Plagiarism includes, among other things, not citing text, paraphrases, or ideas taken from any assigned or unassigned reading, or other students' comments or papers. Please ask about any case you're concerned about. For details on the PSU policy, see [psu.edu/oue/aappm/G-9.html](http://psu.edu/oue/aappm/G-9.html).

### **Reading and Assignment Schedule**

Aug M 25	Remarks about the history of ethics. Virtues. Syllabus. A note about Plato.
W 27	Protagoras, Socrates, and Plato as moral philosophers. Sophists. The teachability of virtue. <i>Read: Protagoras 309a1-320b10</i>
Fr 29	Prometheus. Accounts of human nature. The unity of virtue. <i>Sôphrosunê</i> . <i>Read: Protagoras 321c1-334c4</i>
	[Memorial Day: No Class]
Sep W 03	Value of conversation. Importance of studying poetry. 'Hard it is to be good.' <i>Read: Protagoras 334c5-349a4</i>
F 05	Courage and wisdom. Rationality and pleasure. The nature of virtue. <i>Read: Protagoras 349a5-362a4</i>
M 08	"Being like Prometheus" over one's life. The structure of ethical questions. Where moral philosophy goes from here. <b>Due: Paper 1</b>
W 10	A treatise on ethics. Debates about happiness and goodness. <i>Read: Nicomachean Ethics, Book I</i>
F 12	A more complex view of the nature of virtue. <i>Read: Nicomachean Ethics, Book II</i> Receive: comments on Paper 1

- M 15 A more complex view of courage and *sôphrosunê*. Other virtues.  
Read: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III.6-IV.9
- W 17 Self-control, self-mastery, and weakness of the will.  
Read: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII.1-10  
**Due: Revision to Paper 1**
- F 19 The ethical benefit and paradoxes of friendship.  
Read: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII.1-6 and IX.8-12.
- M 22 How pleasure caps good activity.  
Read: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII.11-14 and X.1-5
- W 24 The good life. Ethics, politics, and education.  
Read: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X.6-9  
**Due: Paper 2**
- F 26 Hellenistic developments in ethics. Marcus Aurelius. The title of the book.  
The practice of gratitude-expression as self-recovery.  
Read: *Meditations*, Introduction, Books I-II
- Oct M 06 Stoic ethics in a literary form.  
Read: *Meditations*, Books III-V
- W 08 Spiritual exercises.  
**Due: Paper 3**
- F 10 The so-called modern period of ethical reflection.  
Read: *Five Sermons*, The Preface
- M 13 Benevolence vs. self-love. Talk about 'thesis-statements.'  
Read: *Five Sermons*, Sermon I  
**Due: Paper 4.I**
- W 15 Arguments for, and the relevance of, human nature.  
Read: *Five Sermons*, Sermon II  
**Due: Paper 4.II**
- F 17 Butler's view of human nature.  
Read: *Five Sermons*, Sermon III  
**Due: Paper 4.III**
- M 20 Butler and Aristotle on *philautia*  
Read: *Five Sermons*, Sermon IV  
**Due: Paper 4.IV**
- W 22 The deep moral maxim, 'loving one's neighbor as oneself.'  
Read: *Five Sermons*, Sermon V  
**Due: Paper 4.V**
- F 24 The problems set forth for modern ethical theory.  
Read: *Five Sermons*, A Dissertation upon the Nature of Virtue  
**Due: Paper 4.Final**
- M 27 David Hume. Reason and sentiment. Naturalism and empiricism.

- Read: *An Enquiry*, §§I-IV
- W 29 A response to Butler. Note on use, utility, and utilitarianism.  
Read: *An Enquiry*, §V
- F 31 A new view of the virtues.  
Read: *An Enquiry*, §§VI-VIII
- NovM 03 Appraisal of Hume's thesis about personal merit.  
Read: *An Enquiry*, §IX
- W 05 Open questions about Humean ethics.  
Read: *An Enquiry*, Appendices I-IV, A Dialogue
- F 07 In-class revision meetings.  
**Due: Paper 5**
- M 10 Kant's project.  
Read: *Grounding*, Introduction and Preface  
**Due: Revision of Paper 5**
- W 12 The good will. Duty and acting from respect for law. Inclination.  
Read: *Grounding*, First Section
- F 14 The categorical imperative.  
Read: *Grounding*, first half of Second Section, pp. 19-36 [=Ak. 406-429]
- M 17 Formulations of the categorical imperative, and its application.  
Read: *Grounding*, remainder of Second Section
- W 19 In-class revision meetings.  
Read: *Grounding*, Supplement: On a Supposed Right to Lie...  
**Due: Paper 6**
- F 21 The Kantian legacy: autonomy, rationality, and goodness.  
**Due: Revision of Paper 6**
- [Thanksgiving Week: No Class]
- DecM 01 Nietzsche the man and the mythology. Genealogical method.  
Read: *Genealogy*, Preface and First Essay, §§1-9
- W 03 Ressentiment.  
Read: *Genealogy*, First Essay, §§10-17
- F 05 Rationality, responsibility, conscience, guilt, justice.  
Read: *Genealogy*, Second Essay, §§1-11
- M 08 The birth of a new moral ideal.  
Read: *Genealogy*, Second Essay, §§12-25
- W 10 Asceticism and aestheticism.  
Read: *Genealogy*, Third Essay, §§1-17
- F 12 Theorizing about ethics. Discussion of final paper.  
Read: *Genealogy*, Third Essay, §§18-28
- End of finals period **Due: Final Paper**