

PHIL 381, Ethical Theory – Varner – Fall 2008
12:40-1:30 MWF in Bolton Hall, room 018

Instructor: Gary Varner Associate Professor of Philosophy
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General course description: This is a writing-intensive course designed specifically for Philosophy majors. Throughout, we will emphasize how the writing styles of the authors we study differ, and how philosophical authors structure their writings around the various “moves” involved in stating the commitments of a theory and one’s reasons for endorsing it, stating objections that have been or could be raised against one’s theory, and replying to those objections. Content-wise, the course will be a survey of utilitarianism, rights theory, virtue theory, and Kantian ethics.

Course objectives: In general terms, I want students to get three things out of this class.

1. An appreciation of what is involved in articulating and defending a complete theory of ethics (EEO [Exemplary Educational Objective] #4).
2. An understanding of the variety of ethical principles that modern, western philosophers have defended and the ways they have sought to justify the adoption of ethical principles (EEOs ##1&2).
3. An improved ability to articulate and defend your own views in ethics and constructively criticize those of others (EEOs ##3&5).

In this writing-intensive installment of the class, specifically, I want students to improve the quality of their philosophical writing.

Prerequisite: Three hours of philosophy other than PHIL 240.

Required texts: We will study the following readings in the order listed.

1. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (any edition). Available for purchase at the TAMU Book Store and, for free, on the course web site.
2. Hohfeld, Wesley. “Rights and Jural Relations.” (Excerpts from Hohfeld’s *Fundamental Legal Conceptions* [1919].) Available on the course web site.
3. Feinberg, Joel. “The Nature and Value of Rights.” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 4 (1970): 243-60. Available on the course web site.
4. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, as translated by H.J. Paton (Harper Torchbooks, 1964). Available for purchase at the TAMU Book Store.
5. Barbara Herman, “On the Value of Acting From the Motive of Duty.” *The Philosophical Review* 90 (1981): 359-82. Available on the course web site.
5. Rosalind Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion,” in Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, eds., *Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 217-38. Available on the course web site.
6. R.M. Hare, *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point* (Oxford University Press, 1981).
Note: This semester, instead of reading this book, I plan to study Hare’s theory by reading an article or two of his plus some things I have written about him. These readings will be made available on the course web site.

The course web site is here: <http://philosophy.tamu.edu/~gary/PHIL381-2008c/>. To access the materials you will need to enter the following ID and password that you'll be given in class:

ID = _____ password = _____

Also on the course web site will be lists of questions for students to answer while doing the assigned readings, copies of handouts used in the course, and links to two on-line encyclopedias of philosophy, to various parts of the TAMU Student Rules, etc.

Overview of course requirements: Letter grades recorded for the course will be based on a weighted average of the following components.

Component	Weight	Combined average	Letter grade
Midterm exam	15%	=> 90%	A
Final exam	20%	=> 80% & < 90%	B
Attendance and participation	10%	=> 70% & < 80%	C
Quizzes and outlines	5%	=> 60% & < 70%	D
Essay #1 draft	10%	< 60%	F
Essay #1 finalized	15%		
Essay #2 draft	10%		
Essay #2 finalized	15%		

Details on the exams: These will be largely or entirely multiple choice, and students are responsible for bringing the correct Scantron form (the 8.5x11" grey ones with "Form No. 0-101607-TAMU" inscribed along the left margin) and a #2 pencil to the exams. The final will be comprehensive.

Details on the essays: On the dates specified on the tentative schedule of readings and topics on this syllabus, short lists of essay topics will be handed out. Students must write essays on topics chosen from these lists. They may write on the topics of their choice, but their first essay topic must be chosen from the first list, and their second essay topic must be chosen from the second one. Students will be required to turn in drafts of their essays one week after the topic lists are handed out. Within a week of handing these in, they will receive detailed written comments on their drafts. Each student will then be scheduled to meet with me to discuss those comments before submitting their final versions of their essays. Essays or draft essays received later on the due date will be penalized half a letter grade. Those received the next day will be penalized a full letter grade, with an additional full letter grade penalty each day thereafter.

Length, format, and citations: Essays may be a maximum of 4 pages. They must be submitted in hard copy, with double spaced text no smaller than this (12 point) and with margins of at least ½ an inch. Other directions will be handed out in the course of the class, including directions on citations.

Grading: Essays will be assigned letter grades with the following assumed percentage values.

A+ = 100%	B+ = 87.5%	C+ = 77.5%	D+ = 67.5%
A = 95%	B = 85%	C = 75%	D = 65%
A- = 92.5%	B- = 82.5%	C- = 72.5%	D- = 62.5%
AB = 90%	BC = 80%	CD = 70%	DF = 60%
			F = varies, 0% to 59%

Here is a general description of what I think about as I assign letter grades to written work:

1. I always assume that an essay is a midrange B (85%) “until proven otherwise.”
2. For an essay to move up from a midrange B, it must be adequate overall and outstanding in one or more respects.
 - (A) To be “adequate overall” it must do everything the directions asked for, and without making any significant mistakes.
 - (B) Different essays are outstanding in different respects. Sometimes an author does a particularly good job explaining the material we have studied, doing so in a succinct, but thorough and precise way. Other times an essay does an outstandingly good job on the critical or evaluative portion of the assignment, for instance by coming up with an original and insightful criticism of an argument we have studied, or by coming up with an original and insightful way of responding to an objection to an argument.
3. For an essay to move down from midrange B, it must either be incomplete or get something wrong.
 - (A) An essay is incomplete if it fails to do everything the instructions required (either explicitly, as in “describe two of the objections that Mill responds to in chapter two”; or implicitly, as when a student fails to consider an objection to the position he or she is adopting when that objection was discussed extensively in class).
 - (B) Different essays get things wrong to different degrees. Sometimes an author just doesn’t write clearly. For example, “A *reductio ad absurdum* argument makes a false assumption” is an imprecise and misleading way of expressing the thought that “In a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, one assumes the denial of what one intends to prove.” Other times they say something that is just plain false. For example: “The ontological argument is an example of an *a posteriori* argument.”
4. Sometimes an essay is incomplete in some way or gets something wrong, but it is also outstanding in some way. In such cases a judgment call must be made.
 - (A) Sometimes, in my judgment, the outstanding aspects of an essay make up for, or more than make up for its inadequacies, and I give the essay a B or even an A.
 - (B) Sometimes I decide that the inadequacies outweigh the outstanding elements and the essay gets a C.
5. For an essay to warrant a D, it must be substantially wrong in multiple respects, and a D essay is almost never outstanding in any respect.
6. For an essay to warrant an F, it must either be radically incomplete, substantially wrong in a majority of respects, or otherwise give me the impression that the student did not take the assignment seriously.

Details on the attendance and participation component: The minimum and maximum grades students receive for attendance and class participation will be limited in the following way:

<u>Unexcused absences</u>	<u>Minimum grade</u>	<u>Maximum grade</u>
0 - 3	85%	100%
4	75%	85%
5	60%	75%
6 or more	0%	60%

You may receive a grade above the minimum, but not exceeding the maximum, if, in my judgment, the quality of your participation in course discussions is above average or (to achieve the maximum) truly outstanding.

Details on the quizzes and outlines: Several times in the course of the semester, I will give short, multiple choice quizzes on the material that we have recently covered or on the assigned reading for the day. These quizzes may or may not be announced in advance. At least two times during the semester you will be required to bring to class an outline of what an author is doing in each paragraph of the assigned reading for the day. These quizzes and outlines will be averaged together to determine this portion of your course grade.

Other policies:

Excused absences and makeups. Makeups will be allowed only for assignments missed due to excused absences and these will be handled in accordance with part I, section 7 of the TAMU Student Rules. Students are advised to be aware of their responsibility for reporting excused absences pursuant to that section of the rules, which states (in section 7.3) that “Students may be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student's grade, for the reasons stated in Section 7.1, or other reason deemed appropriate by the student's instructor. To be excused the student must notify his or her instructor in writing (acknowledged e-mail message is acceptable) prior to the date of absence if such notification is feasible. In cases where advance notification is not feasible (e.g. accident, or emergency) the student must provide notification by the end of the second working day after the absence. This notification should include an explanation of why notice could not be sent prior to the class.”

Extra credit. No extra credit assignments will be allowed, but I may, in individual cases, consider factors such as improvement and extenuating circumstances.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy statement. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room 118 of Cain Hall, on the Internet at <http://studentlife.tamu.edu/ssd/>, or by telephone at 979-845-1637.

Academic Integrity Statement. The Aggie Honor Code states that "An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do." Effective September 1, 2004, Texas A&M University has an Honor Code that defines campus policy on academic misconduct. The Aggie Honor System is charged with the enforcement of this Code. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with definitions of "academic misconduct" and procedures for handling it under Rule #20 of the TAMU Student Rules: <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule20.htm>. Ignorance of these definitions and procedures does not exclude a student from prosecution under the system.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Week 1 8/25ff	Reading: Course syllabus. Focus: Course requirements and policies, and what a course on "ethical theory" is about.	Reading: "Constructing an ethical theory: three cases for discussion" (handout). Focus: Theory justification in ethics.	Reading: "Some basic terminology" (handout). Focus: A taxonomy of ethical theories; what questions should a "complete ethical theory" be expected to answer?
Week 2 9/1ff	Reading: Mill, CH 1 and CH 2 ¶¶1-10. Focus: Arguments, objections and responses.	Reading: Mill, CH 2 ¶¶1-10, cont'd. Focus: Qualitative v. quantitative hedonism.	Reading: Mill, CH 2 ¶¶1-10, cont'd. Focus: preference utilitarianism v. hedonistic utilitarianism.
Week 3 9/8ff	Reading: Mill, remainder of CH 2. Focus: Mill's responses to seven miscellaneous objections.	Reading: Mill, remainder of CH 2, cont'd.	Reading: Mill, CH 3. Focus: The "Why be moral?" question.
Week 4 9/15ff	Reading: Mill, CH 4. Focus: Mill's proof of the principle of utility.	Reading: Mill, CH 4, cont'd. Focus: Mill's proof of the principle of utility, cont'd.	Reading: Mill, CH 5. Focus: Rule utilitarianism and Mill's analysis of rights claims.
Week 5 9/22ff	Reading: Mill, CH 5, cont'd. Focus: Rule utilitarianism and Mill's analysis of rights claims, cont'd. First essay topics handed out.	Reading: none. Focus: An introduction to rights theory; key questions a rights theorist must answer; individualism v. externalism about rights possession.	Reading: Hohfeld, "Rights and Jural Relations." Focus: Hohfeld's analysis of "rights," "privileges," "powers," and "immunities."
Week 6 9/29ff	Feinberg, "The Nature and Value of Rights." Focus: Feinberg's individualist account of rights. Drafts of first essays due.	Feinberg, "The Nature and Value of Rights," cont'd. Focus: Feinberg's individualist account of rights, cont'd.	"Slack"
Week 7 10/6ff	Midterm exam. Drafts of first essays returned.	Conferences on draft essays.	Conferences on draft essays.

Week 8 10/13ff	Reading: Kant, preface. Focus: Kant on the nature of morality, “transcendental deductions,” “critique” and “metaphysics.”	Reading: Kant, CH 1. Focus: Kant on the “the good will” and the “moral worth” of actions.	Reading: Herman, “On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty.” Focus: Kant on the “the good will” and the “moral worth” of actions, cont’d.
Week 9 10/20ff	Kant, CH 2 thru p. 88 (= 421). Focus: Kant’s derivation of the categorical imperative, a preview of how to apply it, and how he would answer the question “Why be moral?”	Reading: Kant’s famous four examples, pp. 89-92 (=421-425). Focus: General discussion of Kant’s famous four examples.	Reading: Kant’s famous four examples, pp. 89-92 (=421-425), cont’d. Focus: Applying Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative.
Week 10 10/27ff	Reading: Kant, remainder of CH 2. Focus: Kant’s other formulations of the categorical imperative.	Reading: Kant, CH 3. Focus: Kant on freedom of the will.	“Slack”
Week 11 11/3ff	Reading: Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion,” pp. 217-26. Focus: Nine objections to virtue theory and her replies.	Reading: Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion,” pp. 226-38. Focus: Illustrating the value of virtue theory.	“Slack”
Week 12 11/10ff	Reading: Hare, TBD. Focus: TBD.	Reading: Hare, TBD. Focus: TBD.	Reading: Hare, TBD. Focus: TBD.
Week 13 11/17ff	Reading: Hare, TBD. Focus: TBD. Second essay topics handed out.	Reading: Hare, TBD. Focus: TBD.	Reading: Hare, TBD. Focus: TBD.
Week 14 11/24ff	Reading: none. Focus: Summing up, course evaluations. Drafts of second essays due.	Conferences on draft essays.	No class – Thanksgiving Holiday
Week 15 12/1ff	Conferences on draft essays.	No classes – reading day	Final exams begin
<p>Final exam: Monday, December 8, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Final version of second essay due at beginning of exam.</p>			