

Phil 400: Living Well and Living Right

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Course Description

This course explores some of the central issues in moral philosophy. We will begin by asking the question: How does one live a good life? We will look at influential answers to this question, beginning with Aristotle's account of the best human life. We will then turn to the two dominant moral frameworks in contemporary moral philosophy: consequentialism and deontology. We will look at the articulations of these frameworks in the works of John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, and we will explore how they are employed in arguments about: the obligations we have to the global poor, the duty not to lie, the moral risks of sex, the limits of just warfare, the permissibility of selecting the genetic traits of one's offspring, and the legitimacy of incarceration. We will then return to our initial question about what makes a human life go well, and we will consider whether being moral actually makes one's life go worse.

Grade

Your grade will be comprised of the following components:

Online discussion contributions - 20%

1st Paper (2-3 pages) - 10%

2nd Paper (5-7 pages)- 30%

3rd Paper (7-9 pages) – 40%

Weekly Discussion Postings

Each week you will be required to: 1) post a question or comment on the course website about the week's readings before the first lecture, and 2) post a response to a classmate's question or comment before the second lecture. In your initial post you can raise a question, contribute a thought, agree or disagree with the author's argument, etc. Your post should show that you have critically engaged with the reading. It is not a summary of the readings. Both your initial post and your response to a classmate's post should be ~250 words, and they will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

Papers

The papers will be due on the course website at the beginning of lecture on the day they are due (10:30am). Late papers will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late.

Please familiarize yourself with the University's student code of conduct (available here). If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me before turning in your work. All work is expected to be your own and original (not previously submitted to another class).

Course Reading Schedule

What makes a human life go well?	
Week 1: Aristotle and the good human life	<p>Required Reading: Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>, Book 1 and excerpts from Book 10</p> <p>Recommended Reading: Christine Korsgaard, "Aristotle's Function Argument" Gavin Lawrence, "Aristotle and the Ideal Life"</p>
Weeks 2-3: Human wellbeing	<p>Required Reading: Plato, <i>Protagoras</i> (excerpts) Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine" in <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> Susan Wolf, <i>Meaning in Life and Why it Matters</i></p> <p>Recommended Reading: Derek Parfit, "What makes someone's life go best?" in <i>Reasons and Persons</i> Thomas Nagel, "Death"</p>
How should we act?	
Weeks 4-6: Consequentialism and its critics	<p>Required Reading: John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" Bernard Williams, "Against Consequentialism" Amartya Sen, "Utilitarianism and Welfarism" Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem"</p> <p>Recommended Reading: Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality" Joel Feinberg, "The Nature and Value of Rights"</p>
Weeks 7-9: Kant's moral theory, then and now	<p>Required Reading: Immanuel Kant, <i>The Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals</i>, Introduction, Sections I-II Christine Korsgaard, "Two Arguments Against Lying" Barbara Herman, "Could it be worth thinking about</p>

	<p>Kant on sex and marriage?" in <i>A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity</i> Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre"</p> <p>Recommended Reading: Barbara Herman, "On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty" John Rawls, "Formula of Humanity" in <i>Lectures on Ethics</i> Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"</p>
<p>How can moral theories be used to guide our actions?</p>	
<p>Weeks 10-11: Procreation Ethics</p>	<p>Required Reading: Derek Parfit, "The non-identity problem" in <i>Reasons and Persons</i> Seana Shiffrin, "Wrongful Life: Procreative Responsibility and the Significance of Harm" Jeff McMahan, "Causing Disabled People to Exist and Causing People to be Disabled" Elizabeth Barnes, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability"</p> <p>Recommended Reading: Robert Adams, "Must God Create the Best?" Gregory Kavka, "The Paradox of Future Individuals" Rahul Kumar, "What is it to wrong someone?"</p>
<p>Weeks 12-13: Punishment and Mass Incarceration</p>	<p>Required Reading: Glenn Loury, "A Nation of Jailors" Jeremy Bentham, "Of the Proportion Between Punishments and Offenses" Immanuel Kant, <i>Metaphysics of Morals</i> (excerpts) John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules" Tommie Shelby, "Punishment" in <i>Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform</i></p> <p>Recommended Reading: John Cottingham, "Varieties of Retributivism" Joel Feinberg, "The Expressive Function of Punishment"</p>

Does being moral make your life go worse?	
Weeks 14-15: Being Moral and Living Well	<p>Required Reading:</p> <p>Plato, <i>Republic</i>, (excerpts from Books 1 & 4)</p> <p>Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> (excerpts)</p> <p>Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints"</p> <p>Recommended Reading:</p> <p>G.E.M. Anscombe, "Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt the Youth?"</p>
Week 15: What have we learned?	<p>Required Reading:</p> <p>G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"</p>