Course description: A few years ago, the New York Times conducted a survey aimed at finding out what its readers’ views were on ethical issues. Respondents were asked whether various practices were (1) always wrong, (2) usually wrong, (3) morally indeterminate or neutral, (4) usually right, or (5) always right; and a wide range of issues was addressed: abortion, almsgiving, racism, life-saving, dog-fighting, cutting in line, torture, and many others. As one would expect, the results of the survey were varied, but the one practice that Americans most consistently agreed is always wrong is cutting in line. Philosophers—no less than readers of the NYT—disagree about what practices are ethical, so this course makes no attempt to tell you what you ought to believe or ought to do in concrete moral dilemmas. Rather, we will make it our goal to explore several historically important moral theories that are in many ways incompatible with one another. For someone genuinely interested in what it means to be a good person, careful and critical study of the disagreements among philosophers can be more informative, instructive, and intriguing than imbibing anyone’s doctrine.

Required texts:

- Anthony Weston, A Rulebook for Arguments, 2nd edn., Hackett 1992
- Plato, Protagoras, tr. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell, Hackett 1992
- Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, tr. Terence Irwin, Hackett 1985
- Immanuel Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, 3rd edn., Hackett 1993
- John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, ed. G. Sher, Hackett 1979

Schedule of readings—3 hours per class:

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: Introduction to the course and to Plato; ethics “exercise”
Mon. 25 Jan.: Plato’s Protagoras.
Mon. 1 Feb.: Plato paper due. Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics I.
Mon. 8 Feb.: Nicomachean Ethics II and III (to 1115a7).
Mon. 15 Feb.: Nicomachean Ethics VI, VII (to 1147b19), and X.
Mon. 22 Feb.: Aristotle paper due. Background: where ethics went between Aristotle and Kant, and an introduction to Kant’s difficult terminology and method.
Mon. 1 March: Kant’s Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, Preface and First Section.

SPRING BREAK

The Ides of March: Kant’s Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, Second and Third Sections.
Mon. 22 March: Conclusion of Kant, and introduction to Mill.
Mon. 29 March: Mill’s Utilitarianism, chs. 1–2.
Mon. 5 April: Mill’s Utilitarianism, chs. 3–4.
Mon. 12 April:  **Kant-Mill paper due.** *High Noon,* Mill’s *Utilitarianism,* ch. 5.

Mon. 19 April: Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals.*

Mon. 26 April: Return of the ethics “exercise,” **Nietzsche research paper outline due;** where ethics went after Nietzsche.

Mon. 3 May: **FINAL EXAM**

**Evaluation:** Your grade in the course will have the following components:

- 1/3 daily grades (homework and participation)
- 1/3 4 major assignments
- 1/3 final exam (questions distributed in advance)

**Grades:** Grades are given to papers (not students). I recognize that the paper you submit may not be an example of your best work; it may be a poor indication of how hard you worked or how much you understand. Assignments in philosophy vary, and criteria for grades vary accordingly, but the following guidelines will cover most cases that affect you in this course in which you’ll be writing arguments. A grade of 70–79% shows an adequate critical grasp of the assigned author’s position, and no major lapses in organization, argument or focus. An 80–89% paper demonstrates intelligent organization, a systematic understanding of issues in light of their relative significance, and the ability to present those issues critically in argument form. A 90–100% paper has all the characteristics of an 80–89% paper but also reveals the ability to apply concepts in novel circumstances, to extrapolate, to apply understanding in insightful or creative ways. A grade of 60–69% reflects inadequate critical appreciation of, and/or misconceptions about, the author’s position; and/or weakness of argument, organization and/or focus. An failing paper indicates failure to demonstrate any philosophical work has been accomplished—either one merely states personal beliefs without providing arguments for them, or merely accepts or rejects someone else’s arguments uncritically on the basis of common sense or conscience; it may also indicate failure to grasp the assigned author’s position. A grade of 0 means nothing was submitted.

**Policies:**

1. Students are expected to read each work listed on the syllabus before we meet to discuss it.
2. Assignments must be word-processed and free of spelling and grammatical errors: spelling and grammar count. It is always a good idea (a) to discuss the topic with anyone who is willing to listen and give you feedback, and (b) to ask someone to read a draft for clarity and correctness. For your own protection, always make a copy of your assignments.
3. Let me know in advance if you won’t be able to meet (I have no other reason to be on campus Monday nights).