

## **Phil 160 Ethical Theory**

Spring 2025

RWAC 0426

MWF 10-10:50 AM

### **Instructor: Yuan Yuan**

Office Hours: Wednesday 11-12, Friday 11-12, and by appointment

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### **Course Description:**

Traditionally, ethical theory has focused on action, particularly concerning how we should act in pursuit of our happiness while adhering to the demands of morality. The ethics of action is undoubtedly crucial, and we will devote Part 1 of the class to related questions. However, living our lives is not merely about exercising our agency in action; it also involves exercising our epistemic and emotional agency.

Our epistemic agency concerns how we relate to one another as epistemic agents, deciding whom to believe, how we contribute to our collective epistemic resources, and how we maintain a healthy deliberative environment in which democracy can flourish. Our emotional agency is deeply connected to our values, our visceral responses to injustice, and the possibilities for reconciliation and moving forward after severe injuries have occurred.

In this course, we will reflect on and illuminate all those aspects of our agency, with Part 2 focusing on our epistemic agency and Part 3 on our emotional agency. While we can only scratch the surface of these profound questions, the course will provide you with cutting-edge conceptual tools and analytical frameworks that will enable you to further explore related questions on your own in the future whether in an academic context or simply as a reflective and responsible agent, regardless of the profession you pursue or the lifestyle you choose.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- To learn about classic literature and new developments in three core subfields of ethics.
- To practice communication skills for active participation and respectful collective deliberation.
- To critically read, discuss, and write about the philosophical scholarship.

### **Subject to Change Statement:**

The syllabus and course schedule may be subject to change. Changes will be communicated via email and in Canvas. It is your responsibility to check email messages and course announcements to stay current in the course.

### **Course Materials:**

- All the assigned readings will be available on the course page in Canvas.

### **Assignments and Assessment:**

- Course performance will be evaluated as follows:
  - A midterm exam, 20 points.
  - A medium length paper (1200-1500 words), due on Friday 5/23, 30 points.
  - A final exam, 30 points.
  - Attendance and engaged participation in in-class assignments, 20 points.
    - Regular in-person lecture attendance is mandatory, unless you have a good reason to be absent from lecture. As insurance against missing a lecture (for whatever reason), please arrange (ahead of time) to borrow notes from someone else in the course.
    - I will also post any handouts and slides, but please do not rely on these alone if you miss class as they provide a framework but not all the important details.
    - There will be 8 in-class assignments, with each assignment worth 2 points. Those assignments will not receive letter grades; instead, full points will be given for good faith participation that shows preparation and effort. Good participation will be determined in part by: (i) active engagement in group discussions and (ii) short writing assignments that can take various forms, such as answering a question or sharing your reflections on an issue. For each in-class assignment missed, you will lose 2 points. There will be no make-up for in-class assignments. If you have legitimate reasons for missing a class, please inform me in advance whenever possible. If advance notice is not feasible, please notify me as soon as you can and provide a valid excuse to avoid losing points.
    - Lecture participation norms: During class time, students are expected to be engaged and to participate in discussion when working in smaller groups and to be fully present. This means that you should not be doing anything else (e.g., on your phones or laptops) that will take your focus away from the lecture and discussion. In order to get something valuable from the course, it is crucial to be following the discussion and be actively involved in thinking about it. I also encourage you to participate by asking questions (or make comments) directly related to the course content under discussion.
- Late assignments will not be accepted without a legitimate excuse, provided in advance if at all possible. There will be no 'make-up' test. I will grant exemptions only in the case of serious emergencies provided suitable evidence is provided afterwards, and for religious observances provided I am informed beforehand.
- Grading Scale (measured by points):
  - A 94-100
  - A- 90-93
  - B+ 87-89
  - B 84-86
  - B- 80-83
  - C+ 77-79

- C 74-76
- C- 70-73
- D 60-69
- F Below 60

### **How to Excel in the Class**

- Ahead of time: Reading with care ahead of the class at which the readings will be discussed is a key first step. Asking yourself questions as you go and taking notes in the margins will help you to be engaged and increase your understanding. For example, you can ask yourself questions such as the following: “What is the author’s main thesis?” “What reasons does the author provide to support their thesis?” “What position(s) is the author arguing against?” “What is at stake or important about the debate the author is engaged in?” “Are the author’s reasons convincing?” “How would an opponent best respond?” “What conclusion do I think is most plausible?” (Also rereading and reviewing after class is a great way to solidify your learning.)
- In class: Being engaged during class and group discussion is crucial. Since you generally read one piece for each topic, I provide a lot of background and complementary or contrasting arguments in my lectures. Therefore, you should pay close attention during lectures. Please feel free to raise your hand to ask questions or offer comments while I am lecturing. Moreover, interacting with others in the class—listening to their questions and comments and engaging with them during group discussions—will help you engage with the material more deeply and learn more.
- Outside of class: Attend at least one office hour early in the quarter, just to introduce yourself, have a chat, and get to know what office hours are like. And check in during office hours or by appointment with any questions at all any time! It is important to let us know about any challenges you might be facing and that might create obstacles to your full engagement in the class. Your TAs and I will be very glad to help, and it will help us to do that if we know about your situation at an early stage.

### **Course Polices on Plagiarism**

- Cheating and plagiarism, of any sort, are violations of the Academic Code of Conduct, and will be treated accordingly. Further detail about what is required and permitted will be provided on each assignment. If there is a violation, the assignment in question will receive an F and the matter will be referred to the Office of Academic Integrity. Please refer to the resources at AIO: <https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu>.

### **Resources**

- Basic Needs: This link takes you to a page with links to help with food security and off-campus housing resources: [basicneeds@ucsd.edu](mailto:basicneeds@ucsd.edu), or call 858-246-2632.
- If you find yourself in need of psychological counseling and you do not already have a counselor, please check in with Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): <https://wellness.ucsd.edu/CAPS/Pages/default.aspx>

## **Schedule and Reading Assignments**

### **Part 1 The Ethics of Action**

#### **Week 1 Happiness** (3/31, 4/2, and 4/4)

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 2.

Derek Parfit, What Makes Someone's Life Go Best.

#### **Week 2 Consequentialism** (4/7, 4/9, and 4/11)

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 3-5.

Bernard Williams, selections from *Utilitarianism: For & Against*.

#### **Week 3 Deontology** (4/14, 4/16, and 4/18)

Robert Nozick, selections from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

Jeremy Waldron, The Right to Do Wrong.

### **Part 2 The Ethics of Epistemology**

#### **Week 4 Epistemic Injustice I** (4/21, 4/23, and 4/25)

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Ch.1 and Ch. 7

#### **Week 5 Midterm Exam** (4/28, 4/30, and 5/2)

Current plan: There will be no lectures during Week 5. Students can choose between two exam formats: In-class, closed-book written exam or ten-minute, closed-book oral exam. Further details will be provided.

Please note that the plan may change based on the number of students selecting each exam type.

#### **Week 6 Epistemic Injustice II** (5/5, 5/7, and 5/9)

Kristie Dotson, Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing.

Nora Berenstain, Epistemic Exploitation

Seunghyun Song, Structural Linguistic Injustice

#### **Week 7 Political Epistemology** (5/12, 5/14, and 5/16)

Elizabeth Anderson, Epistemic Bubbles and Authoritarian Politics.

Robert B. Talisse, Problems of Polarization.

### **Part 3 The Ethics of Emotion**

#### **Week 8 Emotion and Valuing** (5/19, 5/21 and 5/23)

Stephen Darwall, Two Kinds of Respect.

Daniel Moller, Love and Death.

Monique Wonderly, On Moral Pride as Taking Responsibility for the Good.

#### **Week 9 Emotion and Justice** (5/26 Memorial Day, no class, 5/28 and 5/30)

Srinivasan, Amia (2018). The Aptness of Anger

Silva, Laura (2021). The Epistemic Role of Outlaw Emotions.

Pismenny et al. (2024). Emotional Injustice

#### **Week 10 Emotion and Reconciliation** (6/2, 6/4, and 6/6)

Stephen Darwall, selections from *The Heart and its Attitudes*.

Lucy Allais, Forgiveness and Meaning in Life  
Monique Wonderly, Forgiving, Committing, and Un-forgiving

**Week 11 Final exam**

Details will be provided in due course.