

# Ethics

PHIL 205  
Mount Holyoke College  
Fall 2016

## GENERAL INFORMATION

- \* Instructor: Arden Ali
- \* Office location: 213A Skinner Hall
- \* Office phone: (413) 538-2725
- \* Office hours: Friday, 1:00-2:00pm
- \* Email: [ardenali@mtholyoke.edu](mailto:ardenali@mtholyoke.edu)
- \* Class meeting times: Monday & Wednesday, 11:00am-12:15pm
- \* Class meeting location: SHTK 318

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will focus on classic and contemporary work on central topics in ethics. The goal will be to see whether there is anything to be said in a principled way about what to do and how to live. The core of the course will be an examination of the central traditions in moral philosophy in the West, typified by Aristotle, Kant, and Mill. We will also examine vexing contemporary moral issues with an eye to whether moral theories can give us practical guidance. Finally, we will step back and ask whether any of the moral theorizing we have been engaging in is really capable of uncovering objective moral truths. (From the course catalogue)

## TEXT

- \* There is no required textbook for this course. All readings will be posted on Moodle. Please bring a copy of the relevant assigned readings to class each day.

## REQUIREMENTS

- \* Attendance and Participation: You are required to attend every class session. You are also required to participate during discussion by asking questions, explaining material, helping other students, or simply voicing your confusion. Repeated failures to attend class or participate will impact your final grade.
- \* Written Work: One short argument analysis (2-3 pages) and two essays (5-7 pages)
- \* Online Reading Responses: You are required to post a comment on the course Moodle page about one of the scheduled non-textbook readings. These responses must be submitted by 5:00pm on the Friday of the week *before* we talk about the readings. (See schedule below for details.)
- \* Reading Presentation: Each student will give at least one informal reading presentation during the semester. You will be assigned a selection from one of our readings and asked to explain the argument, or the author's position, in the selected text. You *do not* need to post a reading response on the week you are scheduled to give a presentation.

- + Examination: There is no final examination for this course.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

- + Class preparation: You should complete all of the week’s readings before our Monday session. You should bring a copy of any papers assigned for that day.
- + Communication: I send course updates via email. Please check your Mount Holyoke email account regularly. Email is also the best way to contact me outside of class.
- + Electronics policy: Please do not use laptops, cell phones, tablets, or other electronic devices during class, unless you are using these devices for referring to course readings or running software for an approved classroom accommodation.
- + Submission of work: Essay prompts will be posted on Moodle. Please submit a hardcopy of your essay at the beginning of the class session on the specified due date.
- + Extension: One 24-hour extension on an essay or the argument analysis will be granted ‘no-questions-asked.’ To use this extension, email me before due date/time to inform me that you need an extension. The assignment must be turned in 24-hours later in the dropbox outside my office (213A Skinner Hall).
- + Late/Missing Work: In general, essays will not be accepted after their due date/time unless an arrangement has been made before the due date. Talk to me if you fall behind, preferably long before the paper is due. No credit will be awarded for late online reading responses.
- + Mountain Day: If Mountain Day falls on a class day, the instructor will adjust the course schedule and may change the due date on assignments. The revised syllabus and schedule will be posted on Moodle and it is the student’s responsibility to update their personal calendar.
- + Accommodations: To request accommodations for a disability, contact AccessAbility Services, located in Wilder Hall B4, at (413) 538-2646 or [accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu](mailto:accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu). If you are eligible, they will give you an accommodation letter, which you should give to me as soon as possible. We will work together to make sure all of the course content is accessible to you.

## **GRADING**

- |                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| + Attendance and Participation:   | 15% |
| + Reading Responses/Presentation: | 10% |
| + Argument Analysis:              | 15% |
| + Paper 1:                        | 30% |
| + Paper 2:                        | 30% |

## **GETTING HELP**

- + If you are having any difficulties in the course, talk to me! Come to office hours (no appointment needed) or send me an email to set up a different time to talk.
- + The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program provides support for students whose first language is not English. For more information, visit <http://mtholyoke.edu/esol>.

- The Counseling Service (<http://mtholyoke.edu/counseling>) offers safe and confidential support for mental health concerns. Don't struggle alone; reach out for help when you need it.

### **ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITY**

- Pages 34–37 of the *Student Handbook* describe the College's policies with regard to academic honesty. It is your responsibility to review and adhere to these guidelines.
- It is also your responsibility to complete *The Proper Use of Sources Tutorial* provided by the Dean of the College: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/>
- Academic dishonesty, e.g. plagiarism or cheating, may result in a failed mark on assignments, failure in the course as a whole, or more serious disciplinary measures.

**SCHEDULE.** The most up-to-date schedule is posted on Moodle. All readings posted on Moodle as well.

**Week 1                    Introduction to the course**

September 7th: No assigned reading

Post on Moodle about Week 2 readings by Sept. 9 at 5:00pm

UNIT ONE: META-ETHICS

**Week 2                    Euthyphro problem; moral non-naturalism**

September 12th: Read Plato. ‘Euthyphro’

September 14th: Read Moore. ‘Goodness as Simple and Indefinable’

Post on Moodle about Week 3 readings by Sept. 16 at 5:00pm

**Week 3                    Moral error theory; expressivism**

September 19th: Read Mackie. ‘The Subjectivity of Values’

September 21st: Read Ayer. ‘The Emotive Theory of Ethics’

Post on Moodle about Week 4 readings by Fri., Sept. 23 at 5:00pm

**Week 4                    Moral relativism**

September 26th: Read Harman. ‘What is Moral Relativism?’

September 28th: Read Foot. ‘Moral Relativism’

Post on Moodle about Week 5 readings by Fri., Sept. 30 at 5:00pm

UNIT TWO: WELL-BEING

**Week 5                    Hedonism and desire satisfaction**

October 3rd: Read Mill. ‘Hedonism’ [Argument Analysis Due]

October 5th: Read Railton. ‘Facts and Values’

Post on Moodle about Week 6 readings by Fri., Oct. 7 at 5:00pm

**Week 6                    Hybrid approaches to well-being**

October 12th: Read Parfit, ‘What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best?’

Post on Moodle about Week 7 readings by Fri., Oct. 14 at 5:00pm

UNIT THREE: UTILITARIANISM

**Week 7**

**Introducing utilitarianism**

October 17th: Read Mill. Excerpt from *Utilitarianism*

October 19th: Read Singer. ‘Is Act-Utilitarianism Self-Defeating?’

Post on Moodle about Week 8 readings by Fri., Oct. 21 at 5:00pm

**Week 8**

**Motivating utilitarianism**

October 24th: Review readings from previous week.

October 26th: Read Hare. ‘What is Wrong with Slavery?’

Post on Moodle about Week 9 readings by Fri., Oct. 28 at 5:00pm

**Week 9**

**Criticizing utilitarianism**

October 31st: Read Williams. ‘A Critique of Utilitarianism’

November 2nd: Read Thomson. ‘The Trolley Problem’

Post on Moodle about Week 10 readings by Mon., Nov. 7 at 6:00am

UNIT FOUR: DO INTENTIONS MATTER?

**Week 10**

**The doctrine of double effect**

November 7th: Read Foot. ‘The Problem of...’

November 9th: Read Quinn. ‘Actions, Intentions, and Consequences’

Post on Moodle about Week 11 readings by Fri., Nov. 14 at 6:00am

**Week 11**

**Deontology**

November 14th: Read Kant. Excerpt from the *Groundwork* [**Paper 1 Due**]

November 16th: Read O’Neill. ‘Kantian Approaches to Some Famine...’

Post on Moodle about Week 11 readings by Mon., Nov. 21 at 6:00am

**Week 12**

**A new direction**

November 21st (short week): Read Stocker. ‘The Schizophrenia of Modern...’

No posts on Moodle about Week 13 readings

UNIT FIVE: MORAL EVALUATION

**Week 13**

**Praiseworthiness and moral character**

November 28th: Read Kant. Excerpt from the *Groundwork*

November 30th: Read Arpaly. 'Moral Worth'

Post on Moodle about Week 14 readings by Mon., Dec. 5 at 6:00am

**Week 14**

**Blameworthiness and responsibility**

December 5th: Read Frankfurt. 'Alternate Possibilities and Responsibility'

December 7th: Read Nagel. 'Moral Luck'

No posts on Moodle about Week 15 readings

**Week 15**

**Course conclusion and catch-up day**

December 12: No assigned reading [**Paper 2 Due**]