

# PHIL 010-20: Introduction to Ethics

Summer, 2020

MTWR 10:45am-12:45pm est

*Instructor:* Benjamin Elzinga

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## Office Hours:

Thursday, 10:45am-12:45pm est

## Course Description:

The course serves as a general introduction to ethics. The course begins by examining meaning, value, and the good life. Using the concept of virtue as a bridge, we then transition to normative ethics. This is the branch of ethics which asks how one ought to act in order to be moral. We will compare classic approaches which attempt to address this question in terms of a general principle. Next, we will address topics in meta-ethics. This is the branch of ethics which focuses on morality itself: its foundations, status, and scope. While normative ethics asks after how one ought to act, metaethics asks (among other things) after the meaning of moral claims and what grounds (if anything) their truth (if they are indeed the sort of thing that can be true). We will end the course with a discussion of justice, oppression, and resistance.

## Course Goals:

- 1) Students will gain knowledge and appreciation of some of the deep problems in the history philosophy and will also have an opportunity to grapple with more contemporary issues in ethical theory and applied ethics.
- 2) Students will develop a set of analytic tools that will help them to find answers to hard theoretical questions, whether philosophical questions or questions that arise in their broader engagement with the world.

## Required Texts:

All other required materials for the course will consist of articles or brief excerpts from larger philosophical works distributed via Blackboard.

## Course Requirements:

Your course grade will be based on three short papers (3 pages, times new roman, 12 point font, double spaced) and participation including weekly reflection assignments or in class quizzes:

### 1) 5 Short Papers (each worth 15% of total grade)

In these papers, your task will be to do some philosophy yourself. Papers will, for example, ask you to present a philosopher's idea, present an objection to a philosopher's argument, or ask you to apply a philosopher's idea to real world phenomena. Paper prompts will offer a list of topics to choose from.

### 2) Weekly Assignments (15% of total grade)

Students will be required to complete short weekly assignments to assess their level of engagement with the material and to facilitate in class participation. These will normally be assigned for the Thursday (asynchronous) class session.

### 3) Participation (10% of total grade)

The material that we are going to cover in this class is difficult and likely to be unfamiliar. Thus, careful attention to each text will be expected and required. There will always be some opportunity for you to ask pressing and important questions, bring up something you find confusing, raise an objection against something we've read, etc.

Your participation grade will be determined by your active, participation in class. Receiving full credit will require zero unexcused absences and a consistent effort to genuinely engage with the material and with your classmates each time we meet.

#### Late Work and Extensions:

Late papers will automatically be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc) for each day that they are late. Extensions may be possible but only if requested and approved before the due date.

#### Grading:

These are the general criteria I use for assigning specific grades on written work. What matters most is not the content of your ideas, but the expression of them.

A: original ideas very clearly expressed and organized; full grasp of the material and its implications; especially insightful reflection on the relevant texts

B: reasonably original ideas clearly expressed and organized; good grasp of the material and its implications; good reflection on the relevant texts

C: adequate expression and organization of ideas; adequate grasp of the material and its implications; adequate reflection on texts

D: inadequate expression and organization of ideas; inadequate grasp of the material and its implications; inadequate reflection on texts

F: mostly for serious sins of omission, like turning in only part of an assignment

#### Academic Integrity

This course will be conducted under the strictest standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism or other forms of dishonesty are contradictory to the goals of this class and hence, will not be tolerated. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be referred to the Honor Council for investigation, and I reserve the right to fail a student for the entire course in the case of demonstrated violation. Please see *The Undergraduate Bulletin* or, for more information, visit the university's Honor System website at <http://www.georgetown.edu/honor>. The website has useful guidelines about what constitutes plagiarism and how to cite properly.

## Health Help

### 1. Student Health Center

“The health center is staffed by Family Practice faculty physicians and nurse practitioners with particular training and experience in college health, and who are dedicated to providing high quality health care.”

- <http://www3.georgetown.edu/student-affairs/health/index.html>
- Ground Floor, Darnall Hall

### 2. Counseling and Psychiatric Service

“CAPS offers a broad range of psychological and psychiatric services that attempt to balance the unique needs of individual students with the broader demands of a diverse campus community. Accordingly, in order to best serve the needs of our campus at large, open-ended or extended psychotherapy and medication maintenance services are limited and cannot be routinely offered. Such service offerings are based on staff availability and student need.”

- <http://caps.georgetown.edu/>

### 3. Health Education Services

“Health Education Services is comprised of health professionals who are available to help students deal with a range of personal health issues, including pregnancy, alcohol and drug use and abuse, adult children of alcoholics, eating disorders, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, sexual health, stress management, and general health promotion. In addition, Emotional Intelligence is an area of interest and expertise for the staff of Health Education Services. All services are individualized, confidential, and free for students, unless otherwise stated. Staff members are also available to facilitate training and educational programs in these areas.”

- <http://www3.georgetown.edu/student-affairs/healthed/staff.html>

**Course Schedule:  
(subject to revision)**

#	Date	Topic	Reading
<b>Good and Meaningful Life</b>			
1	7/6	Hedonism	Mill, "Hedonism" Nozick, "The Experience Machine"
2	7/7	Two Conditions	Wolf, "Happiness and Meaning"
3	7/8	Existential Approaches	Camus, "Myth of Sisyphus" Nietzsche, selections from <i>The Gay Science</i>
4	7/9	Virtue and the Good Life	Aristotle, "The Nature of Virtue" <b>Module</b>
	7/12	<b>Paper 1 Due</b>	Due at 11:59pm est
<b>Normative Ethics</b>			
5	7/13	Virtue Ethics	Annas, "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing" Badhwar, "The Milgram Experiments, Learned Helplessness, and Character Traits"
6	7/14	Utilitarianism	Mill, "Utilitarianism" Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism"
7	7/15	Deontology	Kant: Selections from <i>Groundwork</i> Onora O'Neil, "A Kantian Approach to Famine Relief"
8	7/16	Why be Moral?	Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints" <b>Module</b>
	7/19	<b>Paper 2 Due</b>	Due at 11:59pm est
<b>Meta-Ethics</b>			
9	7/20	Two Kinds of Egoism	Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism" Rachels, "Ethical Egoism"
10	7/21	Relativism	Gensler, "Cultural Relativism"
11	7/22	Error Theory	Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values"
12	7/23	Objectivism	Sher, "But I could be wrong" Enoch, "Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics" <b>Module</b>
	7/26	<b>Paper 3 Due</b>	Due at 11:59pm est
<b>Justice and Oppression</b>			
13	7/27	Justice and Oppression:	Young, "Five Faces of Oppression" Sandra Bartky, "On Psychological Oppression"
14	7/28	Justice and Oppression	Rawls, Selections from "A Theory of Justice"
15	7/29	Blame and Forgiveness	Coates and Tognazzini, "The Contours of Blame" Walker, "Forgiving"

16	7/30	Individual Responsibility in Collective Settings	Young, "From Guilt to Solidarity" Laura Valentini, "Ideal vs. Non-Ideal Theory" <b>Module</b>
	8/2	<b>Paper 4 Due</b>	Due at 11:59pm est
<b>Solidarity, Dissent, Civil Disobedience</b>			
17	8/3	Solidarity	Shelby, Foundations of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity or Common Oppression? Kolers, <a href="https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/04/30/the-moral-duty-of-solidarity/">https://www.philosophersinamerica.com/2018/04/30/the-moral-duty-of-solidarity/</a>
18	8/4	Impure Dissent	Shelby, "Impure Dissent"
19	8/5	Fight for Freedom	Fanon, "Reciprocal Bases of National Culture and the Fight for Freedom"
20	8/6	Civil Disobedience	<a href="http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/civil-disobedience/">http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/civil-disobedience/</a> Recommended Background: Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience", MLK, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" <b>Module</b>
	8/6	<b>Paper 5 Due</b>	Due at 11:59pm est