Précis of the Seminar: This course is a graduate-level introduction to the leading contemporary theories in normative ethics – utilitarianism, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, and Kantian deontological theories – including case studies (in political ethics and bioethics) that clarify their main implications. We will also discuss some recent “meta-normative” theories about the basis of moral obligations. For example, some accounts ground ethical norms in the nature of personal agency, autonomy, and/or requirements of happiness (constitutivism), whereas others focus on social practices (contractarian and constructivist theories), or even the nature of love. A central goal of the course is to give students a broad sense of the landscape of moral theory today and how the main normative positions connect with issues in related areas of ethics, such as value theory (realism, expressivism) and the relation between norms/practical reasons and motivation (internalism, externalism). But our focus will be on the shape and foundation of the different systems of moral norms, rather than on metaethical problems that lie in the background of these theories (such as the nature of our motives, or the kind of freedom necessary for responsibility). Thus the course provides a basis for further work in normative ethics and metaethics. We will not focus in detail on the historical development of twentieth-century moral philosophy (e.g. Moore and emotivism), which is treated in a 6000-level course. Similarly, Natural Law ethics and topics in contemporary continental ethics (e.g. Levinas) are foci of other graduate seminars. Accordingly, our readings come from contemporary analytic philosophy. However, I will suggest relevant connections with other traditions as we progress, and we will consider Habermas’s discourse ethics (although not his political philosophy).

This course does not assume much background other than a passing familiarity with the history of modern philosophy. We will briefly review the central tenets of Kant’s and Mill’s work as an introduction to our themes, and then concentrate on key primary readings in contemporary normative ethical theory, with the help of some secondary articles that help explain these works and place them in context. As a 5000-level seminar, this course is designed to serve MA students of widely varying levels of prior preparation. Students with less preparation need only concentrate on gaining a solid understanding of the different theoretical approaches, while students with more background will be able to take on more advanced questions in the final paper with my guidance. Some of our readings will be ones that you can use later in life with your own students if you are involved in teaching.

The course has six main units:
1. An overview of contemporary normative ethics and related areas of moral philosophy, including questions about the meaning of "moral obligation."
2. The problem of moral relativism and basic value theory (with a little intro to topics in metaethics).
3. Utilitarianism and its problems, in connection with elementary game theory (collective action)
4. Deontological Ethics, including Neo-Kantian Constitutivism
5. Virtue Ethics and Character
6. Two Applications: duties to the poor and medical euthanasia (in last stages of terminal illness).
We may vary the applied units depending on student interest: other possible topics include human cloning, immigration rights, democratic rights, environmental values, and other public goods.

Assignments:
11% Class participation: includes attendance and active listening, and being prepared and able to ask informed questions. I do not expect you to understand the readings before discussion.
28% 2 short essays (3-4 pages) with a choice between particular questions on the readings.
19%: 1 take-home test due in early April with multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions on the readings.
19% 1 oral report on a given reading for the day (with 3-page written summary and questions).
23% 1 final paper (roughly 10-12 pages) on a topic of the student's choice, directly related to our readings but possibly bringing in other sources. (Depending on the student's level of preparation, this can be a critical review of two or more course readings, or an essay focusing on our applications, or other applied topics in bioethics, political life, etc. More advanced theoretical topics are also possible).

Texts (required):

All other courses readings on Ares and sent by email. However, you may wish to purchase:
   – because this is only in hardback I suggest purchasing used copies for under $20 on Amazon.

Tentative Schedule

1. The structure and function of moral theories.
2. Handouts on the different topics within philosophical ethics and related subjects.

1/28: Normative Theory, Disagreement, and the Challenge of Relativism
1. Robert Kane, *Ethics and the Quest for Wisdom*, chs. 1-4 on agency and the moral sphere.
2. The Platonic/Enlightenment principle: might alone never makes right, and sources of agency.
3. Introduction to value theory, and different forms of (allegedly) objective value.
4. Begin James Griffin, *Value Judgment*, ch.2: “The Good Life” (w. part of ch.1 on method) [Ares]

2/4: Value Judgment and Realism/Anti-Realism debates
2. Joel Kupperman, *Value...And What Follows*, chs.1-2 & 5 on values, emotions, real status.
3. Kane, *Ethics and the Quest for Wisdom*, chs. 5-6 on values.
2/11: Altruism and the Sociobiological Approach to Explaining Ethical Norms & Ideals
3. Introduction to Basic Game Theory; forms of collective action problems (CAPs).
4. Further Background if you want to know more about CAPs: Todd Sandler, *Global Challenges* ch.2 on collective action problems and public goods (Ares), or more advanced texts by Sandler.

2/18: Utilitarianism: A Moral Theory founded on altruism and alternative value-conceptions
2. Handout on forms of utilitarianism (discussion of test cases).
3. Singer-style direct utilitarian arguments for redistribution (handout).
6. First short paper due.

2/25: Deontological Theories (Kantian, Rossian) and the importance of individual agency
1. Kane, *Ethics and the Quest for Wisdom*, ch.15 on Deontology (Ross, Kant).
2. Historical background: Enlightenment arguments against slavery and monarchy (handout).
6. Discussion: two aspects of Kant’s principle (CAPs and the inviolable value of agency).
7. Discussion: distinctive features of deontological accounts of the Right as ‘prior’ to the Good.

3/3: Application I: Aid to the Needy on Kantian vs Utilitarian bases
3. Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, chs.1-3 on duties to aid the needy.
5. Discussion: which is the more convincing approach (do we need an Aristotelian alternative)?

3/10: Ideal Contractualism and Korsgaard’s ‘Constitutivism:’ Two Neo-Kantian Theories
2. Korsgaard's “The Authority of Reflection” in *The Sources of Normativity*, Lecture.3 (eres)
4. Discussion: is this an adequate basis for fundamental human rights?
5. Second short paper due.


3/31: Habermas’s Discourse Ethics and norms implicit in cooperative truth-seeking
2. Secondary reading: Habermas, *Justification and Application*, “Remarks on Discourse Ethics,” sections 7-12 in response to critics (esp. neo-Aristotelians such as Taylor and MacIntyre).
3. Discussion: do we need to add substantive nonmoral values/goods to this approach?

4/7: Application II: Euthanasia
1. Dworkin et al., *The Philosopher’s Brief* (amicus curie brief in favor of a right to die) [Ares]
2. Appellate Court decision by Judge Noonan (appellate court) and Handouts (Ares).

**4/14: Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics**
2. Kane, *Ethics and the Quest for Wisdom*, chs. 7-8 on practices and virtue ethics.
4. Take-home test due on **Thursday April 14**.

**4/21: Virtue, Justice, and Agapic Love Ethics**
1. Slote continued (if necessary)
2. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, chs. 7-8 on Vulnerability and becoming Independent Practical Reasoners.

**4/28: Agapic Ethics in the Divine Command Tradition**

**5/5: Final Meeting in lieu of exam**
1. Final Paper due
2. Any remaining oral reports.
3. Course conclusion.