**PHI 350 Contemporary Ethical Theory**

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| **Faculty Name(s)** | Joseph Van Weelden | | |
| **Contact** | joseph.vanweelden@ahduni.edu.in | **Office Hours:** TBD | |
| **School** | School of Arts and Sciences | | |
| **Semester** | Winter 2022 | **Credits: 3** | **Sections**: 1 |
| **Lecture time & days** | Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-11:00 | **Location:** TBD | |
| **ENABLE** | No | **GER category** | **Humanities and Languages** |
| **Pass/Not Pass** | Cannot be taken as P/NP | **Audit Course** | No |
| **Pre-requisite(s)** | **PHI 120 or PHL 115 or PHL 301 or BIO 140** | | |
| **Anti-requisite(s)** | **None** | | |
| **Co-requisite(s)** | **None** | | |
| **Course Description** | Normative ethics is the branch of philosophy which deals with fundamental questions about how we ought to live and what makes our actions morally right or wrong. This course aims to provide those students who have had some previous exposure to normative ethical theory, and wish to explore its concerns and methods further, with an up-to-date and cutting-edge overview of the contemporary literature in the field. Our point of entry will be the ongoing debate (some would say stalemate) between broadly *consequentialist* and broadly *deontological* approaches to morality. We will examine the major fault lines that distinguish these approaches as well as the various forms that consequentialist and deontological theories have taken, and critically assess their respective strengths and weaknesses. Taking stock of these two leading positions will occupy roughly the first half of the course. In the second part we will turn our attention to various alternative approaches to the fundamental questions of ethics which have gained (or regained) prominence in recent years, largely due to dissatisfaction with the terms of the consequentialism/deontology dispute. Theories discussed will include virtue ethics, moral particularism, feminist care ethics and Ubuntu ethics.  This course is primarily designed as an elective for students majoring in PHL or minoring in Philosophy. However, all Ahmedabad University students are welcome and encouraged to take the course, provided they have taken at least one previous course in ethics. | | |
| **Course Objectives** | The course aims to:  1. Familiarise students with the leading contemporary theories of ethics, the fundamental issues which these theories are attempting to address, and the methods through which they approach them.  2. Provide students who have some previous exposure to philosophy with the opportunity to hone their philosophical reading skills (most significantly, the ability to identify, accurately reconstruct, and assess a paper’s central argument) by applying them to a series of challenging texts which have shaped current debates in ethical theory.  3. Enhance students' ability to construct and clearly communicate their own philosophical arguments (whether orally or in written form). | | |
| **Learning Outcomes** | On completing this course the student will be able, at an intermediate level, to:  1. Identify and describe the leading contemporary approaches to ethical theory (e.g. consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics) with an emphasis on each theory’s core commitments, distinctive features, advantages, and disadvantages.  2. Recognise and reconstruct the main argument (s) of a philosophical text and evaluate its strength or weakness.  3. Formulate their own ethical positions carefully and critically, in the light of the theories and arguments discussed in class, and provide argumentative support for these positions.  4. Communicate their own views about matters of fundamental human importance (e.g. ‘What makes a person good or bad?’, ‘What do we owe to each other?’, ‘Am I obligated to resist oppression, and if so why?’) clearly and effectively, both orally and in writing. | | |
| **Pedagogy** | Lectures, Class Discussion, Student Presentations | | |
| **Expectations from Students** | Maintain an inclusive and respectful classroom environment, where no student is made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable.  Complete all pre-readings in advance of the session (s) in which we are to discuss them.  Be an active participant in the course (through contribution to class discussion etc.).  Note on Academic Integrity: Under no circumstances may students submit another's words or ideas as their own. This is plagiarism, and will result in a grade of 0 for the assignment. | | |
| **Assessment / Evaluation** | Mid-Semester Paper/Presentation [30%], End-Semester Paper/Presentation [40%], 2 Pair Presentations [20%], Class participation (Including attendance) [10%] | | |
| **Attendance Policy** | University attendance policy | | |
| **Project / Assignment Details** | 2 Presentations (each worth 10 % of the final grade): Students will be expected to summarise one of the pre-readings (in some cases a section of the reading) for their classmates, presenting their own interpretation of what the author is saying and raising at least one objection to their argument. This will serve to set the stage for a broader class discussion of the reading.  Mid-Semester Paper/Presentation (worth 30 % of the final grade): Students will be expected to submit a paper of 1500 words on one of the issues discussed in the first half of the course. The instructor will provide a list of topics, but students are also free to generate their own topic. In lieu of a mid-semester exam, a session will be set aside for students to present their papers in progress to their peers. Students will be primarily assessed on their understanding of the theory discussed and their ability to clearly and cogently present their own argument.  End-Semester Paper/Presentation (worth 40% of the final grade): Students will be expected to submit a paper of 2500 words on one of the issues discussed in the second half of the course. The instructor will provide a list of topics, or students may generate their own. In lieu of an end-semester exam, two sessions will be set aside for students to present their papers in progress to their peers. Students will be primarily assessed on their understanding of the issue discussed and their ability to clearly and cogently present their own argument. | | |
| **Course Material** | Reading List:  Annas, Julia. 1992. “Ancient Ethics and Modern Morality” Philosophical Perspectives 6: 119-136.  Dancy, Jonathan. 1983. “Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties” Mind 92(368): 530-547.  Dreier, James. 1993. “Structures of Normative Theories” The Monist 76(1): 22-40.  Driver, Julia. 2005. “Consequentialism and Feminist Ethics” Hypatia 20 (4): 183-199.  Fitzpatrick, William J. 2012. “The Doctrine of Double Effect: Intention and Permissibility” Philosophy Compass 7(3): 183-196.  Foot, Philippa. 1967. “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect” Oxford Review 5: 1-7.  Foot, Philippa. 2002. “Killing and Letting Die” in Moral Dilemmas: And Other Topics in Moral Philosophy. Oxford University Press. 78-87.  Held, Virginia. 1990. “Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 50: 321-344.  Held, Virginia. 1996. “Justice and Utility: Who Cares?” Philosophic Exchange 26(1): 27-39.  Hill, Jr. Thomas E. 1980. “Humanity as an End in Itself” Ethics 91(1): 84-99.  Hills, Alison. 2010. “Utilitarianism, Contractualism, and Demandingness” The Philosophical Quarterly 60(239): 225-242.  Hooker, Brad. 1990. “Rule-Consequentialism” Mind 99(393): 67-77.  Hurley, Paul. 1997. “Agent-Centered Restrictions: Clearing the Air of Paradox” Ethics 108(1): 120-146.  Hursthouse, Rosalind. 1996. “Normative Virtue Ethics” in Roger Crisp ed. How Should One Live? Oxford University Press. 19-33.  Kagan, Shelly. 2000. “Evaluative Focal Points” in Morality, Rules and Consequences: A Critical Reader eds. Brad Hooker, Elinor Mason, and Dale E. Miller. Edinburgh University Press. 134-155.  Kamm, F.M. 1992. “Non-Consequentialism, the Person as an End-in-Itself, and the Significance of Status” Philosophy & Public Affairs 21(4): 354-389.  Keller, Simon. 2007. “Virtue Ethics is Self-Effacing” Australasian Journal of Philosophy 85(2): 221-231.  Korsgaard, Christine M. 1996. “The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil” Philosophy and Public Affairs 15(4): 325-349.  Louden, Robert B. 1984. “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics” American Philosophical Quarterly 21(3): 227-236.    McNaughton, David. 1996. “An Unconnected Heap of Duties?” The Philosophical Quarterly 46(185): 433-447.  Metz, Thaddeus. 2007. “Toward an African Moral Theory” The Journal of Political Philosophy 15 (3): 321-341.  Mintoff, Joe. 2016. “Why Moral Principles?” Mind 125(500): 1133-1159  Molefe, Motsamai. 2017. “A Critique of Thad Metz’s ‘Towards an African Moral Theory’” Theoria 64(3): 53-76.  Moore, G.E. 1903. Principia Ethica. Cambridge University Press.  Mulgan, Tim. 1994. “Rule Consequentialism and Famine” Analysis 54(3): 187-192.  Sachs, Benjamin. 2010. “Consequentialism’s Double-Edged Sword” Utilitas 22(3): 258-271.  Scanlon, T.M. 1982. “Contractualism and Utilitarianism” in Utilitarianism and Beyond eds. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams. Cambridge University Press. 103-128.  Scheffler, Samuel. 1992. “Prerogatives without Restrictions” Philosophical Perspectives 6: 377-397.  Slote, Michael and Pettit, Philip. 1984. “Satisficing Consequentialism” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes 58: 139-176.  Shaw, William. 2006. “The Consequentialist Perspective” in Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory ed. James Dreier . Blackwell. 5-20.  Singh, Keshav. 2021. “Vice and Virtue in Sikh Ethics” The Monist 104: 319-336.  Tiberius, Valerie. 2006. “How To Think about Virtue and Right” Philosophical Papers 35(2): 247-265  Timmons, Mark. 2013. Moral Theory: An Introduction(2nd edition). Rowman & Littlefield.  Varden, Helga. 2018. “Kant’s Moral Theory and Feminist Ethics” in The Bloomsbury Companion to Analytic Feminism ed. Pieranna Garavaso. Bloomsbury. 459-482. | | |
| **Additional Info** | A coursepack will be provided with all the above readings. | | |

Session Plan

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| **S.No** | **Topic Title** | **Topic Subtopics** | **Readings, Cases, etc** | **Activities** | **Important dates** |
| 1 | Introduction | Course Outline, The Contemporary Landscape of Ethical Theory. | Post-reading: Mark Timmons. *Moral Theory: An Introduction* pp.1-21. | Lecture, Class Discussion |  |
| 2 | Introducing Consequentialism | What are the essential commitments of consequentialism? What best explains its appeal/staying power? | G.E. Moore. *Principia Ethica* pp.147-148.  William Shaw “The Consequentialist Perspective”. | Lecture, Class Discussion |  |
| 3 | Act and Rule Consequentialism | What is the difference between act and rule consequentialism? | Shelly Kagan “Evaluative Focal Points”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 4 | Act or Rule Consequentialism? | Should consequentialists focus on acts or rules? | Brad Hooker “Rule-Consequentialism”,  Tim Mulgan “Rule-Consequentialism and Famine”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 5 | Satisficing and Maximizing Consequentialism | Should consequentialists focus on doing the *best* (maximizing) or doing the *good enough* (satisficing)? | Michael Slote and Philip Pettit. “Satisficing Consequentialism”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 6 | Introducing Deontology | What are the essential commitments of deontology? What best explains its appeal/staying power? | F.M. Kamm “Non-Consequentialism, The Person as an End-in-Itself, and The Significance of Status”. | Lecture, Class Discussion |  |
| 7 | Kantian Ethics | What is distinctive of a Kantian approach to ethics? How have contemporary philosophers developed Kant’s ideas? | Thomas E. Hill Jr. “Humanity as an End in Itself”,  Christine M. Korsgaard “The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 8 | Contractualism | What distinguishes contractualist versions of deontology? What are their advantages? | T.M. Scanlon “Contractualism and Utilitarianism”,  Alison Hills “Utilitarianism, Contractualism, and Demandingness”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 9 | Rossian Pluralism | Should deontologists be monists or pluralists about duty? | David McNaughton “An Unconnected Heap of Duties? | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 10 | The Act/Omission Distinction | Is there a morally relevant difference between *doing* something bad (eg. killing) and *allowing* something bad to happen (eg. letting die)? | James Rachels “Active and Passive Euthanasia”,  Philippa Foot “Killing and Letting Die”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 11 | The Doctrine of Double Effect | What is the doctrine of double effect? How plausible is it? | Philippa Foot “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect”, William J. Fitzpatrick “The Doctrine of Double Effect: Intention and Permissibility”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 12 | The Agent-Neutral/Agent-Relative Distinction and the “Consequentializing” Trend. | Is the important debate not between consequentialism and deontology after all, but instead between *agent-relative* and *agent-neutral* moral theories? | James Dreier “Structures of Normative Theories”, Benjamin Sachs “Consequentialism’s Double-Edged Sword”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 13 | Agent-Centered Prerogatives and Agent-Centered Restrictions | What is the difference between agent-centered *prerogatives* and agent-centered *restrictions*? Can one or both of these deviations from agent-neutrality be justified? | Samuel Scheffler “Prerogatives without Restrictions”,  Paul Hurley “Agent-Centered Restrictions: Clearing the Air of Paradox”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 14 | Mid-Sem Paper Presentations | Student Presentations |  | Student Presentations |  |
| 15 | Stocker’s Critique of Contemporary Ethical Theory | What does Stocker think is wrong with modern moral theories? What is the solution? | Michael Stocker “The Schizophrenia of Modern Moral Theories”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 16 | Introducing Virtue Ethics | What are the essential commitments of virtue ethics? What best explains its renewed appeal? | Julia Annas “Ancient Ethics and Modern Morality”, Justin Oakley “Varieties of Virtue Ethics”. | Lecture, Class Discussion |  |
| 17 | Virtue Ethics and Right Action | Can virtue ethics guide our actions? If it can, how? | Rosalind Hursthouse “Normative Virtue Ethics”, Valerie Tiberius “How to Think About Virtue and Right”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 18 | Sikh Virtue Ethics | What are the essential commitments of Sikh ethics? How does it compare to Western virtue ethics? | Keshav Singh“Vice and Virtue in Sikh Ethics” | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 19 | Criticism of Virtue Ethics | Does virtue ethics really avoid common objections to deontology/consequentialism? Does it face its own problems, and if so what are they? | Robert B. Louden “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics”  Simon Keller “Virtue Ethics is Self-Effacing”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 20 | Moral Particularism | What is moral particularism? What best explains its appeal? | Jonathan Dancy “Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 21 | Criticism of Moral Particularism | How can defenders of moral principles respond to the particularist challenge? | Joe Mintoff “Why Moral Principles?”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 22 | Feminism and Care Ethics | What characterises a feminist approach to ethics? What is care ethics, and why has it appealed to feminists? | Virginia Held “Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory”, and “Justice and Utility-Who Cares?”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 23 | Feminist Criticism of Care Ethics | Should feminists stick with consequentialism/Kantian deontology rather than turning to care ethics? | Julia Driver. “Consequentialism and Feminist Ethics”, Helga Varden. “Kant’s Moral Theory and Feminist Ethics”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 24 | A Case Study in Non-Western Ethical Theory: The Ethics of *Ubuntu* | What is the idea of *ubuntu* and what does a moral system based on it look like? | Thaddeus Metz. “Towards an African Moral Theory”.  Motsamai Molefe. “A Critique of Thad Metz’s ‘Towards an African Moral Theory’”. | Lecture, Student Presentation, Class Discussion |  |
| 25 | End-Sem Paper Presentations | Student Presentations |  | Student Presentations |  |
| 26 | End-Sem Paper Presentations | Student Presentations |  | Student Presentations |  |
| 27 | Review and Reflection |  | Review and reflection |  |  |
| 28 | Review and Reflection |  | Review and reflection |  |  |
| 29 | Review and Reflection |  | Review and reflection |  |  |
| 30 | Review and Reflection |  | Review and reflection |  |  |