



Spring 2023 PHIL 340—Ethics

Time: Tuesday and Thursday 5-6:20PM

Location: THH 215

Instructor: Anthony Nguyen

Pronouns: He/Him/His

Email: anthony.nguyen.1@usc.edu

Office Hours: Thursday 2-4PM in MHP courtyard

Course Description

What is the difference between right and wrong? The answer to this question has important implications for how we should live. For most of the course, we will investigate influential ethical theories that purport to answer this question. In the remainder of the course, we will survey several other topics of interest to ethicists: doing versus allowing harm, the ethics of belief, moral luck, the relation between culture and moral responsibility, and the duties of the oppressed under conditions of social injustice. Students will practice using critical reasoning to evaluate philosophical views and arguments in ethics.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to do the following:

- Recognize major claims made when reading philosophical texts about ethics,
- Describe several influential theories and views in normative ethics,
- Develop clear and well-reasoned arguments for these theories and views,
- Develop clear and well-reasoned objections against these theories and views, and
- Philosophically evaluate the arguments and objections to these theories and views.

Components of Course Grade

Your final grade in this course will be determined by 5 components:

1. **In-Class Quizzes:** These are multiple-choice, closed-note, and in-class pop quizzes assessing your understanding of assigned readings. There will be 10 given throughout the semester, and your grade on this component will be determined by your performance on the 5 that you perform best on. For example, you can receive a perfect score on this component of your grade if your answers for 5 quizzes are perfect, even if you completely fail (or do not submit anything) for the other 5 quizzes. For another example, if you only take 4 in-class quizzes but give perfect answers to them, you will receive 80% credit for this component of your final grade. As these are pop quizzes, *they will be given on random class meetings*. They will always be given in the beginning, or near the beginning, of a class meeting. Any quiz given in a class will be on the reading(s) assigned for that day. No more than one quiz will be given during any single class. There is no option to do a make-up quiz *unless* you have an excused absence for the class meeting in which that quiz is given; in that case, email me to determine when you will take a make-up quiz. Make-up quizzes will always be different from the quizzes originally given in class.

2. **Short Essays:** These are 300-400-word essays in which you answer the prompt provided. The prompt for any writing assignment will be given at least one week before its deadline. 5 short writing assignment prompts will be provided over the course of the semester. *You only need to complete 3 short assignments. You are not permitted to work on more than 3.* However, you are allowed to revise and resubmit exactly one of short assignments 1-4 in light of my comments if you choose to do so. In that case, your previous grade on that assignment will be replaced by the new one. Revised short assignments must be submitted to me over email by 4/27, the last day of class.

3. **Midterm Assignment:** Your work on this assignment will consist of 300-400-word responses to 3 prompts. Your work on this assignment should therefore be 900-1,200 words in total. 5 prompts will be given at least 2 weeks before the deadline, which is on 2/17. *You only need to answer 3 of the prompts. You are not permitted to answer more than 3.*

4. **Final Paper:** The final paper will be 2,500-3,000 words long. 3 paper prompts will be provided at least 4 weeks before the deadline, which is on 4/7. You may choose to write a paper responding to one of these prompts. However, you are free to propose a prompt of your own choosing to work on. But it must be relevant to the course and be approved by me by 3/24, which is 2 weeks before the deadline. You may email me a rough draft of your final paper by 3/24. If you choose to do so, I will return comments within a week so that you get feedback from me at least a week before the submission deadline.

5. **Final Exam:** This non-cumulative exam, scheduled for 4:30-6:30pm on 5/4, will consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, and long-answer questions. Any material discussed in readings or lecture covered *after* 2/17, the midterm assignment deadline, may appear on this exam. You will have 2 hours to complete the exam. It will be a closed-note exam. By 4/13, which is 3 weeks before the final exam, a study guide and more concrete details on the exam format will be provided.

Grade Breakdown

Assessment Tool	% of Final Grade	Deadlines and Exam Period
In-Class Quizzes	20	N/A
Short Essays	20	1/25, 2/10, 3/3, 3/24, and 4/14
Midterm Assignment	20	2/17
Final Paper	20	4/7
Final Exam	20	5/4 from 4:30-6:30pm

Grading Scale

Letter grades in this course will be determined using the following 100-point scale:

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82

C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assigned Readings

All assigned readings will be uploaded to Blackboard. *No textbook is required for this course.* You are expected to do the reading assigned for a day before class meets that day.

Grading Timeline

I will return grades and comments on a short essay, midterm assignment, and final paper within 3 weeks of whichever of the following is later: its deadline or date of submission.

Communication Timeline

The best way to contact me about the course is through office hours or email. I will respond to emails within 3 days, including days of the weekend.

Late Work, Extensions, and Excused Absences

There is no late penalty for submitting short essays, midterm assignments, and final papers if they are *no more* than 2 days late. *Work that is 3 or more days late will be penalized by 5% every day that it is more than 2 days late.* If you submit something 1 minute late, I will count that as a day late. If it is 24 hours and 1 minute late, I will count that as two days late. And so on. For example, if you submit your midterm assignment 48 hours and 1 minute late, that counts as 3 days late. Then the highest possible grade that you could receive on your midterm assignment would be a 95% A. For another example, if you submit your midterm assignment 96 hours and 1 minute late, that counts as 5 days late. Then the highest possible grade that you could receive on your midterm assignment would be a 85% B.

Extensions are possible on a case-by-case basis. For example, illness and family emergencies that hinder your ability to complete an assignment on time are valid reasons for requesting an extension. Extensions must be approved by me, ideally but not necessarily before the original deadline. Please contact me if you need an extension. An analogous policy holds for excused absences.

Recommendations

Come to class when you can! If you miss class (even with an excused absence), review the slides uploaded later for that class. But these slides will not cover all the material discussed in class, so I recommend that you either get notes from another student or meet me in office hours.

Carefully read the assigned readings! Even when philosophers write clearly, philosophy is hard and requires keen attention to detail. Having to read slowly and attentively is the norm, not the exception. Even then, rereading a philosophical work is often necessary to really understand the arguments made in it. When reading a philosophical work, don't forget to charitably interpret the

author's view and argument(s). That is, for any philosophers we read, try to attribute the most plausible views and arguments to them that are consistent with the text.

In your work, prioritize quality over quantity! For example, it is better to clearly state and carefully defend one argument for your conclusion than to briefly sketch and defend 3 independent arguments for that same conclusion. Sometimes in this course, you will read philosophers who give several arguments for their conclusion. But they generally have the privilege of having much more space to state and defend their arguments than you will in your work for this assignment. In your final paper, the longest assignment for the course, you *only* have a maximum of 3,000 words to review the relevant background material, argue for your conclusion, object to relevant views besides yours, as well as consider and reply to reasonable objections to your own conclusion or to your argument for it. That is a lot to do. For philosophical writing, 3,000 words are not much at all. So, when you argue for a conclusion in your work for this class, I strongly recommend that you state only one argument and make it well.

Come to office hours if you would like to discuss course material or logistics! Office hours are a time in which my job is to help you succeed in this course in a one-on-one setting. If you are unable to meet during the time scheduled for my office hours (Thursdays 2-4pm), please contact me to schedule another time to meet.

Course Schedule: Weekly Breakdown

This course consists of two modules, or parts, as described below. Readings and important dates are listed. When a reading is assigned for a given day, read it before class meets that day.

Module 1: Ethical Theories

Week 1: Introduction and Divine Command Theory

- T 1/10 Reading: None
- Th 1/12 Reading: Course Syllabus and Jeremy Koons, "Can God's Goodness Save the Divine Command Theory from Euthyphro?"

Week 2: Cultural Relativism and Moral Universalism

- T 1/17 Reading: Julia Driver, "The Challenge to Moral Universalism"
- Th 1/19 Reading: Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others"

Week 3: Ethical Egoism

- T 1/24 Reading: James Rachels, "Ethical Egoism"
- **W 1/25: Short Essay #1 Due**
- Th 1/26 Reading: Kim-Chong Chong, "Egoism, Desires, and Friendship"

Week 4: Act Utilitarianism

- T 1/31 Reading: Henry Sidgwick, excerpt from *The Methods of Ethics*
- Th 2/2 Reading: Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas;" Judith Thomson, excerpt from "The Trolley Problem;" and Émile Torres "Against Longtermism"

Week 5: Rule Consequentialism

- T 2/7 Reading: Brad Hooker, “Rule-Consequentialism”
- Th 2/9 Reading: Frances Howard-Snyder, “Rule Consequentialism is a Rubber Duck”
- **F 2/10: Short Essay #2 Due**

Week 6: Sophisticated Consequentialism

- T 2/14 Reading: Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality”
- Th 2/16 Reading: Neera Badhwar Kapur, “Why is it Wrong to be Always Guided by the Best: Consequentialism and Friendship”
- **F 2/17: Midterm Assignment Due**

Week 7: Kant’s Deontology and the Categorical Imperative

- T 2/21 Reading: James Fieser, “Kant’s Categorical Imperative”
Optional: Immanuel Kant, excerpt from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*
- Th 2/23 Reading: Pauline Kleingeld, “How to Use Someone ‘Merely as a Means’”

Week 8: Rights-Based Deontology

- T 2/28 Reading: Peter Jones, “The Morality of Rights”
- Th 3/2 Reading: Judith Thomson, “Tradeoffs”
- **F 3/3: Short Essay #3 Due**

Week 9: Virtue Ethics

- T 3/7 Reading: Rosalind Hursthouse, “Right Action”
Optional: Aristotle, excerpt from *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Th 3/9 Reading: Ramon Das, “Virtue Ethics and Right Action”

Spring Break: 3/12-3/19

Week 10: Care Ethics

- T 3/21 Reading: Stephanie Collins, “Care Ethics: The Four Key Claims”
- Th 3/23 Reading: Virginia Held, “Caring Relations and Principles of Justice”
- **F 3/24: Short Essay #4 Due**

Module 2: Other Topics in Ethical Theory

Week 11: Doing versus Allowing Harm

- T 3/28 Reading: Judith Lichtenberg, “The Moral Equivalence of Action and Omission”
- Th 3/30 Reading: Fiona Woollard, “Doing, Allowing, and Imposing”

Week 12: The Ethics of Belief

- T 4/4 Reading: Rima Basu, “The Wrongs of Racist Beliefs”
- Th 4/6 Reading: Briana Toole, “From Standpoint Epistemology to Epistemic Oppression”
- **F 4/7: Final Paper Due**

Week 13: Moral Luck

- T 4/11 Reading: Eduardo Rivera-Lopez, “How to Reject Resultant Moral Luck Alone” and Susan Wolf, “The Moral of Moral Luck”
- Th 4/13 Reading: Michael Otsuka, “Moral Luck: Optional, Not Brute”
- **F 4/14: Short Essay #5 Due**

Week 14: Culture and Moral Responsibility

- T 4/18 Reading: Michele Moody-Adams, “Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance”
- Th 4/20 Reading: Neil Levy, “Cultural Membership and Moral Responsibility”

Week 15: The Duties of the Oppressed and Final Exam Review

- T 4/25 Reading: Tommie Shelby, “Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto”
- Th 4/27 Reading: None
Final Exam Review Lecture
Revised Assignments Due (Optional)

Final Exam: 4:30-6:30pm on Thursday, 5/4 in THH 215

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.