Philosophy 17A: Introduction to Ethics

Philosophy 17A is designed to introduce students to some of the most interesting arguments now being made in both moral philosophy and practical ethics. The first part of the course explores the theories of value put forward by utilitarians, deontologists, proponents of virtue ethics, intuitionists, and moral relativists. The second part of the course uses these theories to explore a host of more practical normative controversies that arise in private and public life, including controversies about abortion, euthanasia, free speech, pornography, sexual and racial discrimination, the right to private property, distributive justice, world hunger, and environmental justice.

Course Requirements: two 6-8 page papers and a final exam. Class attendance is mandatory. Participation in class discussion is greatly encouraged.

Final Exam Date/Time: TBA

Course Materials: The following two books will be used extensively. They can be purchased at the Brandeis University Bookstore:

J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism.*
J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*
Hugh LaFollette, ed., *Ethics in Practice.*

Coursepack: The readings not included in the above volumes can be found in a coursepack (CP) that you can purchase from me at cost in class.

**ATTENTION:** If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately either after class or during my office hours.
NOTE: Class discussions will be focused on assigned readings as scheduled below. Hence, it is important that you read the following selections by the date cited.

Sept. 7: Introduction to Course.


Sept. 14: J. S. Mill, Chapters 2 and 4 of Utilitarianism.

Sept. 19: J. S. Mill, Ch. 5 of Utilitarianism.

J. J. C. Smart, Utilitarianism: For and Against, pp. 9-12; 42-53; 67-73.

Sept. 21: Bernard Williams, “Critique of Utilitarianism”, in Utilitarianism: For and Against, pp. 82-100; last paragraph of p.115-117.


Oct. 3: Kant, “Free Will” (CP).

Thomas Hill, “Kantianism” (CP).

Oct. 5: W.D. Ross, “Criticism of Kant” (CP).

Oct. 10: Marcus Singer, “Generalization in Ethics” (CP).


Rosalind Hursthouse, “Applying Virtue Ethics” (CP).


William Shaw, “Relativism in Ethics” (CP).

Richard Brandt, “Disagreement and Relativism in Ethics” (CP).

Oct. 26: First Papers Due (no class) [extra office hours this week]


Nov. 2: Don Marquis, “An Argument that Abortion is Wrong”, Ethics in Practice.

Margaret Olivia Little, “The Moral Permissibility of Abortion, Ethics in Practice.

Nov. 7: Brad Hooker, “Rule-Utilitarianism and Euthanasia,” Ethics in Practice.

David Vellman, “Against the Right to Die”, Ethics in Practice.

Nov. 9: Tom Beauchamp, “Justifying Physician Assisted Suicide”, Ethics in Practice.


Robert Goodin, “Saving Smokers From Themselves” (CP).
Nov. 16: James Q. Wilson, “Against the Legalization of Drugs”, *Ethics in Practice*.

Douglass Husak, “Why We Should Decriminalize Drug Use”, *Ethics in Practice*.


Susan Brison, “Pornography and Harm”, *Ethics in Practice*.


John Archer, “Sticks and Stones,” *Ethics in Practice*.

Nov. 23: Andrew Altman, “Speech Codes and Expressive Harm”, *Ethics in Practice*.

Michele Moody-Adams, “Racism”, *Ethics in Practice*.

Thomas Hill, “Servility and Self-Respect”, *Ethics in Practice*.

Nov. 28: Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, *Ethics in Practice*.

Nov. 30: John Arthur, “Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code”, *Ethics in Practice*.

Holmes Rolston, “Feeding People versus Saving Nature”, *Ethics in Practice*.

Dec. 5: Thomas Hill, “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments”, *Ethics in Practice*.


Dec. 7: Conclusions. Second Paper Due.