

Introduction to Ethics

Fall 2024

Professor

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Office hours: MW 5:30-6:30 pm, or by appt.

Meeting Details

Days: MW
Time: 1:30 – 2:20 pm
Place: University Church (UC)114
Course: PHIL 111

Teaching Assistants (TAs)

Name	Email	Office Hours	Office Location
James Emery	emery26@purdue.edu	Wed. (2:30 – 4:30 pm)	Schleman Hall 410
Hyemi Jun	hyemijun@purdue.edu	Fri. (2:00 – 4:00 pm)	Schleman Hall 411
Bryan Noonan	noonan18@purdue.edu	Mon. (11:30 am – 1 pm)	Schleman Hall 409

Course Description

This course introduces students to classic and contemporary debates in ethics—the systematic study of how we ought to live. Some questions we’ll consider are these: What makes a life worth living? What is happiness and how can we reliably achieve it? What is a good person and how can I reliably become one? Which acts are right, which are wrong, and what *makes* them so? What are *rights* and why would anyone think we have them? Is it morally permissible to violate someone’s rights if it’s necessary to prevent a disaster? Stepping back: Is there any such thing as what we morally *ought* to do or is all this “rightness and wrongness” stuff just made up? If there really are facts about what we morally ought to do, where do they come from: God, my culture, me, nothing at all? And why should I care about morality anyway, especially when ignoring its demands helps me achieve my goals? By the end of the course, students will have acquired some of the tools necessary for grappling with these questions, developing their own views, and defending those views with reasons and arguments.

Required Texts (exactly these editions)

1. *Nicomachean Ethics*, by Aristotle, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett)
2. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, by Immanuel Kant, trans. J. Ellington (Hackett)
3. *Utilitarianism*, by John Stuart Mill (Hackett)

The remaining course readings will be available on the course Brightspace site.

Course Requirements	Weighting	Where will it be assessed?
• Participation	10%	Based on semester performance in recitation
• 2-questions	15%	Submitted on Brightspace before each lecture
• Midterm Exam 1	25%	Blue Book exam taken during recitation
• Midterm Exam 2	25%	Blue Book exam taken during recitation
• Final Exam	25%	Blue Book exam taken during exam week

Attendance

Attendance is required for both lectures and recitation sections. You should make sure your teaching assistant (TA) records your presence at each lecture and recitation section you attend. You are allowed three (3) absences total (lectures and recitation sections combined) without notice and without penalty. You don't need to email your TA or me if you are going to be absent. Each absence beyond those three will result in a two-point deduction from your participation grade. These three absences are yours to use at your discretion—use them wisely.

Grading Scale

A: 94 – 100 A-: 90 – 93 B+: 87 – 89 B: 84 – 86 B-: 80 – 83 C+: 77 – 79
C: 74 – 76 C-: 70 – 73 D+: 67 – 69 D: 64 – 66 D-: 60 – 63 F: < 60

Office Hours & Accessibility

I'm happy to meet with you during my office hours to discuss course assignments, course material, or philosophy generally. So is your TA. I've listed our office hours and locations at the top of page one of this syllabus. If those times don't work, email me or your TA to set up an appointment. Zoom works, too.

I'm committed to making class fully accessible regardless of disabilities. If I can do anything to help make the class more accessible to you, let me know, or (if you would prefer) have the Accessibility Office contact me on your behalf.

Participation

Participation begins by carefully reading the assigned readings before the lecture/recitation. You'll then need to contribute to class discussion in recitation, at some point, by asking questions or making comments. Some people are shy. I get that. Shy people can either rack up their participation points in the back half of the semester (once they become more comfortable with the recitation class setting), or by coming to office hours (either mine or your TA's), or by chatting with me or your TA about course material over email or after class. Making lots of comments in recitation is not the only (or even best) way to receive a high participation grade. Quality matters, too. The best thing to do is strike a nice balance between quality and quantity. Sometimes you'll say stuff that doesn't quite make sense. That's totally fine. Philosophy is hard. You're allowed to struggle. Feel free to contribute even if you're not 100% sure what's happening. There's no penalty for making a good-faith effort but not quite getting it right. That's how you learn literally anything—trying and failing until you get it.

2 Questions

There will be an assigned reading for each lecture. For each reading, you are required to turn in two (2) questions on Brightspace *before that lecture begins*. Brightspace will lock the assignment as soon as the lecture begins. Thus, you will typically turn in four (4) questions per week about the course readings. You'll turn in two (2) questions on Monday and two (2) more on Wednesday.

Each question you ask should be derived from the assigned text. You should include in your question a quote or citation of a page indicating to your TA what part of the text prompted your question or which part of the text you wish to ask about. If you do not do this, you will not receive full credit for the assignment. So, your questions will generally begin with something like, “[The author] says x on page y . I'm wondering z .” They can't both be clarificatory questions—

requests to explain what this author is saying (though these are good questions, and you should ask clarificatory questions when you need to ask them). At least one question must be something other than a clarificatory question—e.g., an objection to an author’s claim or argument, a question about the broader application of a point the author makes in the text, pointing out an ambiguity, a question about the coherence of various claims the author makes, or something else. (Do your best the first few weeks. Your TA will offer more guidance in recitation sections.)

The Two-Questions assignment is intended to achieve at least four goals: (1) incentivize you to read carefully, (2) provide some accountability for doing the reading, (3) get you prepared to participate in recitation, and (4) legitimately answer your questions.

Since the assignment is, in part, intended to check that you’ve done the assigned reading, **you should do your best to convince me (or your TA) in your question that you have, in fact, read carefully.** This kind of question is not convincing: “What would consequentialists think about our duties to our families?” That question doesn’t demonstrate that you’ve done the reading. First, there is no quote or page citation. I have no idea what part of the text prompted your question. Second, anyone who hasn’t done the assigned reading could ask that kind of question.

Here’s a way to ask that same question that *would* demonstrate to me (or your TA) that you’ve read the assigned reading carefully. You could ask it like this: “Would consequentialists condemn parents giving birthday presents to their children? I can see why they might since, on page x, Shafer-Landau claims that consequentialism requires us to *maximize* good consequences. And often the money parents spend on birthday presents could be used to bring about better consequences elsewhere (e.g., by giving it to charity). On the other hand, on page y, Shafer-Landau claims that consequentialism is highly attractive because it accommodates many of our common-sense moral judgments. It seems common sense that parents are morally permitted to buy birthday gifts for their kids. If that’s right, then it seems consequentialists should be fine with parents giving birthday gifts to their kids. So, my question is: What would consequentialists say about this? Is it morally OK, according to consequentialism, for parents to buy birthday gifts for their kids instead of giving the money to charity?”

Use of AI Chatbots

You are not permitted to use AI or chatbots (e.g., Chat GPT, Gemini, Claude, Quillbot) **in any capacity to complete class assignments**—not even Grammarly. You will take your three exams in person during your recitation section. (If you must be absent, you can arrange with your TA an alternative time to take your exam under their supervision.) You will answer exam questions by hand (with a pen or pencil) in a **Blue Book** that you purchase and bring to your recitation section on exam day. You may not use AI or chatbots for your 2-questions. I want *you* to ask the questions.

There are plenty of tools your TA and I can use to check submissions for AI use. As of right now, no tool is perfect on its own. But, by using many different tools and aggregating their judgments, we can get exceedingly good evidence about whether you used AI to complete your assignment. Moreover, the AI-detection software will only get better as time goes on. It won’t be long before college administrators can quickly check every writing assignment you ever submit in college for AI use. It will then be exceedingly easy to see if/when you cheated. Believe me, I understand the appeal of using chatbots to finish college assignments. **But (I’m speaking now, not as your college professor, but as someone who wants your life to go well) my sincere advice to you is: don’t risk it. In an effort to save yourself a few hours of misery (which I completely understand), you may end up ruining your life. I don’t want that for you.** I’m not trying to scare you. I’m trying to help you.

Course Schedule

Consequentialism: Utilitarianism

Week 1	Aug. 19	What's Ethics? How does this class work?
	Aug. 21	Helpful overview before you read Mill (optional) Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Chapters 1-2, up to p. 11)
Week 2	Aug. 26	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Chapter 2, p. 11 to the end)
	Aug. 28	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Chapter 3)
Week 3	Sep. 2	Labor Day (no class)
	Sep. 4	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Chapter 4)
Week 4	Sep. 9	Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
	Sep. 11	Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"

Non-consequentialism: Kantian Ethics

Week 5	Sep. 16	Helpful overview before you read Kant (optional) Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Section 1)
	Sep. 18	Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Section 2, pp. 23-32)
Week 6	Sep. 23	Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Section 2, pp. 32-48)
	Sep. 25	O'Neill, "A Kantian Approach to Famine Relief?"
Week 7	Sep. 30	Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
	Oct. 2	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>

Non-consequentialism: Virtue Ethics

Week 8	Oct. 7	Fall Break (no class)
	Oct. 9	Helpful overview before you read Aristotle (optional) Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 1, not sec. 6)
Week 9	Oct. 14	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 2)
	Oct. 16	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 3, sec. 6-12)
Week 10	Oct. 21	Epictetus, <i>Enchiridion</i> (Chapters 1-29, pp. 1-7)
	Oct. 23	Epictetus, <i>Enchiridion</i> (Chapters 29-52, pp. 7-15)

Applied Ethics: Eating Meat, Guns, Immigration, Genetic Enhancement

Week 11	Oct. 28	Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People”
	Oct. 30	Shafer-Landau, “Vegetarianism, Causation, and Theory”
Week 12	Nov. 4	McMahan, “Why Gun ‘Control’ Is Not Enough” McMahan on Gun Control (Philosophy Bites Podcast) (required)
	Nov. 6	Huemer, “Gun Rights & Noncompliance” Debate: Does America Need Stricter Gun Laws? (optional)
Week 13	Nov. 11	Huemer, “Is There a Right to Immigrate?”
	Nov. 13	Wellman, “Immigration & Freedom of Association” (skip 3) Debate: Is Immigration a Human Right? (optional)
Week 14	Nov. 18	Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection”
	Nov. 20	Savulescu, “Genetic Interventions and Enhancement”

Is Ethics for Whiny Losers?

Week 15	Nov. 25	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> (excerpts, pp. 1-6)
	Nov. 27	Thanksgiving Break (no class)
Week 16	Dec. 2	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> (excerpts, pp. 7-12)
	Dec. 4	Course Wrap-Up