

# Proposed Syllabus

## Contemporary Normative Ethics

Instructor: Christa Johnson

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Office: King 120A

Office Hours: Wednesday 3:00p – 4:00p, Thursday 12:00p – 1:00p or by appointment

### Required Text:

There is **no required text**. Readings will be posted on Blackboard.

### Course Description

The field of Normative Ethics is primarily concerned with right action. In introductory ethics courses, you learn that some hold that agents ought to always maximize the good, while others defend the view that certain acts are impermissible, regardless of the good that might be done. In this course, students will be introduced to contemporary defenses, objections, and versions of these and other normative ethical views. Such views include sophisticated consequentialist views, pluralist deontological views, agent-based virtue theory, feminist ethics, contractualism, and particularism, among others. After considering the nuances and challenges of developing a theory of right action, the course will conclude by considering a number of related issues, including moral emotions, moral worth, moral luck, and moral sainthood.

### Classroom Expectations and Attendance Policy

Everyone is expected to come to class. For each unexcused absence exceeding two prior to fall break and/or two following fall break students will receive a 5% deduction on their final grade. Students are required to have done the readings, and they should be prepared to discuss them. There will on occasion be passionate disagreement—it is vital that we remain courteous to each other and to each other's point of view. It is possible to criticize arguments without showing disrespect for the people who endorse them—that is what we will strive to do. Electronic devices are permitted for note-taking purposes only.

### Late and Make-Up Work

No make-ups or extensions will be granted for any assignment unless you provide either (1) written (and approved) notice of absence beforehand, or (2) written documentation of an emergency situation afterward.

### Academic Misconduct

This course will be governed by Oberlin's Honor Code. All cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Student Honor Committee. For further information about the Honor Code, see <http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/honor-system-charter>.

### Disabilities

Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me as soon as possible. I rely on the Office of Disability Services to verify the need for accommodation based on documentation on file in that office.

## Assignments and Evaluation

### Citizenship (10%)

Philosophy is an activity. Like many activities, you'll only get as much out of doing philosophy as you put into it. To encourage engagement, 10% of your grade will depend in part on your being an active, appropriate, and interesting contributor to the class. I understand that speaking up in class is difficult for some students. To that end, this grade encompasses more than hand-raising. I primarily ask that all students are good citizens of the course. Thus, students who are present, clearly attentive, and who show engagement in other ways will also be rewarded.

### 60 seconders (15%)

For every class meeting, I will ask two of you to prepare and present a 60-second point on a specific reading.

#### Summary Points:

One student will be assigned a summary point. Here, I am looking for the student to remind the class of the main thesis of the article and perhaps a quick outline of the author's argument for her point. **DO NOT CRITICIZE.** It is important for philosophers to be able to present an argument from a neutral position. This is what I hope the summary points will accomplish in addition to reminding the class of the main points from the articles we have all read.

#### Critical Points:

The other student will be assigned a critical point. The idea is to tell us where you think the author's argument is vulnerable or underargued. **DO NOT SUMMARIZE** – we will have already heard the summary point. Instead I want you to launch directly into telling us where you think the author's argument is inadequate. Alternatively, you can do a 60-second supporting point: in this case, you should provide an argument for the author's conclusion that is different from what the author herself or himself offers. The idea here is to present additional support for some conclusion that the author didn't mention or develop. 60 seconds is a short time. In preparing for this, you will likely come up with more than one critical or supporting point. Pick one that you can articulate clearly and concisely. There will be time in the rest of class to bring up other points.

### Take home essays (20%)

Students are to write a total of four short essays (1-2 pages typed, double-spaced) throughout the term. These essays will each take the form of summarizing and discussing an argument or point made in class or a reading. Students may only write one essay per topic. Essays written for a given topic are to be uploaded onto Blackboard by the beginning of the second class of the next topic.

### Papers (50%)

Students will write two papers over the course of the semester, a midterm paper of 4-5 pages and a final paper of 5-6 pages. I will provide possible paper topics at least three weeks prior to the due dates of the papers. Students are permitted to write a paper based on another topic provided they meet with me to discuss their topic.

## Schedule of Topics/Readings:

### Week 1: Ethics 101

- The Structure of Normative Ethics, *Shelly Kagan*

### Weeks 2-5: Consequentialism

- Varieties
  - o Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism, *J.J.C. Smart*
  - o Inconsistency and the theoretical commitments of Hooker's rule-consequentialism, *Robert F. Card*
  - o Rule-consequentialism and internal consistency: A reply to Card, *Brad Hooker*
  - o Satisficing Consequentialism, *Michael Slote*
  - o Scalar Consequentialism the Right Way, *Neil Sinhababu*
  - o Combining teleological ethics with evaluator relativism: A promising result, *Douglas Portmore*
- Challenges
  - o Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality, *Peter Railton*
  - o Why it is wrong to be always guided by the best: Consequentialism and friendship, *Neera Badhwar Kapur*
  - o Consequentialism and feminist ethics, *Julia Driver*

### Weeks 5-8: Deontology

- Varieties and Doctrines
  - o Deontology, *David McNaughton and Piers Rawling*
  - o Patient Relativity in Morality, *Matthew Hammerton*
  - o Thresholds for Rights, *Samantha Brennan*
  - o Can Deontologists be Moderate?, *Saul Smilansky*
  - o Killing and Letting Die, *Philippa Foot*
  - o The Trolley Problem, *J.J. Thomson*
- Challenges
  - o Non-consequentialism, the Person as an End-in-itself, and the Significance of Status, *F.M. Kamm*
  - o The Paradox of Deontology, Revisited, *Ulrike Heuer*
  - o In Defense of Consequentializing, *James Dreier*
  - o The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul, *Joshua Greene*

**Weeks 9-11: Virtue Theory**

- Varieties
  - What's Aristotelian about neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics?, *Sukaina Hirji*
  - Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics, *David Copp and David Sobel*
- Challenges
  - Qualified agent and agent-based virtue ethics and the problems of right action, *Jason Kawall*
  - Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics, *John Doris*
  - Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character, *Rachana Kamtekar*

**Weeks 11-13: Alternate Views**

- Recent work in feminist ethics, *Samantha Brennan*
- Précis of "What We Owe to Each Other", *T.M. Scanlon*
- Owing, Justifying, and Rejecting, *F.M. Kamm*
- Rag-bags, Disputes and Moral Pluralism, *Berys Gaut*
- Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties, *Jonathan Dancy*

**Weeks 14-15: Bonus Topics**

- Moral Worth, *Nomy Arpaly*
- Moral Luck, *Bernard Williams*
- Moral Saints, *Susan Wolf*
- Freedom and Resentment, *P.F. Strawson*