

# PHIL 110

## Ethics

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### DESCRIPTION

In this course we will reflect on what philosophers call the good life. What is the purpose of human existence? Is there a purpose or highest human good? What is the relation between thought and practice? How can philosophical inquiry help us make sense of the rightness and wrongness of action? Is there a connection between the individual and the collective good? Does the human good involve the good of nonhumans? How do social structures shape and determine our understanding of the good and, more importantly, our ways of pursuing it in practice? By pairing primary texts with supplementary contemporary texts, we will consider how ethical theories can potentially become problematic or otherwise fail to capture what it means to live the good life in today's contemporary context.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- Critically summarize and discuss (via well-grounded arguments) their own understanding of a diverse range of philosophical problems and positions, in both writing and discussion.
- Analyze, synthesize, and situate multiple texts in the service of developing their own ideas.
- Formulate complex, stakes-filled inquiries supported by properly integrated evidence.
- Develop responsible and generative research methods.
- Compose an articulate and well-argued essay presenting philosophical positions in a way that critically addresses fundamental issues and questions. This includes writing an effective thesis statement, supplying strong supporting arguments, making an effective use of language, and successfully incorporating and citing source material.

### REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

The following are the core texts for this class. Be sure to purchase *these* specific editions:

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Edited by Roger Crisp (Cambridge University Press). ISBN: 9781107612235. [AMAZON](#).
- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Edited by Ben Eggleston (Hackett), ISBN: 9781624665455. [AMAZON](#)
- Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Trans. J.W. Ellington (Hackett), ISBN 0-87220-167-8. [AMAZON](#)
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground, and The Gambler*, Trans. Jane Kentish (Oxford World Classics), ISBN: 0199536384. [[AMAZON](#)].

All other readings and other materials will be made available in PDF format.

## ASSIGNMENTS

### ***Weekly participation exercises and quizzes (25%)***

On most weeks where we have new reading material, there will be a participation exercise. These will rotate between (i) reading comprehension quizzes (graded by points), as well as (ii) forum posts and (iii) group exercises (both of which are graded pass/no-pass).

### ***Midterm essay — 25% of your grade.***

The midterm will be a 5-6 page take-home essay assignment. This assignment will focus on exegesis of key texts, analysis of argumentation, as well as comparison of contrasting positions. The assignment will incorporate in-class peer review modules (worth 5% of the assignment), allowing students to evaluate one another's work and collaborate in the revision and refinement of the essay-writing process.

### ***Group Presentations (20%)***

In the final weeks of the semester, in groups of approximately three to five, students will give a 30-45 minute presentation to the class about a contemporary issue they have researched. The purpose of the presentation is to reflect on our world using the ethical theories we learn this semester, as well as to refine skills such as scholarly research methodology, oration, rhetoric, and persuasive writing. The focus of the presentation should be a thoughtful and critical analysis of one important contemporary ethical dilemma or controversy on which at least two or more morally plausible positions exist. Your presentation will conclude by posing several challenging questions to the class, which will serve as the basis for Forum discussions and responses, which your group will moderate.

### ***Final essay — 30% of your grade.***

The final paper will be a 7-8 page take-home essay assignment. This assignment will have the same structure as the midterm, while also incorporating the use of scholarly secondary source material discovered by the students.

## SCHEDULE

### **Week 1: Introduction & course overview**

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I.1-5,

### **Week 2: Virtue Ethics: Virtues of Character**

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I (7, 13), Book II
- Mayo, "Virtue Ethics"

### **Week 3: Virtue Ethics: Virtues of Character**

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III (6-10); Book IV  
*Quiz 1*

### **Week 4: Virtue Ethics: Contemporary interventions**

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IV
- Chamayou, "A Crisis in Military Ethos," from *A Theory of the Drone*
- Russell, "In Praise of Idleness"  
*Short assignment #1 (What is virtuous today?)*

### **Week 5: The Need for Moral Laws**

- Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface, First Section
- Onora O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics"

### **Week 6: The Categorical Imperative**

- Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Second Section (p.23-33 *only*)
- Singer, "All Animals are Equal"
- *Short assignment #2 (Group film analysis)*
  - Watch [Island of Lost Souls](#).
  - Working together with your group, draw connections between specific moments, themes, and lines in the film and specific passages and ideas in our reading from Kant.

### **Week 7: Midterm Paper Workshop & Peer Review**

*Midterm peer review.*

### **Week 8: Utilitarianism I: Of pleasure and pain**

- Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. I-III
- Quiz 2*

### **Week 9: Utilitarianism: Contemporary Interventions**

- Pojman, "Strengths and Weaknesses of Utilitarianism"\*\*\*
- Google, "The Selfish Ledger" (short [video](#)); Verve.com, "Google's *The Selfish Ledger* is an Unsettling Vision..." ([online](#)).
- *Short Assignment #3: "Objections and Replies to utilitarianism"*

### **Week 10: Utilitarianism's Pessimistic Critic**

- Dostoevsky, *Notes From Underground*, Part I
- *In-class group assignment: "Dostoevsky's objections to Mill"*

### **Week 11: Ethic and Otherness**

- Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Selections)
- Quiz 3*

### **Week 12: Precarity, Responsibility, and War**

- Levinas and Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas"
- Butler, "Precarious Life," from *Precarious Life*

### **Week 13: Speaking for Others**

- Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others" (skip Section II).
  - Haggerty, "Speaking for Others: Epistemology and Ethics"
- Short Assignment #4 (Argument analysis)*

**Week 14: Bureaucracy I: The Banality of Evil**

- Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Selections)
- Jones, “Denying Ethics: Bureaucracy”  
Film: *Hannah Arendt*  
*Short Assignment #5 (Film Response Assignment)*

**Week 15: Bureaucracy II: Structural Violence and Responsibility**

- Graeber, “Dead Zones of the Imagination: An Essay on Structural Stupidity,” from *The Utopia of Rules*
- Young, “Political Responsibility and Structural Injustice”  
*Quiz 4*  
*In-class group presentations*

**Week 16: Group Presentations | Final Paper Peer Review**

*In-class group presentations*  
*Final paper peer review*