

Sidgwick's Ethics
Philosophy 9xxx
Autumn 2017

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Henry Sidgwick's (1838-1900) *The Methods of Ethics* is rightly considered one of the best books in the history of moral philosophy. It has influenced its fair share of philosophical luminaries, including Rawls and Parfit. But its doctrines are not widely known. Accordingly, this course is devoted to a detailed examination of its main meta-ethical and normative doctrines. In discussing these, we will focus in particular on Sidgwick's framing of the problems of ethics to which he devoted his attention and to the philosophical strategies that he utilizes to contend with them. The first class will be devoted to a discussion of Sidgwick's life.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course has four objectives. The first is to familiarize students with the ethical philosophy of Henry Sidgwick and the problems to which it is addressed. The second is to provide students with a deeper understanding of the aims and ambitions of the utilitarian tradition of moral thought. The third objective is to equip students with some of the skills required for conducting philosophical research in ethics and its history. The fourth is to assist students in developing concision and precision in writing.

COURSE PRESUPPOSITIONS

This is a graduate seminar designed to facilitate advanced understanding of the issues in moral philosophy to which it is devoted. It presupposes a familiarity with basic concepts in moral philosophy and with the structure of and the problems facing utilitarianism. Those not in possession of this should read William Frankena, *Ethics*, second edition, A. C. Ewing, *Ethics*, Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, second edition, and (especially) William H. Shaw, *Contemporary Ethics: Taking Account of Utilitarianism*.