

PHIL 152-01  
Contemporary Ethical Theory  
Sacramento State University, Spring 2020  
Mon/Wed, 3:00-4:15 pm  
Douglass Hall 110

**Instructor:** Dr. Tristan J. Rogers, Lecturer, Department of Philosophy  
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Contemporary ethical theory has been defined by the attempt to rescue (or dismiss) the possibility of moral knowledge. As participants in this intellectual project, students of contemporary ethical theory have an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the foundations of ethics and their relevance for our societies. But what are the foundations of ethics? Is ethics objective in the sense of not depending on social convention and our feelings? Or is ethics just a way of expressing approval or disapproval of certain types of actions? And if so, how can we make sense of moral disagreement? A second line of questioning investigates theories about morality. Can morality be justified by an appeal to consequences? To what extent is morality a natural phenomenon? Is morality a mutually advantageous agreement among rational agents? Finally, is morality fundamentally about moral character rather than right action? In this course, we will discuss these (and other) questions, as raised in philosophical work by the likes of G.E. Moore, W.D. Ross, A.J. Ayer, Bernard Williams, Philippa Foot, John Rawls, and others. The course is divided into three parts: (1) Early Meta-Ethics, (2) Mid-Century Ethical Theories, (3) More Recent Ethical Theories. Students are encouraged to engage with the texts and develop their philosophical acumen in class discussion.

**Catalogue Description:** “Major topics in ethical theory with attention to their contemporary formulation, including such topics as utilitarianism vs. right-based theories and the dispute over the objectivity of ethics.”

**Required Texts (available in Bookstore, online, or through the library):**

*Twentieth Century Ethical Theory*, eds. Cahn and Haber (Pearson, 1995)  
*The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge*, Dallas Willard (free e-book available through the library)

**Learning Objectives:** By the end of the course, the student should have the ability to

- ✓ Develop competence in philosophical language and literature on the history and transformations of ethical theories. *Practical Goals associated with this objective:*
  - Accurately describe and distinguish a variety of concepts, theories, and positions in the history of ethics;
  - Express one's own ethical judgments in a cogent and clear fashion;
  - Engage in respectful discussion of difficult and sometimes controversial ethical issues;
  - Analyse specific ethical arguments for consistency and credibility (including one's own).
- ✓ Develop written and oral communication skills as those are associated with argumentative writing and public speaking. *Practical Goals associated with this objective:*
  - Write competently in concise, precise and well-developed logical style;
  - Express of a point of view through the formulation of a coherent and consistent argument;

- Present an exposition of text in a coherent manner to an audience of peers.
- ✓ Meet the learning objectives associated with all General Education area C2 (Humanities) courses at CSUS:
  - Demonstrate knowledge of the conventions and methods of the study of the humanities.
  - Investigate, describe, and analyze the roles and effects of human culture and understanding in the development of human societies.
  - Compare and analyze various conceptions of humankind.
  - Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the historical development of cultures and civilizations, including their animating ideas and values.

### **Assessment:**

#### 20% - Study Questions/Attendance/Participation

I will collect written answers to Study Questions posted online for that day's assigned readings. Answers will be graded as Check (15)/Check-Plus (20)/Check-Minus (10), depending on thoroughness and accuracy. You must be present for the duration class to receive credit. I also expect you to engage in class discussion based on your pre-class preparation, either voluntarily or when called on. I will do my best to make this enjoyable and stress-free.

#### 30% - Philosophical Analysis Papers

There will be three short analysis papers (1000 words). The papers should follow the format detailed [here](#). We will discuss this further in class. Due dates on the schedule below.

#### 20% - Tests

There will be two tests based on Parts One Two respectively. They will focus on comprehension of the major philosophical ideas of each part. Online and multiple choice. Due dates on the schedule below.

#### 30% - Final Exam

There will be a written final exam, scheduled during the exam period. You will receive questions in advance from which I will choose on exam day.

*Extra Credit:* There will be a Philosophy Department Symposium event in the Spring for which you may receive extra credit for attending. Details to follow.

### **Grading Schema:**

A = 93-100%, A- = 90-92%, B+ = 87-89%, B = 84-86%, B- = 80-83%, C+ = 77-79%, C = 74-76%, C- = 70-73%, D+ = 67-69%, D = 60-66 %, F = 0-59%

**Late work policy:** As a rule, work will not be accepted late except in cases of documented emergency or illness. You may make a written petition in advance if you feel an exception is warranted.

**Course conduct:** You are expected to be respectful toward your fellow students and myself. This course requires discussion of controversial and sometimes emotionally charged issues. If you are not comfortable rationally discussing them in a thoughtful and respectful way, you should not take the course. Additionally, please refrain from using your phones (e.g. texting, email, YouTube videos, listening to music, etc.), and otherwise acting in an inappropriate or distracting way (e.g. chronic lateness, talking, sleeping, playing games, etc.). Responsible use of laptops/tablets (e.g. note taking,

viewing reading) is permitted provided it does not degenerate into any of the above. Failure to abide by the above will result in forfeiting the participation portion of the grade and you may be asked to leave class.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a violation of University policy and seriously undermines your integrity as a student. Penalties may be severe. It is your responsibility to understand the University’s plagiarism policy. When in doubt, ask me. See <https://www.csus.edu/umannual/student/stu-0100.htm>

**Reasonable Accommodation:** Should any student need accommodation because of a disability, please let me know to discuss options (documentation to SSWD, Lassen Hall 1008, 916-278-6955).

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<b>Week</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings/Assignments NB: read <i>before</i> class</b>
Week One	Mon, Jan 20	MLK Day – No Class	N/A
	Wed, Jan 22	Introduction to the Course	James Rachels, “Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century”
<b>PART ONE: Early Twentieth Century Meta-Ethics</b>			
Week Two	Mon, Jan 27	Ethical Intuitionism	Moore, “The Subject-Matter of Ethics”
	Wed, Jan 29	Ethical Intuitionism	Russell, “The Meaning of Good and Bad”
Week Three	Mon, Feb 3	Ethical Intuitionism	Prichard, “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?”
	Wed, Feb 5	Ethical Intuitionism	Ross, “What Makes Right Acts Right?”
	<b>Sun, Feb 9</b>	<b>First Analysis Paper Due</b>	<b>Submit via Canvas</b>
Week Four	Mon, Feb 10	Positivism	Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics”
	Wed, Feb 12	Positivism	Ayer, “A Critique of Ethics”

Week Five	Mon, Feb 17	Emotivism	Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms"
	Wed, Feb 19	Emotivism	Stevenson, "The Nature of Ethical Disagreement"
Week Six	Mon, Feb 24	Moral Disagreement	Mackie, "A Refutation of Morals"
	Wed, Feb 26	Moral Disagreement	Ewing, "The Definition of Good"
Week Seven	Mon, Mar 2	Moral Reasoning	Hampshire, "Fallacies in Moral Philosophy"
	Wed, Mar 4	Moral Reasoning	Strawson, "Ethical Intuitionism"
	<b>Sun, Mar 8</b>	<b>Second Analysis Paper Due</b>	<b>Submit via Canvas</b>
<b>PART TWO: Mid-Century Ethical Theories</b>			
Week Eight	Mon, Mar 9	Utilitarianism	Smart, "Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism"
	Wed, Mar 11	Utilitarianism	Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism"
	<b>Sun, Mar 15</b>	<b>First Test Due</b>	<b>Canvas</b>
Week Nine	Mon, Mar 16	Variants of Utilitarianism	Baier, "The Point of View of Morality"
	Wed, Mar 18	Variants of Utilitarianism	Rawls, "Two Concepts

			of Rules”
Week Ten	Mon, Mar 23	Ethical Puzzles	Hare, “A Moral Argument”
	Wed, Mar 25	Ethical Puzzles	Searle, “How to Derive ‘Ought’ from ‘Is’”
Week Eleven	Mar 30-Apr 3	SPRING BREAK	NO CLASS
Week Twelve	Mon, Apr 6	Naturalism	Foot, “Moral Beliefs”
	Wed, Apr 8	Naturalism	Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”
Week Thirteen	Mon, Apr 13	Naturalism	Foot, “Virtues and Vices”
	Wed, Apr 15	Critique of Ethical Theory	Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”
	<b>Sun, Apr 19</b>	<b>Third Analysis Paper Due</b>	<b>Submit via Canvas</b>
<b>PART THREE: Later Ethical Theories</b>			
Week Fourteen	Mon, Apr 20	Contract Theory	Rawls, “Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics”
	Wed, Apr 22	Contract Theory	Gauthier, “Why Contractarianism?”
	<b>Sun, Apr 26</b>	<b>Second Test Due</b>	<b>Canvas</b>

Week Fifteen	Mon, Apr 27	Contract Theory	Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism”
Week Sixteen	Wed, Apr 29	Virtue Theory	MacIntyre, “The Nature of the Virtues”
	Mon, May 4	Virtue Theory	Annas, “Virtue and Duty: Negotiating Between Different Ethical Traditions” (PDF)
	Wed, May 6	Virtue Theory	Excerpt from Dr. Rogers’ forthcoming book manuscript <i>The Authority of Virtue</i>
	<b>Mon, May 11</b>	<b>Final Exam</b>	<b>3 pm – 5 pm</b>