

Philosophy 160, Sect. B
Introduction to Ethics
Spring 2006

TuTh 1:00-2:15
Room: Kennedy 508
Instructor: Michael Rubin

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to ethical theory. It is broken up into three segments. For the first two segments, our focus will be on the question of what makes morally right actions morally right. Our goal will be to carefully formulate theories, discuss their application, and consider objections to them. For the last segment of the class, several topics will be proposed. Sometime during the semester the class will vote on which of these topics to study. Possible topics include:

- (a) *Theory of value* (what makes something good or bad?);
- (b) *Metaethics* (are there objective moral facts, or are our moral judgments mere expressions of our attitudes?);
- (c) *Applied ethics* (questions concerning the moral permissibility of abortion, euthanasia, eating animals etc.);
- (d) *Distributive justice* (is an unequal distribution of material goods ever just? Is it unjust to tax some in order to benefit others?);
- (e) *Freedom of the will and moral responsibility* (are our actions predetermined by biological and environmental factors? If so, can we ever be held morally responsible for our actions?);

Required Reading

Most readings will be from Fred Feldman's *Introduction to Ethics*. It is available at Amherst Books located in downtown Amherst (next door to Subway). Additional readings will be made available on the class website.

Course Requirements

Three in-class exams and three short homework assignments. At the end of the semester students will have the option of retaking one of the exams. There is no cumulative final exam.

Class Website

Check the class website regularly for updates:

<http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~rube/introethics.htm>

Office Hours & Email

Office: Bartlett 351
Office hours: Tuesdays 11:30 am (and by appointment).
Email address: rubin@philos.umass.edu

Class Calendar

Normative Ethics of Behavior I.

1. Tu Jan. 31 – Introduction.
2. Th Feb 2 – Basic Logic.
3. Tu Feb 7 – Concepts in Ethics; Divine Command Theory (Read: Locke* and Plato, “Euthyphro”).
4. Th Feb 9 – DCTh & Discussion
5. Tu Feb 14 – Objections to DCTh.
6. Th Feb 16 – Cultural Relativism (Read: Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”).
- No Class (Tu Feb 21)
7. Th Feb 23. – CR discussion and objections (Homework 1 due).
8. Tu Feb 28 – Linguistic Cultural Relativism.
9. Th Mar 2 – Exam 1

Normative Ethics of Behavior II.

10. Tu Mar 7 – Act Utilitarianism (Read: Mill, “Utilitarianism”).
11. Th Mar 9 – AU Discussion.
12. Tu Mar 14 – Objections to AU.
13. Th Mar 16 – Rule Utilitarianism & Objections
- Spring Break
14. Tu Mar 28 – Kantianism (Read: Kant, “Morality and Rationality”).
15. Th Mar 30 – Discussion of CI.
16. Tu Apr 4 – Objections to CI (Homework 2 due).
17. Th Apr 6 – Rossian Pluralism (Read: Ross, “What Makes Right Acts Right?”)
18. Tu Apr 11 – Rossian Pluralism Discussion and Objections.
19. Th Apr 13 – Exam 2.

(Topic: To Be Announced).

20. Tu Apr 18
21. Th Apr 20
22. Tu Apr 25
23. Th Apr 27
24. Tu May 2
25. Th May 4
26. Tu May 9 – (Homework 3 due)
27. Th May 11
28. Tu May 16 – Exam 3.

* = reading found on class website