

## Philosophy 3G03E: Ethics

September-December 2009

Instructor: Dr. D. L. Hitchcock

Lectures: Tuesdays 19:00 to 20:50, Arthur Bourns Building (ABB) 163

Optional tutorials: Tuesdays 21:00 to 21:50, ABB 163

Instructor's office hours: Wed 14:00 to 15:00, or by appointment, in University Hall (UH) 304

Instructor's e-mail address: hitchckd@mcmaster.ca

Course Web site: ELM

Teaching assistant: Ben Hamby

TA's e-mail address: hambyb@mcmaster.ca

TA's office hours: Tues 18:00 to 18:50, or by appointment, in UH B106A

This course is "an introduction to the major types of ethical theory and the problem of their justification" (Undergraduate Calendar description). We will consider the two currently most influential ethical theories, as well as a contemporary ethical theory that includes a critique of them:

- 1) Immanuel Kant's apparently deontological theory, articulated in the various formulations of his "categorical imperative" and justified by an appeal to the autonomy of a rational agent
- 2) John Stuart Mill's consequentialist theory of utilitarianism, expressed by his "principle of utility" and justified by the claim that all human beings ultimately desire only happiness
- 3) Bernard Gert's mixed theory of "common morality", consisting of 10 defeasible moral rules, a set of moral ideals, and a two-step procedure for justifying violations of the moral rules; and justified as a system that, given certain conditions, it is rationally required for all moral agents to endorse

**Objectives:** On completion of the course, you should be able to:

- 1) describe, apply and discuss critically the ethical theories of Kant, Mill and Gert. (You will be asked to do this in the reflective summaries, in class discussions, and on the final exam.)
- 2) work out and defend a reasonable position on an issue in ethical theory. (You will be asked to do this in an essay.)

**Texts** (referred to under "Schedule of topics, readings and due dates" by the underlined name)

Kant, Immanuel. 2002. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited and translated by Allen W. Wood. Yale University Press, New Haven and London. (First published in 1785.)

Mill, John Stuart. 2001. *Utilitarianism, and the 1868 Speech on Capital Punishment*, second edition. Hackett, Indianapolis. (*Utilitarianism* was first published in 1861.)

Gert, Bernard. 2004. *Common Morality: Deciding What to Do*. Oxford University Press, New York.

### Required work

Attendance in class (**Attendance is required for credit in the course. You may miss at most one class without justification or excuse.**)

Reflections 30%\*†

Essay proposal 5%\*†

Essay 30%\*†

Final exam 35%\*

Your total mark out of 100 will be converted to a final letter grade using the scale in the Undergraduate Calendar. I will not "curve" or otherwise adjust grades. For details on what is required, see the following sections entitled "Attendance", "Reflections", "Essay proposal", "Essay" and "Final exam".

\*The percentage weightings are subject to the condition that **the final letter grade will be F if you miss more than one class in this course without justification or excuse.**

†Marks will be awarded for the reflections, essay proposal and essay only if you take them back after they have been marked. **Any marked work that remains in my hands at the time of the final exam will get no credit.**

**Tentative schedule of topics, readings and due dates:** The following tentative schedule of topics, readings and due dates is subject to change in the light of our experience. I will announce any such changes in class, in advance of their taking effect. You are responsible for learning about any such announced changes.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic/ Work due /Reading</b>
Sep. 15	Introduction; Kant: transition to moral philosophy: <u>Kant 1-21 (Ak 4:385-405)</u>
<b>Sep. 20</b>	<b>Reflection 1:</b> <u>Kant 22-42 (Ak 4:406-424)</u>
Sep. 22	Kant: transition to the metaphysics of morals (first part)
<b>Sep. 27</b>	<b>Reflection 2:</b> <u>Kant 42-62 (Ak 4:425-445)</u>
Sep. 29	Kant: transition to the metaphysics of morals (second part)
<b>Oct. 4</b>	<b>Reflection 3:</b> <u>Kant 63-79 (Ak 4:446-463)</u>
<b>Oct. 6</b>	<b>essay proposal</b> due (to be submitted in class)
Oct. 6	Kant: transition to the critique of pure practical reason:
<b>Oct. 11</b>	<b>Reflection 4:</b> <u>Mill 1-26 (Chapters I &amp; II)</u>
Oct. 13	Mill: general remarks, utilitarianism
<b>Oct. 18</b>	<b>Reflection 5:</b> <u>Mill 27-41 (Chapters III, IV)</u>
Oct. 20	Mill: sanction and proof of the principle of utility
<b>Oct. 25</b>	<b>Reflection 6:</b> <u>Mill 42-64 (Chapter V)</u>
<b>Oct. 27</b>	<b>default due date for your essay</b> (to be submitted in class)
Oct. 27	Mill: justice and utility
<b>Nov. 1</b>	<b>Reflection 7:</b> <u>Gert: 3-55</u>
Nov. 3	Gert: introduction, the moral rules
<b>Nov. 8</b>	<b>Reflection 8:</b> <u>Gert: 55-79</u>
Nov. 10	Gert: justifying violations of the moral rules
<b>Nov. 15</b>	<b>Reflection 9:</b> <u>Gert 81-116</u>
Nov. 17	Gert: morality and rationality
<b>Nov. 22</b>	<b>Reflection 10:</b> <u>Gert 116-149</u>
Nov. 24	Gert: morality and impartiality
<b>Dec. 1</b>	<b>last date for</b> (optional) submission of <b>revised essay</b> (in class)
Dec. 1	review
<b>December</b>	<b>Final exam</b> (scheduled by the registrar)

**Attendance:** Attendance in class is required. You may miss at most one class without justification or excuse. Your attendance record will be calculated from the first day that you show up in class; that is, classes missed at the beginning of term before you joined the course will not count against you. Missing a class for a legitimate medical or compassionate reason will also not count against you; I reserve the right to request documentation if you claim such a reason.

**Reflections:** You are to submit a reflection on the assigned reading for the upcoming class on each date indicated above under "Tentative schedule of topics, readings and due dates". You should submit your reflection to me by midnight on the due date, as an e-mail attachment, preferably in pdf (but any version of Word or WordPerfect is OK), with your name included in the reflection. To help me in storing your submissions, please use as the title of your file your family name followed by a space followed by the number of the reflection, e.g. "Hitchcock 1". Your reflection should be at most 750 words long, and preferably back-printable on one sheet of paper.

In your reflection you should motivate, articulate and discuss an issue of interpretation, comparison or evaluation raised by the assigned reading. The motivation of your issue should include a summary of the relevant parts of the assigned reading, which you should label as such and support with references to specific pages in the assigned reading. (For Kant, use the pagination of the Berlin Academy edition, as is given in the margin of our text and is general in Kantian scholarship. For Mill and Gert, use the page numbers of our texts.) For an example of what is required, see my sample reflection on ELM in the “reflective summaries” folder concerning the assigned reading for our first class (Kant 1-21 = Ak 4:385-405). As practice, you could try writing your own reflection on this reading before looking at my example. (Don’t worry if the posted sample reflection seems to be at a level beyond what you can produce. Do your best. I plan to post some of your reflective summaries once I get them, as more realistic models.) My posted sample reflection raises and discusses an issue of interpretation, but lists at the end some other issues raised by the reading, to give you a sense of the range of possible issues that you can raise and discuss.

The summary section of your reflection will be evaluated according to five criteria:

- Accuracy (you get it right)
- Clarity (your reader understands what you mean the first time your sentence is read)
- Completeness (you include all the claims and arguments relevant to your issue)
- Salience (you include only important or relevant points)
- Coherence (the parts of your summary hang together and make sense as a whole)

Of these criteria, salience is probably the most difficult to meet. You do not need to summarize every paragraph (or even every section) of a reading. You need to include only the points relevant to your issue. You can if you like summarize other very important points. Do not include minor details that are irrelevant to your issue. (The summary in the sample reflection is more complete than necessary for the issue discussed, but it sticks to what is important.) It is usually a good idea to read the assigned reading through before you start writing. This will give you a better sense of which points are relevant to your issue, which points are important, and which points are irrelevant minor details that you should omit.

The reflective section of the assignment will be evaluated according to two main criteria:

- The significance of the issue raised
- The insightfulness of your response to the issue

Responding to an issue goes beyond just raising it, but does not necessarily mean resolving it completely. We will be looking for evidence that you have honestly grappled with the problem. It is also important to be fair. If you level a criticism against the work you are discussing, you might want to speculate how someone could respond to that criticism. You will not lose marks just because, in the end, you conclude that the author is able to successfully respond to your criticism.

You will get one point for each reflection that you submit. Some of your reflections will be marked out of 20 and returned to you with comments. Your total mark for the reflections will be the sum of your total points (out of 10) for submitting the reflections and your average mark (out of 20) on the ones that are marked. (If you have legitimate medical or compassionate reasons for non-submission of one or more reflections, you will be given the point for submitting the reflection.) Note that, if you miss a reflection without a legitimate excuse and you are one of those whose reflection is to be marked that week, you will get a mark of 0 out of 20 for that reflection, which will count towards your average mark out of 20.

**Essay proposal:** In your essay, you should work out and defend a position on an issue of interpretation, comparison, critical appraisal or substance in theoretical ethics. The issue must have been discussed thematically in the scholarly literature in philosophy in the last 25 years. By an issue I mean a question to which the answer is not obvious. An issue of interpretation is a question about how to interpret some philosophical text; for example, does Kant really hold, as he seems to at the beginning of the *Groundwork*, that an action has no moral worth if one has an inclination to do it? (Marcia Baron discusses this issue in her essay "Acting from duty" in our textbook.) An issue of comparison is a question about the similarities and differences between two or more thinkers on some question; for example, what difference does it make to their versions of utilitarianism that Jeremy Bentham recognizes only quantitative differences among pleasures whereas John Stuart Mill recognizes also qualitative differences? An issue of critical appraisal is a question about how good a certain position or argument is; for example, does Gert's conception of common morality adequately accommodate the common opinion that cruelty to animals is morally wrong? An issue of substance is a theoretical question in ethics; for example, is morality culturally relative?

Your proposal for your essay is due in class on October 6. It should consist of (a) a paragraph or two of background explaining why your issue is worth investigating, (b) formulation of your issue as a question, and (c) a preliminary bibliography that includes at least two references to work published in the last 25 years in which your issue is discussed thematically. Sample proposals, submitted by students in last year's class, are posted on ELM, as are tips for finding an issue to write about.

You may write your essay on any issue in theoretical ethics, whether or not it is discussed in our assigned texts, provided that there has been thematic discussion of the issue in the scholarly literature in philosophy in the last 25 years. (You can look for issues under discussion by consulting such sources as *The Philosopher's Index* or *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or by browsing in the BJ sections of the periodicals and books in Mills Library.) You may **not** write on an issue in applied ethics; for example, we will not accept proposals to write essays on the morality of abortion, euthanasia, suicide, capital punishment, or similar specific moral issues.

One of us will work with you to refine your essay proposal until it is acceptable. Your proposal will get a preliminary mark out of 5, but the mark will go up if you improve your proposal; the mark that counts will be the mark given to the latest version of your proposal that is submitted on or before October 20.

**Essay:** Your essay should be at most 2,000 words long, except with special permission to exceed this limit. It should be printed, on one side only, double spaced, with wide margins on all sides, a separate title page, and scholarly documentation of sources using a standard style guide (e.g. American Psychological Association, Chicago Manual of Style). As a reader, I prefer an author-date system of referencing with citations embedded in the text, a minimum of discursive footnotes (not end notes), and at the end a list of works cited.

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. You are expected to submit your essay electronically to Turnitin.com so that it can be checked automatically for plagiarism. For this purpose, the class ID number is 2771474, the class name is "Ethics", and the password is "morality". No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. However, if you decide not to submit your essay to Turnitin.com, your essay will not be marked until you notify me in writing of this decision. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com

Policy, go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity) .

Whether or not you submit your work to Turnitin.com, you must submit a hard copy in class, to the person who marked your proposal. You should attach to your essay (at the back) the latest submitted version of your essay proposal, with the marker's comments on it.

Your essay will be graded on the basis of a global impression of its quality. Among the factors that impress us are:

- how interestingly and clearly you present your issue
- how carefully and accurately you develop your position
- the extent to which you use primary sources (rather than secondary sources) to support basic claims about what an ethical theorist like Kant or Mill or Gert says or thinks
- how judiciously you choose and use secondary sources
- how much the essay reflects your own thinking
- how significant and insightful your position is
- how clearly and coherently you write
- how convincing a case you make for your position
- how correctly you spell, punctuate, and compose sentences and paragraphs

You will get back your essay with a grade, a rating on the above-mentioned factors, a list of five positive features, and a list of two areas for improvement. You can get more comments on request. If you wish to rewrite your essay to get a better grade, you must tell your marker when you will submit the revised essay. Your marker will gladly give you suggestions for improvement; please ask. Submit your revised essay to the same marker, along with the original essay with comments and your essay proposal with comments.

**Final exam:** There will be a two-hour final exam, scheduled by the registrar's office, during the December exam period. It will ask descriptive, interpretive and critical questions about the ethical theories of Kant, Mill and Gert as stated in our three texts. You will be allowed to use as an aid a single sheet of paper (8.5 by 11 inches) with writing or printing on both sides.

**Opportunities for discussion, study aids:** I encourage you to raise questions in class, and expect to have some in-class discussion. The optional tutorial will provide more opportunity for discussion. I will post to the course site on ELM this course outline, a sample reflection, and sample essay proposals. I also expect to post on ELM lecture outlines (not complete notes), to help you follow or review what I say in class. If you want additional helps, please ask.

**E-mail communication:** "It is the policy of the Faculty of Humanities that all e-mail correspondence sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. Instructors will delete e-mails that do not originate from a McMaster account."

**Reserve reading:** The textbooks for the course are on reserve in Mills Memorial Library, as well as two anthologies of articles that may help you to select an essay topic:

Cahn, Steven M., and Peter Markie. 2006. *Ethics: History, Theory and Contemporary Issues*, 3rd edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Moser, Paul K., and Thomas L. Carson. 2001. *Moral Relativism: A Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.

I will put other books on reserve on request.

**Deadlines:** The policies on deadlines for the required work are as follows:

Reflections must be submitted by e-mail by the date when they are due--no extensions.

Essay proposals lose 1 point (out of 5) for each day that they are late. (If you do not submit the proposal in class on September 29, you may submit it later as an e-mail attachment.)

Essays: You can renegotiate your date for essay submission at any time before the due date of October 27, with no penalty and no reason required. You can renegotiate the revised date before it arrives, again with no penalty and no reason required. And so on. The last possible date for submission of your essay is December 1 in class, the last class of term. Further, if you hand the essay in after October 27, you lose the right to submit a revised essay. If you submit your essay after an agreed date without having renegotiated it beforehand, you will get zero (0) for the essay.

Revised essays: You can renegotiate your date for submission of a revised essay on the terms described in the preceding paragraph.

Final exam: To arrange for rescheduling or deferring your final exam, see the office of your dean of studies, providing documentation of medical or compassionate circumstances.

**Medical and compassionate circumstances:** If you have legitimate medical or compassionate reasons for not submitting a reflection, I will excuse you from doing so. Similarly, for legitimate medical or compassionate reasons, I will extend without penalty the deadline for submitting your essay proposal, original essay or revised essay. I reserve the right to require documentation.

**Changes:** The university and I reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes if at all possible. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course Web sites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

**Official university statement on academic integrity:** "You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

"Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. [Wherever an offence depends on "knowingly", the offence is deemed to have been committed if the person ought reasonably to have known.-DH] This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: 'Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty'), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

"It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <<http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>>.

"The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations."

**Teaching evaluation:** You will have an opportunity to complete an evaluation of my teaching of this course at the end of the term.