

Ethical Theory
PHIL 3200
Fall 2007
Syllabus

Professor Edward Halper
Office: Peabody Hall #128
Hours: 2:30- 3:15 M, F
Other times by appointment
Telephone: 542-0668

Description and Objective: The theme of this course is moral reasoning. Are there ways of reasoning that are characteristic of ethics? What sorts of arguments are appropriate for deciding moral problems? How do these arguments differ from those available in other areas of philosophy?

There is, first, the thought that identifying the proper method of moral reasoning is essential for determining the right moral action. But there is also the thought that simply the commitment to following moral reasoning, whatever its outcome, makes an action right and a person moral. This latter is a reflexive dimension of the subject, and there is a further question whether, or to what extent, this reflexivity of reason can define the content of morality. On the other hand, many contemporary philosophers see the special character of moral reasoning in its particularity and, consequently, reject the notion of a special role for reason among moral traits. There is a kind of reflexivity to the course: we will be thinking about what others say about reason in morality in order to discover what moral reasoning is; that is, we will be reasoning about moral reasoning to determine the character of moral reasoning.

The course balances classical and contemporary readings. The focus of class discussions will be the readings, and one important aim of the class is to learn to read philosophical works. Obviously, you will not learn how to read philosophy if you do not do the readings. You will also find the class boring because I will be talking about how to find ideas in the readings. There is also a kind of reflexivity in this dimension of the course: in working on the course material, you are also working on yourself, and to master the texts is, or contributes toward, your self-accomplishment. And depending on the role of reason in morality, this latter may, or may not, be identical with being moral.

This description is intended to give you a taste of some of what is in store. Learning philosophy requires learning new ways to think. There are few if any facts to learn. We are concerned with ideas, and learning involves critical reflection, that is, your raising and answering objections for yourself. As part of the process of critical reflection, we will view and discuss two films. They will be screened in the evening.

Readings: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Focus Publishing I.1-3, 6-7, 13, VI, VII
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Cambridge University Press
G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Focus Publishing "Morality"
Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Harvard University Press
Packet of Readings on Moral Reasoning including: John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason,"
and "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following," Alasdair MacIntyre, "Moral Relativism,
Truth, and Justification," and other readings.

You are not responsible for the editors' or translators' introductions, but you should read prefatory material from the author. Other translations are acceptable.

Films: September 10, 6:30 PM, November 12, 6:30 PM

Grading:	Quiz	August 31	2.5%
	First Paper (3-6 pages)	October 1	25%
	Mid-Term	October 17	15%
	Quiz	October 25	2.5%
	Second Paper (3-6 pages)	November 14	25%
	Final Exam (cumulative)	December 12 (12:00-3:00 PM)	30%

Paper topics will be assigned. They will not require outside reading.

Study: Most of the work for this course will lie in the preparation of the reading assignments. You will get much more out of the lectures if you have prepared the material **before** class. Reading philosophy is not like reading other material. You will need to read the assignment more than once. As a minimum, I suggest **three readings**. Begin by reading a large portion of text quickly; then, carefully prepare the section that will be discussed in class; third, read the material again after class. As you read, look for the author's arguments and ask yourself the sort of questions that I might ask about the text. Remember, knowing **what** the author says is not enough! You should understand **why** the author takes this position, that is, you should understand his arguments; and you should have objections to his argument to reflect upon.