

Introduction to Ethics

Fall 2025

Professor

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Office hours: MW 12:45 – 2:45 pm, or by appt.

Meeting Details

Days: MW
Time: 11:30 am – 12:20 pm
Place: University Church (UC)114
Course: PHIL 111

Teaching Assistants (TAs)

Name	Email	Office Hours
Alex Dibelka	adibelka@purdue.edu	MW 12:30 - 1:30 pm (or by appointment)
James Emery	emery26@purdue.edu	by appointment
Daniel Schwartz	schwa206@purdue.edu	by appointment

Course Description

This course introduces students to classic and contemporary debates in ethics—the systematic study of how we ought to live. Together, we’ll explore fundamental moral questions such as: 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? We will then step back to ask deeper questions about morality itself: Is there really any such thing as moral rightness and wrongness at all, or is it all just made up? If moral truths do exist, where do they come from—God, my culture, me, nowhere at all? And why should I care about morality anyway, especially if ignoring it 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 (these exact editions)

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

Course Materials

All other course materials (e.g., additional course readings, lecture slides, exam study guides, exam answer keys) will be available on the lecture Brightspace page under “Content.”

Course Requirements	Weight	Where will it be assessed?
• Participation	10%	Based on performance in recitation
• Two Questions Assignments	20%	Submitted on Brightspace before lecture
• Exam 1 (Friday, Sep. 26)	20%	Blue Book exam taken during recitation
• Exam 2 (Friday, Oct. 31)	20%	Blue Book exam taken during recitation
• Final Exam (TBA, Dec. 15 – 20)	30%	Blue Book exam during exam week

Attendance

Attendance is required for both lectures and recitations. You're allowed three (3) no-questions-asked "freebie" absences total—across lectures and recitations. No need to email me or your TA (no doctor's notes, no funeral programs). After that, each additional absence (that isn't due to official University business) knocks two points off your participation grade. Your TA tracks attendance, so make sure you're counted. Use your freebies 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 assignments, course material, or philosophy generally. Your TA is, too. I've listed our office hours and locations at the top of page one. Can't make those times? Email us to set up an appointment. Zoom is fine, too.

I'm committed to making the class fully accessible regardless of disabilities. If there's something I can do to make it more accessible, let me know or (if you prefer) have the Disability Resource Center reach out to me on your behalf.

Participation

Participation begins by carefully reading the assigned text before each lecture. You'll then need to contribute to your recitation discussion: ask a question, offer a comment, or take a stab at an idea. If you're shy, that's fine. You can earn participation credit later in the semester once you're more comfortable, or by visiting office hours (mine or your TA's), chatting after class, or engaging over email. You don't need to talk constantly in recitation to earn a high participation grade. Quality matters, too. Ideally, you'll aim for both. Sometimes you'll say something that doesn't quite make sense. That's fine. Philosophy is hard. Struggling out loud is part of the process. Make your best effort even if you're unsure. That's how you learn literally anything—trying and failing until you get it.

Two Questions Assignments

Each lecture has an assigned reading. Before each lecture begins at 11:30am, you must submit two questions about the assigned reading on your recitation's Brightspace page. The assignment locks at 11:30am, so your TA won't accept late submissions. (Blame me.) Since we meet twice a week, you'll typically submit four questions per week—two before Monday's lecture and two before Wednesday's.

Each question you ask must be derived from the required edition of the assigned text. You must include a quote or citation of an exact page, indicating to your TA which part of the text prompted your question. If you do not do this, you will not receive credit for the assignment.

Questions will generally begin with something like, "[Author] says *x* on page *y*. I'm wondering *z*." Clarificatory questions (e.g., "What does the author mean here?") are fine, but you're allowed a maximum of one clarificatory question per submission. At least one question must go deeper—e.g., raising an objection, identifying an ambiguity, exploring a broader implication, or testing internal consistency. (If you're unsure at first, just do your best—your TA will help you improve in recitation.)

This assignment is designed to: (1) encourage you to read carefully, (2) hold you accountable for doing the reading, (3) prepare you to participate in recitation, and (4) provide a structured way for you to ask questions that actually receive answers.

Tip: Pose your question in a way that makes it blindingly obvious to your TA that you've read the assigned reading carefully. This kind of question is not convincing: "What does Utilitarianism say about our duties to our families?" First, there is no quote or page citation. I have no idea what part of the text prompted this question. Second, the question doesn't explain why Utilitarianism might entail something problematic about our duties to our families. Why might it? Why is this issue worth considering? Third, someone who hasn't done the assigned reading (but merely read the Wikipedia page for "Utilitarianism") could easily ask a vague question like this. It demonstrates no familiarity with the peculiarities of the assigned text.

Here's a way to ask that same question that *would* demonstrate you've read carefully: "Does Utilitarianism condemn parents who give birthday gifts to their children rather than donating the money to charity? I can see why it might, since, on page *x*, [Author] claims that Utilitarianism requires us to *maximize* good consequences. And often, the money parents spend on their children's birthday presents could be better spent elsewhere. On the other hand, on page *y*, [Author] claims that Utilitarianism is attractive because it accommodates many of our common-sense moral judgments. And common sense allows parents to buy birthday gifts for their kids. So, my question is: What does Utilitarianism actually imply about cases like this?"

Chatbots: The Policy

Submitting AI-generated work as your own is academic dishonesty and carries the same penalties as [plagiarism](#). If any part of your assignment is produced by a chatbot (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Grok), you will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities for review of your standing at Purdue.

Chatbots: The Policy's Justification

Imagine a strength coach tells a client, "Do some deadlifts." The client replies, "Sure, but in the real world, we have forklifts to lift heavy stuff. So, shouldn't I be allowed to use one?" The strength coach should respond, "You don't get it. The point of lifting weights isn't to move heavy stuff from A to B. It's to build bodily strength—your capacity to move stuff around without technology. You build strength by lifting weights yourself, not outsourcing it to a machine. So, no forklift. Get to work."

Same for this class. I'm your academic coach. My job is to help you strengthen your thinking, writing, and speaking. The assignments are your mental workouts—strength training for your mind. If you ask me, "Why can't we use AI to complete our assignments? In the real world, we have AI to answer questions!" I'll respond, "You don't get it. The point of the assignments is not to generate a bunch of text for your TAs to read. It's to improve your thinking, writing, and speaking—your capacity to do these things without technology. You build these capacities by completing the assignments yourself, not outsourcing the work to a machine. So, no AI. Get to work."

Freedom of Expression Policy

Students are encouraged to exercise their right to free inquiry and expression. Any idea that's relevant to the course content is fair game. You're responsible for learning the course material, but you're not required to agree with it. Your grade will reflect the quality of your academic work, not the positions you take. You may take reasoned exception to, or withhold judgment about, any view presented on matters of conscience or controversy. When you encounter ideas that you find offensive, immoral, or unwise, you are encouraged to engage them with reasons, evidence, and arguments. However, threats, harassment, or behavior disruptive to the learning environment won't be tolerated and will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students.

Course Schedule

Consequentialism: Utilitarianism

Week 1	Aug. 25	What's Ethics? How does this class work? (no assigned reading)
	Aug. 27	Helpful overview before you read Mill (optional) John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Chapters 1 - 2, up to p. 11)
Week 2	Sep. 1	Labor Day (no class)
	Sep. 3	John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Chapter 2, p. 11 to chapter's end)
Week 3	Sep. 8	John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Chapter 3)
	Sep. 10	John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Chapter 4)
Week 4	Sep. 15	Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
	Sep. 17	Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"

Non-consequentialism: Kantian Ethics

Week 5	Sep. 22	Helpful overview before you read Kant (optional) Immanuel Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Section 1)
	Sep. 24	Immanuel Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Sec. 2, pp. 19-33)
Week 6	Sep. 29	Immanuel Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (Sec. 2, pp. 33-48)
	Oct. 1	Onora O'Neill, "A Kantian Approach to Famine Relief"
Week 7	Oct. 6	Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
	Oct. 8	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>

Non-consequentialism: Virtue Ethics

Week 8	Oct. 13	Fall Break (no class)
	Oct. 15	Helpful overview before you read Aristotle (optional) Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 1, skip sec. 6)
Week 9	Oct. 20	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 2)
	Oct. 22	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Book 3, sec. 6-12)
Week 10	Oct. 27	Epictetus, <i>Enchiridion</i> (Chapters 1-29, pp. 1-7)
	Oct. 29	Epictetus, <i>Enchiridion</i> (Chapters 29-52, pp. 7-13)

Practical Ethics: Eating Meat

Week 11	Nov. 3	Alastair Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People”
	Nov. 5	Russ Shafer-Landau, “Vegetarianism, Causation, and Ethical Theory”

Practical Ethics: Guns

Week 12	Nov. 10	Jeff McMahan, “Why Gun ‘Control’ Is Not Enough” Jeff McMahan on Gun Control (Philosophy Bites Podcast) (required)
	Nov. 12	Michael Huemer, “Gun Rights & Noncompliance” Debate: Does America Need Stricter Gun Laws? (optional)

Practical Ethics: Immigration

Week 13	Nov. 17	Michael Huemer, “Is There a Right to Immigrate?”
	Nov. 19	Kit Wellman, “Immigration & Freedom of Association” (skip sec. 3) Debate: Is Immigration a Human Right? (optional)

Practical Ethics: Genetic Enhancement

Week 14	Nov. 24	Michael Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection”
	Nov. 26	Julian Savulescu, “Genetic Interventions and Enhancement” Debate: Is Genetic Enhancement Morally Required? (optional)

A Challenge: Is Ethics for Whiny Losers?

Week 15	Dec. 1	Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> (excerpts, pp. 1-6)
	Dec. 3	Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> (excerpts, pp. 7-12)
Week 16	Dec. 8	To be determined
	Dec. 10	Course Wrap-Up