

PHIL 110: Ethics
Fall 2021, Section 2
MWF 2:40-3:45pm
Goldspohn 31

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Office: Seybert 102 (floor below advisors)
Office Hours: 9:15-10:35 MWF

Course Description

Unlike that of rocks, bacteria, and lions, human behavior has the strange feature of being ethically significant. The choices we make about what to eat, how to spend money, how to behave sexually, what political structures to support, just to name a few, find themselves inevitably under moral scrutiny from others and from ourselves. Ethical questions—questions about how to act and why—are ones to which all people, not simply philosophers, already assume an answer. We all live our lives in accordance with particular notions of right and wrong, however unspoken, inauthentic, or contradictory they may be. In this course we will aim, first, to make our implicit ethical beliefs explicit, that is, to ask why we act, or respond to the actions of others, the way we do. Secondly, we will evaluate these beliefs. Are they coherent? Are they universally true, or relative to each individual or culture? What sort of justification can we provide for them? To aid us in pursuing these questions we will read some of the most influential answers offered by the history of philosophy.

Course Objectives

Course-Specific Objectives

- Analyze argumentative texts
- Write clearly and persuasively
- Understand and critically evaluate major ethical theories
- Apply ethical theories to real-life situations

Objectives for Cardinal Directions: Humanities

- Explain how humanities scholars ask and answer questions about human experiences or the nature of being human
- Identify ways in which human cultures have developed and interacted over time
- Use methods common to the humanities to analyze texts, objects, events, and/or ideas in context

Objectives for Cardinal Directions: Ethical Dimensions

- Evaluate the ethical dimensions of life and work across multiple cultural, philosophic and/or historical traditions
- Identify characteristics of major ethical traditions
- Apply ethical principles in decision-making

Required Course Readings

Please buy, rather than rent, all course texts in hard copy, to facilitate underlining and note-taking. The additional cost will be rewarded with greater understanding and easier preparation for class discussion and exams.

Anthony Appiah, *Ethics of Identity*. ISBN: 9780691130286
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Sachs. ISBN: 9781585103393
Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*. ISBN: 9781504054225
Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Korsgard. ISBN:
9781107401068
John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*. ISBN: 9780872206052
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Kaufmann. ISBN:
9780679724629

Additional readings are available on Blackboard and marked as follows: (**)

Student Assessment

Each student's grade will be determined as follows:

- Class participation: 25%
- Reading questions and quizzes: 15%
- Collaborative project: 20%
- Mid-term and final exams: 20% each, 40% total

Class participation presupposes careful and thorough preparation and serious intellectual involvement in class discussion. Students should come to class not only having read the text through, but having underlined, taken notes, and scanned over the marked text at least one additional time after the initial reading. On the basis of such preparation, students should be prepared for an intensive, text-focused discussion. While some class sessions will include a lecture element for purposes of providing background and context, the majority of our time together will be spent in discussion.

My expectation for class participation is that *every member of class* will be able to contribute with remarks and citations that are on-topic and reflect solid preparation for class. A student who meets that baseline will receive a grade in the **B range** for their participation portion. Students whose contribution is notably lacking—for instance, those who speak very little, who give no evidence of having done the reading carefully, who consistently change the topic in a disruptive way, or whose primary contributions are jokes or personal anecdotes—will receive a participation grade in the **C or D range**. Students who distinguish themselves through some particular service—such as consistently contributing new topics that shape the discussion, serving as a resource for navigating the text, or making a special effort to draw in quieter classmates—will qualify themselves for a participation grade in the **A range**. Active participation in a smaller break-out group qualifies for a B-range grade, but you must regularly contribute to the whole-group discussion if you want an A for participation.

The baseline condition for class participation is of course physical presence in class. Absences not only affect the individual student, but the entire group, and the same is true of habitual lateness. Punctual attendance should be regarded as mandatory. Lateness will count against a student's participation for that session, and in extreme cases will be treated as the equivalent of an absence.

Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. Absences will be considered excused only for the following reasons:

- You have suffered an illness or medical emergency that prevents attendance
- The death or illness of a family member requires you to be elsewhere during class time
- You are celebrating a religious holiday and have received approval for this before missing class
- You are representing the college in an official capacity and have made me aware of your responsibilities before missing class; these absence notifications and must be accompanied by a note or email from a relevant NCC employee (e.g., coach, faculty mentor, dean, etc.)

Unexcused absences will negatively affect your participation grade, and more than three unexcused absences will result in automatic failure of the course.

Absences may not be used as an excuse for failing to turn in assignments or for submitting them late. If you are going to be absent on a day when an assignment is due, upload it to Blackboard ahead of time just as you normally would.

Students requiring additional accommodations are urged to discuss this matter with the professor as early as possible in the semester and to devise a formal written plan in consultation with the relevant institutional offices. In line with the Shimer School (my home department)'s policies on attendance, accommodations will be made with the aim of allowing a student to attend at least 80% of class sessions and without placing undue burdens on either the accommodated student or the faculty member.

Reading questions and quizzes will provide the professor with additional evidence of your careful reading of the course materials. These will occur at least two days a week most weeks, on a semi-improvised schedule. Reading questions will be posted on Blackboard and announced via email shortly after the preceding class. Your responses will be due before class on the day for which the reading is assigned; I recommend checking for reading questions prior to doing the reading. For days on which no reading question is posted, a quiz may take place at the beginning of class. At the end of the term, the lowest 2 scores from these questions will be dropped from your grade.

Please note that reading questions cannot be submitted late. Quizzes may be made up in the case of excused absences, but not unexcused absences; it is your responsibility to contact the professor to arrange for a make-up quiz.

Your *collaborative project* will track your progress in consciously cultivating an ethical virtue of your choice, together with an accountability group of other students. Grading will be based on your effort and serious reflection, not on your moral caliber as a person. A personal journal will count for 15% of your final grade and a short group presentation will count for 5%. An assignment sheet providing more details will be passed out in class on the date listed below.

The *mid-term and final exams* will be made up of a mixture of short-answer and essay questions. Both are open-book, open-note, take-home exams. Mastery of all reading questions and quiz materials will be a necessary but not sufficient condition of succeeding on these exams.

Note on Institutional Policies

Please note that the college-wide policy on plagiarism holds for this class and that student assignments may be run through plagiarism-detection software at the professor's discretion. Plagiarism is a very serious academic and ethical offence that can lead to failure of the assignment or course—or, after multiple instances, expulsion from college. Please consult the Student Handbook for more details of the plagiarism policy.

All other institutional policies apply equally, including those related to accommodations for students with learning disabilities or differences and Title IX protections. More details on those policies are available in the Student Handbook, and students are encouraged to approach the professor with any questions or concerns they may have.

Class and Reading Schedule

Wednesday	August 25	Syllabus and Course Introduction Reading workshop—bring Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> to class
Friday	August 27	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 1
Monday	August 30	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 2
Wednesday	September 1	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 3
Friday	September 3	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 5
Monday	September 6	NO CLASS—Labor Day
Wednesday	September 8	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 8
Friday	September 10	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 9 In-class: Preparation for Virtue Cultivation Project
Monday	September 13	Honiak, "Virtue and the Skills of Everyday Life" (**) In-class: Lecture introduction to Kant and Deontological Ethics
Wednesday	September 15	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Preface and First Section (pp. 3-20)
Friday	September 17	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , beginning of Second Section (pp. 21-30, up to "Now the question arises...")
Monday	September 20	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , continue Second Section (pp. 30-43, up to "The imperatives according to the previous mode...")
Wednesday	September 22	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , finish Second Section (pp. 43-55)
Friday	September 24	Rawls, selection from <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (**)—read only up to heading 5 on pg. 22 of PDF

Monday	September 27	Korsgaard, selection from <i>Fellow Creatures</i> (**)— footnotes optional
Wednesday	September 29	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Ch. 1 and start of Ch. 2 (pp. 1-15, up to “And this leads...”)
Friday	October 1	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , rest of Ch. 2 and all of Ch. 3 (pp. 15-34)
Monday	October 4	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Ch. 4 and start of Ch. 5 (pp. 35- 50, up to “Having thus endeavored...”)
Wednesday	October 6	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , finish Ch. 5 and “Speech on Capital Punishment” (pp. 50-71)
Friday	October 8	Singer, “All Animals Are Equal” (**)
Monday	October 11	Ahmed, selection from <i>The Promise of Happiness</i> (**)
Wednesday	October 13	Review session
Friday	October 15	NO CLASS—Midterm take-home exam must be submitted on Blackboard by class time
Monday	October 18	Fall Break—NO CLASS
Wednesday	October 20	Group Presentations on Virtue Cultivation; virtue journals due by class time
Friday	October 22	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , First Essay, sections 1-10
Monday	October 25	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , First Essay, sections 11-17 (and Note)
Wednesday	October 27	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , Second Essay, sections 1-8
Friday	October 29	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , Second Essay, sections 9-15
Monday	November 1	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , Second Essay, sections 16-25
Wednesday	November 3	Patterson, two selections from <i>Slavery and Social Death</i> (**)
Friday	November 5	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , first half of ch. 2 (pp. 37-58, up to “But this will to negation”)
Monday	November 8	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , rest of ch. 2 (pp. 58-78)
Wednesday	November 10	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , Ch. 3, sections 1-2 (pp. 79-103)
Friday	November 12	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , Ch. 3, section 3 (pp. 103-124)

Monday	November 15	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , Ch. 3, section 4 and first part of section 5 (pp. 124-149, up to “Thus, violence...”)
Wednesday	November 17	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , Ch. 3, rest of section 5, and Conclusion (pp. 149-173)
Friday	November 19	Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” (**)
Monday	November 22	NO CLASS—Professor travelling for conference
Wednesday	November 25	NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break
Friday	November 27	NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break
Monday	November 29	Appiah, <i>Ethics of Identity</i> , Preface and first half of Ch. 1 (pp. ix-17, up to heading “Invention and Authenticity”)
Wednesday	December 1	Appiah, <i>Ethics of Identity</i> , rest of Ch. 1 (pp. 17-36)
Friday	December 3	Appiah, <i>Ethics of Identity</i> , Ch. 2 (pp. 36-61)
Monday	December 6	Appiah, <i>Ethics of Identity</i> , first half of Ch. 3 (pp. 62-88, up to heading “Neutrality Reconsidered”)
Wednesday	December 8	Appiah, <i>Ethics of Identity</i> , rest of Ch. 3 (pp. 88-113)
Friday	December 10	Review session
Monday	December 13	FINAL EXAM PERIOD—Final take-home exam must be submitted on Blackboard by 3:30pm