

# Philosophy 127: Ethics

Whitman College – Fall 2017

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Tue. & Fri. 1 - 2:30

Writing Fellow: XXX

## Course Description

We are all human beings living very human lives. We have desires and goals that motivate our actions: we want to have a successful career, we want to be happy and healthy, we want to make a contribution to our society and our world, we want to love and to be loved. We also feel that we have responsibilities and obligations: to ourselves, to our family and friends, to people we meet, to people we will never meet, to other creatures, to the environment.

To some degree, those responsibilities and obligations might align with our goals and desires, or even be born out of them. But inevitably, it seems, there will be differences and even conflicts between them. And so, we are led to think about how we *should* live and act – what our responsibilities and obligations really are, and when and how those should limit or override our pursuit of our own desires and goals. Ethics is the branch of philosophy that examines such issues, asking questions about goodness and badness, right and wrong, and the proper relationships to ourselves and to others.

This course is intended as an introduction to ethics. In it, we will examine four different theories about how to approach those kinds of issues, focusing on the work of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, the 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, the 19<sup>th</sup> century British philosopher John Stuart Mill, and the contemporary American philosopher and education theorist Nel Noddings. We will work to understand those theories on their own terms, as well as to assess their strengths and weaknesses for ourselves.

In addition to considering those theories in the abstract, each student will also choose (from a list I provide) a specific concrete ethical debate to examine through the four different frameworks. That should help give you a more vivid sense of how those theories can be applied in practice, as well as an additional way to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

## Goals of the Course

The ultimate goal of the course is to help you to **refine and articulate your own moral viewpoint**.

More specific goals toward achieving this include:

1. To gain an understanding of the issues and concepts of moral reasoning.
2. To explore some of the most important ethical frameworks in the history of Western philosophy.
3. To develop an appreciation of the relation between ethics and other theoretical and empirical inquiries.
4. To enhance the abilities to read carefully and critically, to discuss difficult ideas and topics in a thoughtful and productive way, to develop and support your own ideas, and to express yourself in clear and convincing writing.

## Class Format

Our class meetings will primarily focus on discussion of the readings and the larger issues related to them. I will sometimes also present important background or related views. As much as possible, however, you will have a chance to apply and evaluate the ideas that the texts present, and to propose and consider alternatives. In order to achieve our ultimate goal for the course, it is essential that *each* of you *actively* engage the material and each other. More specific expectations for class-participation are included below.

## Texts to be Used

- (1) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Roger Crisp (Cambridge University Press) – ISBN 1107612233
- (2) Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited by Mary Gregor & Jens Timmerman (Cambridge University Press) – ISBN 1107401062
- (3) Jeremy Bentham & John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, edited by Alan Ryan (Penguin Classics) – ISBN 0140432728
- (4) Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 2nd edition (University of California Press) – ISBN 0520275705

It would certainly be best for you to use those specific editions – but some other edition *could* be okay if need be; please just talk with me about it. The Aristotle, Kant, and Noddings books will also be on 3-hour reserve at the Penrose Library circulation desk. (Whitman doesn't own a copy of the Bentham & Mill book, but you could request it through SUMMIT if you wanted.)

There are several additional readings that will be available on the class CLEo site, in the "Resources" tab.

## Technology

- **CLEo:** Being registered for this course automatically gives you access to the (very rudimentary) CLEo site that I will be maintaining. If you're unfamiliar with CLEo or have any difficulty accessing the site, please just let me know.
- **E-Mail:** I will often distribute important announcements, reminders, and clarifications through the class list-server. It is your responsibility to *check your Whitman e-mail account every day!* If you have questions, ideas, information, and/or links that you'd like to share with the class, you're also welcome to use the class list-server, which can be accessed through the CLEo site.
- **In the Classroom:** You are welcome to use a computer, tablet, or smart-phone in the classroom, as long as it is *exclusively* focused on our immediate tasks (the readings, note-taking, etc.). You should *never ever EVER* take even a moment to check your e-mail, tweet your snapchat, blog your tumblr on the instagram, etc.

## Summary of Requirements and Grading

**Participation** — 20% of your total grade

Our class meetings will primarily focus on conversation about the readings and the larger issues that they address. You are expected to be an active and productive participant in our conversations. To do this, you must carefully read (and sometimes re-read) the assigned texts before class, and come to our meetings with questions and ideas to discuss. There will occasionally be more specific assignments for you to complete. More details about expectations and grading standards are provided below.

**Brief Essays — 60%** of your total grade (best essay 20%, other essays 10% each)

As we are examining the different ethical frameworks, it is important for you to reflect on the ideas presented and to develop your own ideas in response. About once every two or three weeks (as indicated on the schedule below), you will articulate and develop your views on the material in a brief essay. More details are provided below.

**Oral Examination — 20%** of your total grade

During the final exam period, I will conduct a 30-40 minute oral examination of each student. The exam will be comprehensive, and may cover any of the material that we've read or discussed this semester. The focus will be on the general ethical theories and approaches, although we will also discuss on the applied issue that has been your focus. This one-on-one conversation will give you the best opportunity to demonstrate that you have understood, synthesized, and reflected on the issues and views that we've examined throughout the semester. More details will be provided toward the end of the semester.

## Writing Fellow

XXX is an outstanding junior Philosophy major who will be serving as the course "Writing Fellow" this semester. Having honed her own skills in composing clear and convincing philosophical essays, she will now be working with you to develop yours. Of course, I will also be happy to meet with you at any point in the semester; XXX's help is meant to supplement mine, not to replace it.

Before the due-date for each of the brief essay assignments, XXX will be available for one-on-one meetings to help you develop your ideas and map out your arguments. And starting with the second essay, she will also discuss the feedback you've received to help you determine how to address my comments and suggestions in the next essay. More details about how those meetings will work are included with the explanation of the paper assignment at the end of the syllabus.

Each student will be **required** to meet with XXX before each of the first two papers. You will be **strongly encouraged** to meet with her before each of the remaining essays. Simply put: the more you work with XXX, the better your essays will be!

Please be sure to respect XXX's time and schedule at least as much as you would mine. Skipping a meeting with her, or cancelling less than 24 hours in advance, will result in your overall grade for the course being lowered by 1% (i.e., about a third of a notch) each time that happens.

## Tentative Schedule of Topics and Assignments

<b>Tue.</b>	<b>Aug. 29</b>	course introduction
<b>Thu.</b>	<b>Aug. 31</b>	what is ethics? how is ethics done? Kagan, <i>Normative Ethics</i> , ch. 1 (CLEo) Williams, <i>Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy</i> , ch. 1 (CLEo)

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### Aristotle and Virtue Ethics

<b>Tue.</b>	<b>Sep. 5</b>	basic ideas of virtue ethics Aristotle, <i>Ethics</i> book I, all <i>except</i> ch. 6
<b>Thu.</b>	<b>Sep. 7</b>	virtues of character Aristotle, <i>Ethics</i> book II, all & book III, chs. 6-12

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**Tue. Sep. 12** virtue and friendship  
Aristotle, *Ethics* books VIII & IX, all

**Thu. Sep. 14** virtue, friendship, and society

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*Mon. Sep 18 – brief essay due by 4:00 p.m.*

**Tue. Sep. 19** pleasure and the good life  
Aristotle, *Ethics* X

**Thu. Sep. 21** applying virtue ethics  
*readings TBD*  
+ introduction to Kant and deontology

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### Kant and Deontology

**Tue. Sep. 26** good will and duty  
Kant, *Groundwork*, Preface & First Section through the top of p. 17  
Korsgaard's Introduction to the *Groundwork*, through p. xviii bottom

**Thu. Sep. 28** the Categorical Imperative: formula of universal law  
Kant, *Groundwork*, rest of First Section & Second Section through p. 40 middle  
Korsgaard's Introduction to the *Groundwork*, from p. xviii bottom to p. xxiii bottom

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*Mon. Oct. 2 – brief essay due by 4:00 p.m.*

**Tue. Oct. 3** the Categorical Imperative: formula of humanity  
Kant, *Groundwork*, rest of Second Section  
Korsgaard's Introduction to *Groundwork*, from p. xxiii bottom to p. xxviii bottom

**Thu. Oct. 5** **NO CLASS – FALL BREAK**

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**Tue. Oct. 10** deontology and society  
Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, excerpts (CLEo)

**Thu. Oct. 12** deontology and society, cont.  
Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, excerpts (CLEo)

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**Tue. Oct. 17** applying deontology  
*readings TBD*

### Mill and Utilitarianism

**Thu. Oct. 19** introduction to consequentialism; Bentham's utilitarianism  
Bentham, *Principles*, ch. 1 and *skim* chs. 4, 13, and 14

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**Mon. Oct. 23 – brief essay due by 4:00 p.m.**

**Tue. Oct. 24** Mill's utilitarianism  
Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chs. 1-2

**Thu. Oct. 26** the case for utilitarianism  
Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 4  
Shaw, "Arguing for Utilitarianism" (CLEo)

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**Tue. Oct. 31** utilitarianism and rights  
Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 5

**Thu. Nov. 2** applying utilitarianism  
*reading TBD*

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### **Noddings and the Ethics of Care**

**Tue. Nov. 7** background and introduction to the ethics of care  
Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, excerpts (CLEo)

**Thu. Nov. 9** analysis of caring  
Noddings, *Caring*, chs. 1-3

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**Mon. Nov. 13 – brief essay due by 4:00 p.m.**

**Tue. Nov. 14** caring as a basis for ethics  
Noddings, *Caring*, ch. 4

**Thu. Nov. 16** the ethical ideal  
Noddings, *Caring*, ch. 5

**— — — THANKSGIVING BREAK — — —**

**Tue. Nov. 28** care and education  
Noddings, *Caring*, ch. 8

**Thu. Nov. 30** care and society  
Held, "Noncontractual Society" (CLEo)

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**Mon. Dec. 4 – brief essay due by 4:00 p.m.**

**Tue. Dec. 5** applying the ethics of care  
*reading TBD*

**Thu. Dec. 7** semester wrap-up  
reread Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, ch. 1 (CLEo)  
reread Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, ch. 1 (CLEo)