

PHIL 440: Contemporary Ethical Theory

Fall 2011

Instructor: Prof. Dan Moller

Meetings: T, TH 2:00-3:15, Skinner 1112

OH: T, TH 3:15-4:00, and by appointment, Skinner 1107B

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A survey of major themes in contemporary ethical theory, including nihilism, consequentialism and virtue ethics.

Texts

- E-reserve (<https://elms.umd.edu> > PHIL 440 > Course tools > Course reserves)
- Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*
- John Doris, *Lack of Character*

Grading

- Attendance & participation: 10%
- Reading quizzes (6, drop the lowest): 15%
- First paper (2100 – 2400 words (around 7-8 pages)): 20%
- Second paper (2400 – 3000 words (around 8-10 pages)): 30%
- Final: 25%

Policies

- Technology: use of laptops and all other electronic devices in class is prohibited. Students caught texting will be asked to leave.
- Absences must be cleared with me in advance. Unexcused absences will be reflected in participation grading (routine absence will result in an F).
- Reading quizzes will be random; the lowest grade is dropped. Missed quizzes cannot be made up.
- You must observe academic integrity; I will check for plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty and forward all instances to the Honor Council.

Topics & Readings

PART I – meta-ethics

1. *Introduction* (9/1)

Moral nihilism: are there any moral facts?

2. *The traditional challenge* (9/6-8) – Plato *Republic I-II* (esp. 336-9, 343-4, 358-61), Thucydides “Melian dialogue,” Haidt “The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail”
3. *Nietzsche I* (9/13-15) – *Genealogy* preface - Bk. I, *Bible* Numbers 31, 1 Samuel 27, Deuteronomy 7, 20, Judges 1, 6, Mathew 5, Luke 6, Eusebius *Life of Constantine* 1.4-8, 4.5-6
4. *Nietzsche II* (9/20-22) – *Genealogy* Bk. II, Foucault *Discipline and Punish* ch. 1
5. *Nietzsche III* (9/27-29) – *Genealogy* Bk. III, *The Rule of St. Benedict* 5-7, 33, 39-40, 47, 54
6. *Moral nihilism & moral realism* (10/4-6) – Harman *The Nature of Morality* c. 1-3, Sturgeon “Moral Explanations”

Optional: Huemer “Moral Knowledge”

PART II – normative ethics

Consequentialism vs deontology: do the ends justify the means?

7. *The basic problem* (10/11-13) – Nagel “War and Massacre,” Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect”
8. *The Trolley* (10/18-20) – Thomson “The Trolley Problem,” Greene “An fMRI Investigation,” Koenigs “Damage to the Prefrontal Cortex,” Sunstein “Heuristics”
9. *Rescuing and saving* (11/1-3) – Taurek “Should the Numbers Count?” Parfit “Innumerate Ethics,” Harris “The Survival Lottery”
10. *Torture* (11/8-10) – Harris “In Defense of Torture,” Sussman “What’s so Bad about Torture?” McMahan “Torture in Principle and Practice”

Optional: UN Convention on Human Rights

Virtue ethics & situationism: is character-ethics undermined by science?

11. *Virtue ethics* (11/15-17): Wolf “Moral Saints,” Hursthouse “Virtue-theory and Abortion”

Second paper due: 11/15

12. *Situationism I* (11/22): Doris 1-3, Goldhagen “Hitler’s Willing Executioners”

13. *Situationism II* (11/29-12/1): Doris 4-6

14. *Situationism III* (12/6-12/8): Doris 7-8, Nagel “Moral Luck”

15. *Conclusion* (12/13)