

PHIL 152-01  
Recent Ethical Theory  
California State University, Sacramento, (Fall 2020)  
Tues/Thurs, 1:30-2:45 pm  
Douglass Hall 110

\*\*\*Subject to Change due to dynamic COVID-19 Situation\*\*\*

**Instructor:** Dr. Tristan J. Rogers, Lecturer, Department of Philosophy  
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Recent ethical theory has been defined by the attempt to recover the possibility of moral knowledge from the skeptical claims of ethical subjectivism. As participants in this intellectual project, students of recent ethical theory have an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the foundations of ethics and their relevance for our lives and societies. But what are the foundations of ethics? Is ethics objective in the sense of not depending on social conventions and our feelings? Or is ethics just a way of expressing emotions of approval or disapproval of certain types of actions? These are what philosophers call “meta-ethical” questions. A second line of questioning investigates normative ethical theories, about what constitutes morally right action. Is morality fundamentally about producing good consequences? To what extent does morality depend on natural facts? Can we construct morality as 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 questions, raised in the philosophical work of G.E. Moore, W.D. Ross, A.J. Ayer, Bernard Williams, Philippa Foot, John Rawls, and others. 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:**

All required readings will be provided in pdf format on the Canvas Course Site

**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/Course Engagement

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.

#### 50% - 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.

#### 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.

### **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).

<b>Week</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings/Assignments NB: read <i>before</i> class</b>
Week One	Tues, Sept 1	Introduction to the Course	James Rachels, “Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century”
	Thurs, Sept 3	Ethical Intuitionism	Moore, “The Subject-Matter of Ethics,” Sections 1-7
<b>PART ONE: Meta-Ethics – Intuitionism and Emotivism</b>			
Week Two	Tues, Sept 8	Ethical Intuitionism	Moore, “The Subject-Matter of Ethics,” Sections 8-15
	Thurs, Sept 10	Ethical Intuitionism	Russell, “The Meaning of Good and Bad”
Week Three	Tues, Sept 15	Ethical Intuitionism	Prichard, “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?”
	Thurs, Sept 17	Ethical Intuitionism	Ross, “What Makes Right Acts Right?”
	<b>Sun, Sept 20</b>	<b>First Analysis Paper Due</b>	<b>Submit via Canvas</b>
Week Four	Tues, Sept 22	Positivism	Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics”
	Thurs, Sept 24	Positivism	Ayer, “A Critique of Ethics”

Week Five	Tues, Sept 29	Emotivism	Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms”
	Thurs, Oct 1	Emotivism	Stevenson, “The Nature of Ethical Disagreement”
Week Six	Tues, Oct 6	Moral Disagreement	Mackie, “A Refutation of Morals”
	Thurs, Oct 8	Moral Disagreement	Ewing, “The Definition of Good”
Week Seven	Tues, Oct 13	Moral Reasoning	Hampshire, “Fallacies in Moral Philosophy”
	Thurs, Oct 15	Moral Reasoning	Blanshard, “The New Subjectivism in Ethics”
	<b>Sun, Oct 18</b>	<b>Second Analysis Paper Due</b>	<b>Submit via Canvas</b>
<b>PART TWO: Normative Ethics – Utilitarianism and Contract Theory</b>			
Week Eight	Tues, Oct 20	Utilitarianism	Smart, “Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism”
	Thurs, Oct 22	Utilitarianism	Brandt, “Some Merits of One Form of Utilitarianism”
Week Nine	Tues, Oct 27	Utilitarianism	Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism”
	Thurs, Oct 29	Utilitarianism	Rawls, “Two Concepts of Rules”

Week Ten	Tues, Nov 3	Contract Theory	Rawls, "Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics"
	Thurs, Nov 5	Contract Theory	Rawls, "Justice as Fairness"
Week Eleven	Tues, Nov 10	Contract Theory	Gauthier, "Why Contractarianism?"
	Thurs, Nov 12	Contract Theory	Scanlon, "Contractualism and Utilitarianism"
	<b>Sun, Nov 15</b>	<b>Third Analysis Paper Due</b>	<b>Submit via Canvas</b>
<b>PART THREE: Normative Ethics – Naturalism and Virtue Theory</b>			
Week Twelve	Tues, Nov 17	Naturalism	Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"
	Thurs, Nov 19	Naturalism	Foot, "Moral Beliefs"
Week Thirteen	Tues, Nov 24	Naturalism	Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"
	Thurs, Nov 26	Thanksgiving	NO CLASS
Week Fourteen	Tues, Dec 1	Virtue Theory	Foot, "Virtues and Vices"

	Thurs, Dec 3	Virtue Theory	MacIntyre, "The Nature of the Virtues"
Week Fifteen	Tues, Dec 8	Virtue Theory	Russell, "Virtue Ethics, Happiness, and the Good Life"
Week Sixteen	Thurs, Dec 10	Virtue Theory	Annas, "Virtue and Duty: Negotiating Between Different Ethical Traditions"
	<b>Dec 14-18</b>	<b>Finals Week</b>	<b>Exam Date TBD</b>