

PHIL 521/621/ BETH 621: Ethical Theory

Spring 2010 – 3 Hours

Tuesdays 4:30 – 7:15 P.M.

Med Center One, Suite 270

Instructor: Avery Kolers

Phone: 852-0453

Office/Hours: By appointment, **plus:**

email: akolers@louisville.edu

Med Center One: T3:30 – 4:30

web: <https://blackboard.louisville.edu>

Humanities 314: MF 12:00 - 1

Be safe leaving campus after class!

Be visible and walk/ride with friends.

TARC schedules (ride free with UofL ID):

<http://www.ridetarc.org/SearchByRoute.asp>

HSC Campus Shuttle information (ride free with UofL ID):

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Course Description: Recent developments in ethical theory, such as examinations of the status of moral facts; moral realism; impartiality and personal attachments; or moral agency.

Prerequisite: One course in ethics or consent of instructor.

Undergrads: This course fulfills an A&S upper-level Written Communication requirement (WR)

Grads: This course fulfills a **core** requirement in the Bioethics & Medical Humanities MA curriculum.

Texts:

The books are available in the local bookstores. You may also like to try the online used market (www.abebooks.com and Amazon are best, in my experience) or www.chegg.com, an online textbook rental company.

- Hugh **LaFollette**, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory* (Blackwell, 2000-2007).
- Helga **Kuhse**, *Caring: Nurses, Women, and Ethics* (Blackwell, 1997).
- Articles available in full text **online** (instructions or links provided as needed).

Technology:

This course will make significant use of the Blackboard platform, including (inter alia) as a site for links to required readings, and as the site for the class blog, which is required. If you have not used Blackboard previously you should familiarize yourself with it. Also, I will use email to contact you if I need to. I will normally send email **only** to your U of L (netmail, groupwise) account. If you do not usually check that account, you should set it to forward to your preferred account. Also, I have a spam filter on my email account and so if you use email to turn in assignments you should send them **from** your U of L account to ensure that my spam filter doesn't block them.

Disabilities:

The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to

participate in and complete requirements for this class, notify me immediately and contact the Disability Resource Center (Robbins Hall, 852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations.

Purpose & Aims of the Course

This is a course in Ethical Theory, with special attention to the application of ethical theory to the context of health care. Ethical theories are attempts to come to grips with our moral experience in a systematic way. Ethical theories are in this respect not fundamentally different from scientific and social-scientific theories: they aim to systematize, correct, and explain our data, while at the same time being answerable to the data. There are, of course, significant differences in the nature of the data; though just how significant these differences are is itself subject to debate. The crucial point, however, is that ethical theory is a systematic and rigorous endeavor; ethical theories are answerable to critical challenge in just the same way as any theory. Ethical systems that cannot stand up to such challenge are not worthy of our loyalty.

Ethical theory is typically divided into three most-general categories of questions. The **first** is *meta-ethics*, or the study of the nature of morality. Meta-ethical questions have to do with the *metaphysics*, *epistemology*, and *psychology* of ethics. Some of the most significant questions in meta-ethics are:

- What are moral properties? In what sense are they *normative*; and what is normativity?
- What is the relationship between moral properties and natural properties?
- How can we discern moral properties in the world around us, or in ourselves?
- How is morality related to human psychology, including rationality, health, and motivation?
- What is moral responsibility?

The **second** category of problems in ethical theory is *normative* ethics, or the study of general moral theories of how we ought to live. The two most significant questions in normative ethics are:

- The normative question: How ought we to live? What sort of person should I be?
- The prudential question: (Assuming I have answered the normative question,) Why be moral? What is the relationship between moral quality and prudential quality (rational self-interest)?

The **third** category of problems in ethical theory falls under *applied ethics*, or the study of how specific empirical contexts interact with the results of moral theorizing. The two most significant general questions in applied ethics are:

- The practical question: How ought I to behave in such-and-such a situation?
- The theoretic question: (Assuming I have answered the ethical question,) What implications does this have for normative ethical theory, and vice-versa?

This course is designed to introduce you to the field of ethical theory in a systematic and up-to-date way. Because it is co-listed between Philosophy and Bioethics, however, it also has the aim of bringing to bear ethical theory on questions that arise most distinctively in bioethics, and then bringing the latter to bear on the ethical theories. This is the sort of theory-practice interaction where applied ethics has the most to contribute.

The course will offer significant room for independent work. Through papers and other assignments, you will be encouraged to develop your own ideas and/or do independent research on specific problems that you find particularly interesting.

By the conclusion of this course, then, it is intended that you will have nurtured the following skills

(among others):

- Familiarity with a broad range of concepts, theories, and debates in contemporary meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics
- Ability to productively move back and forth between theory and application while working through practical moral problems
- Ability to evaluate claims about value and values in society
- Ability to read complex texts and, in doing so, to identify, comprehend, and evaluate key theses
- Ability to formulate and examine arguments regarding complex and abstract phenomena
- Ability to determine the role and value of abstraction, analogy, marginal cases, and (sometimes bizarre) examples in the development of arguments that apply to concrete phenomena
- Ability to write expository and critical essays

Requirements	521	621
Participation:	10	10
Discussion Leaders	30	30
Paper Draft:	10	15
Midterm exam:	25	n/a
Normative/Applied Paper:	25	n/a
Term Paper:	<u>n/a</u>	<u>45</u>
Total:	100	100

Participation: We only have 13 substantive meetings. I expect you to attend every time. If you cannot attend, please let me know in advance. I will expect a good reason. You are all intelligent adults, but you cannot expect to gain a full understanding of this material in the absence of lecture and discussion with your peers. Therefore I will deduct one point of participation credit for each unexcused absence, up to 5; more than 5 absences will be sufficient for a failing grade. Remaining participation grades will be based on your contribution to discussions and participation in any miscellaneous class activities. **NOTE:** I reserve the right to give pop quizzes if it appears that a critical mass of people is not reading, and these pop quizzes will be part of your participation grade.

Discussion Leaders: Each week we should have several students who have prepared to either **Explicate, Critique, or Defend** paper(s) on the syllabus for that day. (Undergraduates must do each of these functions once; Grads must do each twice.) These tasks involve written work of the following sort: Explicators and Critics should upload to the blog, and be ready to read aloud, a short (+/- 2-page) paper on the relevant reading. These should be up on the blog no later than midnight on the day before the relevant meeting. Defenders should write some prose or perhaps bullet-pointed replies to the critic (or explicator, or imaginary critic) on behalf of the author. Defenses should be up on the blog no later than noon on the relevant day. On your days you should expect to play a major role in the discussion, including potentially starting us off for the day, though you do not technically have to *lead* discussion. I will pass around a sign-up sheet on the first day of class and any day thereafter that is required to get a full complement.

Midterm Exam:* For **undergraduates only**. This is a take-home exam covering Part One of the course. I will distribute the exam and instructions on 2/2; it will be due on 2/9.

Normative/Applied Ethics Paper:* For **undergraduates only**. This paper is in the range of 7-10 pages.

Outside research is optional; more important is what you do with what you have. The paper must articulate and defend a clear, significant philosophical thesis in the range of topics covered in the parts 2-4 of the course. I will hand out paper guidelines and some topic suggestions well in advance. [See also *Paper draft* below.]

*Term paper**: This is a major research paper of **15-20 pages** that takes up a particular issue relevant to the course. You must articulate and evaluate a clear, controversial philosophical thesis. Your topic may, but need not, be something we discuss in-depth during the semester. I will hand out paper guidelines and some topic/reading suggestions early in the semester.

Paper draft: The draft is due 2 weeks before the final paper (undergrads: Normative/Applied paper; grads: term paper) is due, and **you must resubmit the draft with the final paper**. Of the points based on the final, 5 are for improvement from draft to final.

*N.B. Grad students who have not had 3 philosophy classes (3xx or above) before this one may talk to me about doing the midterm and normative/applied paper in place of the term paper. Similarly, undergrads with at least 3 philosophy classes (3xx or above) and a GPA in the major of 3.5 or higher may talk to me about doing the term paper in place of the midterm and normative/applied paper.

Evaluation

This course uses the +/- grading system for both graduates and undergraduates. Letter grades will be assigned based on the following percentages:

“plus”: $n7.5-n9.4$

“flat”: $n2.1-n7.4$

“minus”: $m9.5-n2$ (for $m = n-1$)

Handing in Assignments

Each assignment is due on a specific day; except as indicated in the schedule below, assignments are due by the end of class on the relevant day. Late assignments will be penalized one grade per school day, **starting at 7:16 p.m. of the due date**. I am not flexible on this policy. In general, the only acceptable reason for failure to complete or submit an assignment on time is physical impossibility or a death in the family. Even in these cases, if at all possible you must communicate with me in advance about your situation. In such dire (and rare!) circumstances, lateness will be excused.

You may hand in assignments on paper or by e-mail attachment. If you submit your paper electronically you must use MS Word (.doc or .docx) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) only. If I can't open the document I have not received it. Also, I have a spam filter so **please email me from your U of L account or Blackboard. Also, always cc yourself or at least ensure that mail is copied to your “sent” folder and that you don't delete it until after your grade comes back**. If there is any confusion about whether or when you sent your paper I will assume that my records are right unless you have the original email with the date stamp attached to prove that you did send it. However you choose to hand in your assignments, please minimize the amount of extra paper you use, and avoid any adornments. If you cannot hand in your paper in class, leave it in my office mail box – though assignments remain your responsibility until I have them in my hands or on my computer.

Academic Integrity

According to the University of Louisville's *Code of Student Conduct*, Section 5 (“Academic Dishonesty”), “Academic dishonesty is prohibited at the University of Louisville. It is a serious offense

because it diminishes the quality of scholarship, makes accurate evaluation of student progress impossible, and defrauds those in society who must ultimately depend upon the knowledge and integrity of the institution and its students and faculty.”

It is your responsibility to know this code and comply with its requirements. If I discover violations of this policy I will pursue the required disciplinary channels. If you have any questions about how to comply with this policy, ask me *in advance*.

Schedule of classes and topics

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment/Notes
Part I: Meta-Ethics			
01/12/10	Introduction & Key Concepts	Smith in LaFollette	
01/19/10	Realism & Anti-realism; Naturalism	Smith, continued; Blackburn & Rachels in LaFollette	
01/26/10	Naturalism and Non-naturalism	Rachels, continued; McMahan in LaFollette	Thursday 1/28 is the last day to apply for a degree
02/02/10	Moral Psychology and Moral Luck	Thomas in LaFollette ; Williams and Nagel, “Moral Luck” (online)	Midterm Exam distributed (undergrads only)
Part II: Normative Ethics			
02/09/10	Consequentialism	Frey & Hooker in LaFollette	Midterm Exam due (undergrads only)
02/16/10	Anti-Consequentialism	Kamm & Hill in LaFollette	
02/23/10	Contractarianism & Contractualism	Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism” (online); Sayre-McCord in LaFollette	Wed 2/24 is the last day to withdraw
03/02/10	Virtue Ethics	Slote in LaFollette ; Baker article (handout)	
Part III: Nurses, Women, and Ethics			
03/09/10	Feminist Ethics	Kuhse , chaps. 5-6; Jaggar in LaFollette	
03/16/10	Spring	Break	No Class
03/23/10	Nursing: history and institutional structure	Kuhse, chaps. 1-3 & 7	

03/30/10	A moral theory of just nursing	Kuhse, 8-9	
Part IV: Cognitive Disability as a Challenge to Ethics*			
04/06/10	Justice, Contract, Capabilities	Nussbaum, Bérubé, Stark, and Singer, online	Paper drafts due
04/13/10	Agency and Moral Responsibility	Jennings, Shoemaker, and Silvers & Francis, online	
04/20/10	Personhood; Conclusions	Carlson, McMahan, and Kittay, online	Normative/Applied papers due (undergrads only)
Tues., April 27, 8:00PM			Term papers due (grads only)

*The essays in this part of the course can all be found online in the July 2009 issue of *Metaphilosophy* (<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com.echo.louisville.edu/journal/122603154/issue>). If this link fails, use the library's online "journal finder" tool, search for *Metaphilosophy*, and click through to the Wiley-Blackwell site (NOT the Ebscohost site, which is embargoed for a year after publication).