Introduction to Ethics

Fall 2026

Professor

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Office Hours: Mondays (3 – 5 pm)

Meeting Details

Days: Tuesday/Thursday
Time: 8:30 – 9:20 am
Place: WALC 1055
Course: PHIL 111

Teaching Assistants	Email	Office Hours	Office Location
Cade Franken	cfranken@purdue.edu	…	…
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Course Description

This course introduces students to classic and contemporary debates in ethics—the systematic study of how we ought to live. We'll explore questions such as: What's the best kind of life? What makes someone a good person, and how can I become one? What is happiness, and how can I achieve it? Which acts are right, which are wrong, and what *makes* them so? What are rights, and is it ever OK to violate them to prevent a disaster? We'll also step back to examine morality itself. Are there really any moral truths, or are right and wrong merely useful fictions? If moral truths exist, where do they come from—God, culture, us, nowhere at all? Finally, why should I care about morality, especially if ignoring it helps me achieve my goals? By the end of the course, students will acquire some tools for grappling with these questions, forming their own views, and defending them with reasons and arguments.

Required Texts (these exact editions)

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

Course Materials

All other course materials—readings, slides, study guides, answer keys, etc.—are available under "Content" on the lecture Brightspace page.

Requirements	Weight	Where will it be assessed?
• Participation	10%	Based on your performance in recitation
• Two Questions Assignments	20%	Submitted on Brightspace before lecture
• Exam 1 (Friday, Sep. 18)	20%	Blue Book exam taken during recitation
• Exam 2 (Friday, Oct. 30)	20%	Blue Book exam taken during recitation
• Final Exam (TBD)	30%	Blue Book exam during exam week

Attendance

Attendance is required at both lectures and recitations. You're allowed three (3) no-questions-asked "freebie" absences total. No need to email me or your TA—no doctor's notes, no funeral programs. *These are excused absences*. They cover unexpected but totally legitimate circumstances, such as illness or a death in the family, without requiring you to disclose sensitive info. After your three freebies, each absence unrelated to official University business will reduce your participation grade by two percentage points. Your TA will track attendance, so make sure you're counted, and use your freebies wisely.

Participation

Participation begins by carefully reading the assigned text *before* each lecture. You must then contribute to recitation: ask a question, offer a comment, or take a stab at an idea. If you're shy, that's fine. You can participate more as you grow comfortable or earn credit by attending office hours, talking with me or your TA after class, or engaging over email. You don't need to speak up 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, and struggling out loud is part of the process. Make your best effort even if you're unsure whether you're on the right track. That's how you learn literally anything: by trying, failing, and trying again until you get the hang of it.

Two Questions Assignments

Each lecture has one assigned reading. *Before* lecture begins at 8:30 am, you must submit two questions about that day's reading on your recitation's Brightspace page. The assignment locks at 8:30 am, so your TA won't accept late submissions. (Blame me.) Since we meet twice a week, you will typically submit four questions per week: two *before* Tuesday's lecture and two *before* Thursday's.

Each question must (1) draw from the required edition of the text, and (2) include a quotation and exact page citation (not line number) showing your TA which part of the text prompted your question. If your question fails to satisfy both requirements, you will not receive credit. A typical question might begin like this: "[Author] claims x on page y. This is puzzling because z and makes me wonder whether [your question]." Clarificatory questions (e.g., "What does the author mean here?") are fine, but you're allowed a maximum of one per submission. At least one question must go deeper: raise an objection, ask how different claims fit together, explore how the author's view applies to a case, or challenge the view's consistency. (During the first few weeks, if you're unsure whether you're on the right track, just do your best. Your TA will offer further guidance in recitation.)

This assignment has four aims: (1) motivate you to complete the reading, (2) gauge your understanding of it, (3) prepare you to participate in recitation, and (4) give you a structured way to ask questions that actually receive answers.

Tip: Frame each of your questions so it is blindingly obvious to your TA that you've read the assigned text carefully, rather than an online summary. This kind of question is not convincing: "What does Utilitarianism say about our duties to our families?" It includes neither a quotation nor a page citation, so we cannot tell which part of the text prompted it. It also fails to explain why Utilitarianism might have troubling implications for family duties. Why would it? Explain. Finally, anyone who skimmed the Wikipedia page on Utilitarianism could ask this question. It demonstrates no familiarity with the assigned text.

Here's a way to ask that same question that *would* demonstrate you've read carefully: "Does Utilitarianism condemn parents who buy birthday gifts for their children rather than donating the

money to charity? On page *x*, [Author] claims that Utilitarianism requires us to *maximize* good consequences. But money spent on birthday gifts could often produce better consequences elsewhere. On page *y*, however, [Author] argues that Utilitarianism is attractive partly because it accommodates many common-sense moral judgments. And common sense permits parents to buy their children birthday gifts. So, what does Utilitarianism 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 a chatbot, such as ChatGPT, Claude, or Grok, produces *any* part of your assignment, I will report the matter to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities for review.

Chatbots: The Policy's Justification

Imagine a strength coach tells a client, "Do some deadlifts." The client replies, "In the real world, we have forklifts to lift heavy stuff. So, why can't I use one?" The coach should respond, "You don't get it. Lifting weights isn't about moving heavy stuff from point A to B. It's about building bodily strength—your capacity to move heavy stuff without technology. You build strength by lifting the weight yourself, not outsourcing the work to a machine. So, no forklift. Get to work."

I'm your academic coach. My job is to help you strengthen your thinking, writing, and speaking. The assignments are mental exercises—strength training for your mind. If you ask, "Why can't I use AI to complete my assignments? In the real world, AI answers all my questions," my response is the same: "You don't get it. Assignments aren't about generating stuff for your TAs to grade. They're about improving your ability to think, write, and speak without technological assistance. You do that by completing the assignments yourself, not outsourcing the work to a machine. So, no AI. Get to work."

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 during office hours (Mondays 3-5 pm) to discuss course material, assignments, or anything else. If that time doesn't work, email me to arrange an alternative in-person or Zoom meeting.

I'm committed to making this class fully accessible. If there's anything I can do to support your access needs, let me know, or (if you prefer) have the Disability Resource Center contact me on your behalf.

Freedom of Expression Policy

You're encouraged to speak your mind. Any idea relevant to course content is fair game. You're responsible for learning the material, but you're not required to agree with any of it. Your grade will reflect the quality of your academic work, not anyone's opinion of the positions you take. You're free to challenge, question, or withhold judgment on any position we discuss. If you encounter ideas you find misguided, offensive, or immoral, you're welcome to engage them with reasons and arguments or ignore them—your call. But if you threaten or harass someone in class, or disrupt the learning environment, I've got to report you to the Office of the Dean of Students.

Course Schedule

Consequentialism: Utilitarianism

Week 1	Aug. 25	What is Ethics? How does this class work? (no assigned reading)
	Aug. 27	Helpful overview before you read Mill (optional) John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism* (Chapters 1 – 2, up to p. 11)
Week 2	Sep. 1	John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism* (Chapter 2)
	Sep. 3	John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism* (Chapter 3)
Week 3	Sep. 8	John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism* (Chapter 4)
	Sep. 10	Peter Singer: "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
Week 4	Sep. 15	Don Marquis: "Why Abortion is Immoral"
	Sep. 17	No class. Study for Exam 1.

Non-consequentialism: Kantian Ethics

Week 5	Sep. 22	Helpful overview before you read Kant (optional) Immanuel Kant: *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Section 1)
	Sep. 24	Immanuel Kant: *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Sec. 2, pp. 19-33)
Week 6	Sep. 29	Immanuel Kant: *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (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	No class. Enjoy Fall break!

Non-consequentialism: Virtue Ethics

Week 8	Oct. 13	No class. Enjoy Fall break!
	Oct. 15	Helpful overview before you read Aristotle (optional) Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 1, skip sec. 6)
Week 9	Oct. 20	Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 2)
	Oct. 22	Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 3, sec. 6 - 12)

Week 10	Oct. 27	Epictetus: *Enchiridion* (Chapters 1 - 29, pp. 1 - 8)
	Oct. 29	Epictetus: *Enchiridion* (Chapters 29 - 52, pp. 7 - 15)

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" Philosophy Bites Podcast: Jeff McMahan on Gun Control (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	No class. Enjoy Thanksgiving Break!
Week 15	Dec. 1	Julian Savulescu: "Genetic Interventions and Enhancement" Debate: Is Genetic Enhancement Morally Required? (optional)

A Challenge: Is Ethics for Whiny Losers?

	Dec. 3	Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil* (excerpts, pp. 1 - 6)
Week 16	Dec. 8	Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil* (excerpts, pp. 6 - 10)
	Dec. 10	Course wrap-up and final exam review