

PHIL 110: Ethics
Spring 2023, Section 1
MWF 8:00-9:05am
Goldspohn 20

Professor: Adam Kotsko, akotsko@noctrl.edu
Office: In flux—confirm with professor
Office Hours: MWF 11:50-1:10 or by appointment (in person or Zoom)

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 explore some of the most influential attempts to develop a systematic account of our ethical duties from the history of philosophy and weigh their insights and shortcomings.

Course Objectives

Upon completing this course, students will be able to

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

This course also meets the objectives for the Cardinal Directions general education requirements in Humanities and Ethical Dimensions, for Community Engaged Learning, and meets the qualifications for the iCons Being Human and Engaging Civic Life.

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.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Bartleet and Collins (U Chicago). ISBN: 9780226026756

Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Fretchman (Philosophical Library). ISBN: 9781480442801

The Classical Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill, ed. John Troyer (Hackett). ISBN: 9780872206496

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Ellington (Hackett). ISBN: 9781107401068

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, trans. Gruber, ed. Cooper (Hackett). ISBN: 9780872205543

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

Student Assessment

Each student's grade will be determined as follows:

- Class participation: 20%
- Reading questions and quizzes: 20%
- Collaborative project: 10%
- Two tests: 15% each, 30% total
- Final exam: 20%

Grades will be represented in Blackboard on a scale of 1000 points total, with each Blackboard point being the equivalent to one-tenth of one percent of the final grade. My grading scale is as follows:

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| 930-1000: A | 780-799: C+ |
| 900-929: A- | 730-779: C |
| 880-899: B+ | 700-729: C- |
| 830-879: B | 600-699: D (Merlin allows no D+ or D-) |
| 800-829: B- | 599 or below: F |

I reserve the right to round up, though such mercy is not to be considered guaranteed. I will never round down.

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. Students should expect a mixture of lecture, small-group exercises, and whole-group discussion. The professor reserves the right to call on students at random at any time, with a preference for students who have not volunteered to speak recently.

The format of each class session will vary, and I recognize that in such a large class, it is not realistic that every individual will actively address the entire group every single class session, but every student should expect to participate actively in small groups, to contribute regularly to whole-group discussions, and to respond to the professor's questions most of the time when called on.

Participation grades will be posted on Blackboard at intervals of two to three weeks. On average, each regular class session is worth 5 points, for a total of 200. Students who baseline expectations over a given grading period will receive a grade in the **B range** (4 points per session) 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** (3 or fewer points per session). 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 keep small groups on task—will qualify themselves for a participation grade in the **A range** (5 points per session). 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.

It is of course impossible to participate in class if you are not present. 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.

Absences may be considered excused if the student supplies a valid excuse such as the following:

- 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.)

Students are responsible for notifying the professor absences as soon as possible, ideally beforehand.

Unexplained no-shows will result in the loss of participation points for that session, with no possibility of make-up. For a limited number of excused absences, the professor will award points equivalent to the student's average participation level, but if the number of excused absences become excessive, either across a short period or the semester as a whole, the professor reserves the right to require an individual meeting with the student to review missed material. Failure to attend such a meeting, which may be conducted via Zoom if needed, in a timely fashion will result in the loss of participation points even for excused absences. Nine or more absences, whether excused or not, will be considered grounds for automatic failure of the course, except in cases of extreme emergency or official accommodation.

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 on a semi-improvised schedule. Reading questions will be posted on Blackboard and announced via email shortly after the preceding class. Students may be required to answer a question from the reading, but more often they will be expected to upload photos of certain pages from the reading with their notes and underlining, or of their lecture notes. 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. Please note that reading questions cannot be submitted late, even if the student has an excused absence for that class.

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 short paper will make up 7.5% of your grade and a group presentation will make up 2.5%. An assignment sheet providing more details will be passed out in class on the date listed below.

The *tests and final exams* will be made up of a mixture of short-answer and essay questions. All tests are open-book, but **only for students with print copies**—the use of laptops or other electronic devices during exam sessions will not be permitted (with the exception of students with disability accommodations). Note that this means you will need to **actually print out** PDF readings. The two tests will cover only a portion of the class content; the final exam will primarily focus on the segment of the class after the second test, but will also include a review element.

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. Note that the professor considers the use of AI text-generation software a form of plagiarism.

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

*This calendar provides the schedule for assignments and readings for our time together this semester. Students should be aware that the schedule may change. All students will be alerted as soon as possible via email and Blackboard announcement. **Failure to check email regularly is no excuse for missing these updates.***

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| Monday | January 9 | Course intro and syllabus |
| Wednesday | January 11 | Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (in <i>Trial and Death of Socrates</i> [TD]) |
| Friday | January 13 | Plato, <i>Apology</i> (in TD) |
| Monday | January 16 | Martin Luther King Day—NO CLASS |
| Wednesday | January 18 | Plato, <i>Crito</i> (in TD) |
| Friday | January 20 | Plato, Selection from <i>Phaedo</i> (in TD); “Allegory of the Cave” (**) |
| Monday | January 23 | Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 1, ch. 1-5 |
| Wednesday | January 25 | Aristotle, Book 1, ch. 7-10 |
| Friday | January 27 | Aristotle, Book 1, ch. 12-13; Book 2, ch. 1-3 |
| Monday | January 30 | Aristotle, Book 2, ch. 4-9 |

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| Wednesday | February 1 | Aristotle, Book 3, ch. 1-5 |
| Friday | February 3 | Aristotle, Book 3, ch. 6-9 |
| | | Introduction of virtue project |
| Monday | February 6 | Aristotle, Book 3, ch. 10-12; Book 4, ch. 3 |
| Wednesday | February 8 | Aristotle, Book 8, ch. 1-5 |
| Friday | February 10 | Aristotle, Book 10, ch. 6-8 |
| Monday | February 13 | Aristotle, Book 10, ch. 9 |
| Wednesday | February 15 | Plato and Aristotle review day |
| Friday | February 17 | Test 1: Plato and Aristotle |
| Monday | February 20 | Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , First Section |
| Wednesday | February 22 | Kant, Second Section (pp. 19-27, up to “The question now arises...”) |
| Friday | February 24 | Kant, Second Section (pp. 27-38, up to “In the previous formulations of imperatives...”) |
| Monday | February 27 | Kant, Second Section (pp. pp. 38-48) |
| Wednesday | March 1 | Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns” (pp. 63-67) |
| Friday | March 3 | Virtue Papers due; Virtue Presentations in-class |
| Monday | March 6 | Bentham, <i>Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> , chs. 1-2 (<i>Classical Utilitarians</i> [hereafter <i>CU</i>], pp. 9-19) |
| Wednesday | March 8 | Bentham, <i>Principles</i> , chs. 4 and 8 (<i>CU</i> , pp. 19-31) |
| Friday | March 10 | Bentham, <i>Principles</i> , chs. 13-14 (<i>CU</i> , pp. 26-38) |
| Monday | March 13 | Spring Break—NO CLASS |
| Wednesday | March 15 | Spring Break—NO CLASS |
| Friday | March 17 | Spring Break—NO CLASS |
| Monday | March 20 | Bentham, “The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number” and “Push-Pin Versus Poetry”; Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , ch. 2, first half (<i>CU</i> , pp. 92-94, 98-106, up to “And this leads...”) |
| Wednesday | March 22 | Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , ch. 2, remainder (<i>CU</i> , pp. 106-115) |
| Friday | March 24 | Kant and Utilitarians Review Day |
| Monday | March 27 | Test 2: Kant and Utilitarians |
| Wednesday | March 29 | Gilligan, Selection 1 (**) |
| Friday | March 31 | Gilligan, Selection 2 (**) |
| Monday | April 3 | Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” (**) |
| Wednesday | April 5 | DuBois Selection (**) |
| Friday | April 7 | Good Friday—NO CLASS |

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| Monday | April 10 | Baldwin Selection 1 (**) |
| Wednesday | April 12 | Baldwin Selection 2 (**) |
| Friday | April 14 | Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , first half of ch. 2 (pp. 37-58, up to “But this will to negation”) |
| Monday | April 17 | Professor traveling—NO CLASS |
| Wednesday | April 19 | Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , rest of ch. 2 (pp. 58-78) |
| Friday | April 21 | Beauvoir, ch. 3, section 2 (pp. 84-103) |
| Monday | April 24 | Beauvoir, ch. 3, section 3 (pp. 103-124) |
| Wednesday | April 26 | Beauvoir, ch. 3, start section 5 (pp. 139-155, up to “One might first wonder...”) |
| Friday | April 28 | Final review day |
| Monday | May 1 | Final Exam, 10:30am-12:30pm |