

## **PHIL 1005.002 – INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS (FALL 2023)**

This course serves as an introduction to some of the key issues and theories in contemporary ethics or moral philosophy. We begin by briefly considering a “metaethical” question about the status of morality: Is morality relative, or are there objective moral truths out there to be discovered? We then turn to three concrete questions in “applied ethics”: What obligations do we have to give to charity, or to otherwise benefit those in need? What is the morality of abortion? And how should we treat nonhuman animals (for example, is it okay to eat them)? Next, we turn to three more theoretical questions in “normative ethics” about the structure of morality: Is morality mainly about producing good consequences? Is it mainly about following the right rules? Or is it about having good character traits—about being a good person? Finally, we return to the same sort of metaethical questions with which we began the course, asking: Is morality *really* objective? How, if at all, does morality relate to God? And why should we be moral? In addressing these questions, our aim is not to answer them once and for all, but rather to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of different moral positions, the considerations and traditions of thought behind them, and how, more generally, to think about such issues—both individually and in discussion with others.

**Instructor:** Jacob Barrett

**Location and Meeting Time:** Monday/Wednesday/Friday at 10:10-11:00am in Buttrick Hall 306

**Email:** [jacobaribaret@gmail.com](mailto:jacobaribaret@gmail.com) (I will do my best to respond to all emails within 48 hours)

**Office Hours:** TBD in Furman 103

**Required Text:** All readings will be available on Brightspace

**Learning Goals:** By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- (1) Understand and critically assess a text addressing an ethical or philosophical question.
- (2) Understand the central ethical issues and theories we investigate in this course.
- (3) Critically assess other ethical issues and theories, besides those covered in this course.
- (4) Engage in productive and respectful ethical discussions with you peers.
- (5) Write a brief argumentative essay discussing an ethical issue.

**Classroom Expectations:** One of the primary ways we will pursue the above learning goals is through lectures, discussions, and other in-class activities. Here, the expectation is that you come to class having done the reading, that you pay attention, and that you actively participate in discussions and activities. I will often seek feedback (sometimes anonymously, but sometimes more informally in person) about how well in-class activities are going and what I might be doing differently.

*Reading:* I have not assigned a whole lot of reading: before coming to class most days you will have one or two readings totaling about 10 (and never more than 12) pages. In exchange, I ask only that you carefully read the assigned pages. I have included a schedule of readings at the end of the syllabus, but that list is tentative and subject to change (with reasonable notice) if it seems better to slow down, speed up, or change direction. This is something else I will seek frequent feedback about throughout.

*Participation:* It is great if you participate enthusiastically, and essential that you do so respectfully—especially during bits of the course where we are discussing controversial ethical issues. It is important to keep the focus on critically assessing arguments and positions, not the people suggesting them (or trying them out), and to remember that reasonable people can disagree. At the same time, please also keep in mind that we will sometimes be talking about real issues affecting real people, and that your peers may also reasonably feel quite passionately about them. I will provide opportunities for you to let me know (anonymously) if you have any concerns in this direction as the course progresses.

**Assessment:** Your final grade will depend on your performance in the following four categories:

Quizzes:	10%
First essay:	25%
Second Essay:	35%
Final Exam:	30%

I have selected these assessments in light of the above learning goals. Each should not only help me to assess your performance but should also (more importantly!) help you to achieve those goals.

*Quizzes* (10%): Most days, we will have a brief reading comprehension quiz at the beginning of class. You will receive half credit simply for completing a quiz, with the rest of your grade depending on getting the answers right. Occasionally, I may provide an alternative in-class assignment that will count toward your total quiz score, which I will grade only for completion. I may round up quiz scores in cases where questions prove too difficult or confusing and will drop your four lowest quizzes (including scores of zero from days where you have an excused or unexcused absence).

*First Essay* (25%): Your first essay will be due on **October 13**. I will provide further details closer to the date, but the basic idea will be to address one (or more) of the applied ethics topics we cover in class. I will give you a few essay topics to choose from.

*Second Essay* (35%): Your second essay will be due on **December 1**. I will again provide further details closer to the date, but this time the basic idea will be to apply one (or more) of the moral theories we are learning to some other applied moral issue besides those covered in class. I will give you a few essay topics to choose from, or you may come up with your own (as long as you clear it with me first).

*Final Exam* (30%): The final exam will be on **December 9**. It will be cumulative, covering all the material in the course. The exam will include “quiz questions” drawn from or similar to the questions you will be answering all term, as well as short essay questions similar to the possible topics from the First and Second Essay. I will provide some study materials and devote some class time to preparation.

**Academic Integrity:** It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with Vanderbilt’s [undergraduate Honor System](#). But basically: don't cheat on your quizzes or exam, and don't plagiarize your essays. The English Language Center has a helpful guide on [avoiding plagiarism](#). If you are ever in doubt about whether something qualifies as such, please don't hesitate to ask. If you are ever struggling and feel tempted cheat or plagiarize, please approach me instead about an extension or for extra help.

**Late Work:** I have a zero-tolerance policy for unexcused late work in this course. If you are unable to submit an essay by the due date or to make the exam, you must (except in case of emergency) let me know ahead of time, and you must explain why. Please note the emphasis here on “unexcused”: I am happy to discuss extensions (and so on) if you approach me ahead of time with a good reason.

**Accommodations:** I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all students. If you are facing any special difficulties or have a relevant disability or medical condition that requires specific accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably in person (but email is fine, too, if you are more comfortable with that). I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions. If appropriate, you may also contact [Student Access](#) for more information.

## Course Schedule

Introductions			
Week 1	M	Aug 21	NO MEETING
	W	Aug 23	Syllabus; Peter C. Brown et al., "Learning is Misunderstood" (~9 pages)
	F	Aug 25	James and Stuart Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (~9 pages); Allen Buchanan and Rachell Powell, "Instances of Moral Progress" (~1 page)
Applied Ethics, Part I: Charity			
Week 2	M	Aug 28	Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (~10 pages)
	W	Aug 30	John Arthur, "World Hunger and Moral Obligation" (~6 pages); Travis Timmerman, "A Reply to Singer" (~4 pages)
	F	Sep 1	Amia Srinivasan, "Stop the Robot Apocalypse" (~10 pages)
Week 3	M	Sep 4	Elizabeth Ashford, "Severe Poverty as an Unjust Emergency" (~8 pages)
	W	Sep 6	Ryan Pevnick, "Democratizing the Nonprofit Sector" (~10 pages)
	F	Sep 8	Spillover
Applied Ethics, Part II: Abortion			
Week 4	M	Sep 11	Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, "The Wrong of Abortion" (~6 pages); Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion" (~5 pages)
	W	Sep 13	Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral" (~5 pages); Perry Hendricks, "Even if the Fetus is Not a Person, Abortion is Immoral: The Impairment Argument" (~4 pages)
	F	Sep 15	Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (~8 pages)
Week 5	M	Sep 18	Gina Schouten, "Fetuses, Orphans, and a Famous Violinist: On the Ethics and Politics of Abortion" (~10 pages)
	W	Sep 20	Susan Sherwin, "Abortion Through a Feminist Ethics Lens" (~9 pages); Dorothy Roberts, "Reproductive Justice, Not Just Rights" (~3 pages)
	F	Sep 22	Spillover
Applied Ethics, Part III: Animals			
Week 6	M	Sep 25	Peter Singer, "All Animals are Equal" (~8 pages)
	W	Sep 27	Carl Cohen, "Do Animals Have Rights?" (~7 pages); Carl Cohen, "In Defense of Speciesism" (~2 pages)
	F	Sep 29	Mark Bryant Budolfson, "Is it Wrong to Eat Meat from Factory Farms? If so, Why?" (~10 pages)
Week 7	M	Oct 2	Jacob Barrett and Sarah Raskoff, "Ethical Veganism and Free Riding" (~8 pages); Rosalind Hursthouse, "Vegetarianism" (~2 pages)
	W	Oct 4	Cora Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People" (~5 pages); Melanie Joy, "To Love or to Eat?" (~6 pages)
	F	Oct 6	Spillover

Normative Ethics, Part I: Consequences			
<b>Week 8</b>	M	Oct 9	Jeremy Bentham, "On the Principle of Utility" (~4 pages); John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism" (~5 pages)
	W	Oct 11	Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine" (~2 pages); Chris Fraser, "Mohist Consequentialism" (~3 pages)
	<b>F</b>	<b>Oct 13</b>	Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem" (~4 pages); Bernard Williams, "Against Utilitarianism" (~4 pages); <b>FIRST ESSAY DUE</b>
Week 9	M	Oct 16	Julia Driver, "Consequentialism and Feminist Ethics" (~11 pages)
	W	Oct 18	John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules" (~10 pages)
	F	Oct 20	NO MEETING (FALL BREAK)
Normative Ethics, Part II: Rules			
Week 10	M	Oct 23	Immanuel Kant, "The Moral Law" (~6 pages); Onora O'Neil, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics" (~3 pages)
	W	Oct 25	Christine Korsgaard, "Kant's Formula of Universal Law" (~11 pages)
	F	Oct 27	T. M. Scanlon, "The Structure of Contractualism" (~8 pages)
Week 11	M	Oct 30	W. D. Ross, "What Makes Right Actions Right?" (~9 pages)
	W	Nov 1	Robert Nozick, "The Rationality of Side Constraints" (~3 pages); Shelly Kagan, "Constraints" (~4 pages);
	F	Nov 3	Spillover
Normative Ethics, Part III: Character			
Week 12	M	Nov 6	Aristotle, "Virtue and Character" (~8 pages); Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory" (~3 pages)
	W	Nov 8	Margaret A. McLaren, "Care as a Virtue" (~11 pages)
	F	Nov 10	David Solomon, "Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics" (~5 pages); Thaddeus Metz, "The Virtues of African Ethics" (~4 pages)
Week 13	M	Nov 13	Robert N. Johnson, "Virtue and Right" (~12 pages)
	W	Nov 15	Julia Annas, "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing" (~9 pages)
	F	Nov 17	Spillover
BREAK	Nov 18-26	NO MEETINGS (THANKSGIVING)	
Metaethics			
<b>Week 14</b>	M	Nov 27	J. L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Value" (~9 pages);
	W	Nov 29	David Enoch, "Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics" (~12 pages)
	<b>F</b>	<b>Dec 1</b>	Plato, "Euthyphro" (~11 pages); <b>SECOND ESSAY DUE</b>
<b>Week 15</b>	M	Dec 4	Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints" (~11 pages)
	W	Dec 6	Spillover
	F	Dec 8	NO MEETING (READING DAY)
	<b>S</b>	<b>Dec 9</b>	<b>FINAL EXAM, 9:00-11:00am</b>