



Spring 2025 PHIL 340 - Ethics
Time: Mon/Wed 12:30pm - 1:50pm
Location: WPH B30

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Office Hours: Tuesday 12-2PM in MHP B5C or by appointment

***Tentative Syllabus: subject to minor changes!**

Course Overview: we have many intuitive judgements about which actions are right or wrong. In this class, we will study the basics of Normative Ethics, the subarea of ethics where we try to find general principles and theories that explain our moral judgements. By doing so, we can understand what *makes* an action right or wrong, offer principled reasons for rejecting some moral judgements that initially seemed appealing, and ultimately use these principles and theories to shed light on moral issues and dilemmas that we have no clear intuitive judgements about.

Throughout the history of normative ethics, we can find that most normative theories converge on three types of classic approaches: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. This class will be an in-depth dive into these three theories. We will cover one theory at a time, starting with its historical roots, its modern versions and debates, and finally its applications.

Learning Objectives: after this course, you will be able to:

1. Articulate reasoned answers to the central question of normative ethics, what makes an act right or wrong, by appealing to three classic approaches.
2. Evaluate and compare the prominent versions of these classic approaches from past to present and compare these three approaches with each other.
3. Apply your knowledge to concrete moral dilemmas to offer reasoned analyses and suggestions.

Texts: for this course, we will mostly read papers and selections from books. All books and papers will be available online or accessible in electronic form from USC library for free. See the “Readings (with Links)” section after the course schedule on p.5.

Assignments and Grading Breakdown

1. **Practice Reflection (5%):** this will be a 1-2 page short assessment that’s graded on effort (and I’ll give more comments based on the writing expectations). You’ll answer one theoretical question and one applied question. It’s meant to give you a chance to figure out how these reflections pieces will work in this class.
2. **Theoretical Reflections (10% × 3 = 30%):** three of these. For 2-3 pages (double-spaced), you will answer some questions that ask you to compare the different versions of the normative theory just covered and evaluate them based on their theoretical virtues and potential flaws. As the semester goes on and the more theories we cover, you will also sometimes be asked to compare the different theories with each other. [Objective 1&2]

3. Application Reflections (10% × 3 = 30%): three of these. for 2-3 pages (double-spaced), you will be asked to apply the theory we just covered to analyze a set of moral dilemmas. Some of these moral dilemmas will be recurring, and as the semester goes on you might be asked about how different theories might give different verdicts to the same case. [Objective 1&3]

**Depending on how these reflections go, I might decide to add an option to drop an assignment grade and let you average the other five!*

4. Paper & Possible Revision (30%): 1000-2000 words. You'll have a lot of freedom in this assignment and you can keep thinking about and working on it throughout the semester. You can choose from three due dates and three types of topics: [Objective 1-3]

1) In-depth paper on one normative theory: you can choose one of the three normative theories for in-depth discussion. You can turn in your paper at any due date after we finish covering the theory (e.g. for deontology, choose from due date 2 or 3).

2) Comparing two theories: you can choose to compare two out of the three theories. You can turn in your paper at any due date after we finish covering both theories you want to write about.

3) Survey of all three theories: if you choose this, your paper will be due on due date 3. This is a good option if you feel like you don't have a lot to say about one or two of the theories and want to instead write a survey paper of all the theories.

I highly recommend meeting with me once about your outline & topic choice. No matter what paper topic you choose, you will get a chance to revise the paper after another meeting with me. This won't decrease your grade and can potentially improve your grade by one letter grade (e.g. from a B to an A). The latest due date for the revision will be on May 14th, and this applies even if you wrote a paper for an earlier due date (meaning you get a lot of flexibility on when you want to submit your revision if you finished the paper early). This also means that you can potentially change your topic if you realize for example you'd rather include some discussion of a new theory.

5. Participation (5%): you can earn this grade by actively participating in class discussions (asking questions, answering questions or engaging with your classmates in discussion). You can also earn this grade by coming to office hours with questions, especially when you had to miss a class. Strict attendance won't be taken but frequent absences will reflect negatively on this grade.

Course Grading Scale

Letter grade	Numerical point range
A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-90
B	83-87
B-	80-83
C+	77-80
C	73-77
C-	70-73
D+	67-70
D	63-67
D-	60-63
F	59 and below

For reflections, you can earn a 10 out of 10 (or 5 out of 5 for the practice one); for the paper, you're given a letter grade. Deadlines for all assignments can be found in the course schedule below.

Lateness Policy: if you have valid reasons (such as illness, religious holidays, family reasons, event conflicts, etc.) with reasonable proof for not being able to submit an assignment on time, you should let me know well before the assignment is due (unless extreme circumstances arise). If you want to submit an assignment late without these reasons, you will receive a penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade for every day the assignment is overdue up to three days (your assignment won't be graded if it's late by more than three days). This is meant to give you more options: for example, if you think having one extra day to work on the assignment will help you drastically improve your assignment, you can take the small grade hit to work on it. NOTE: this doesn't apply to the Paper Revision, as there's a hard grade deadline!

Electronics: electronics are allowed in lectures. However, since I will upload detailed slides to Brightspace, I highly encourage you to refrain from using electronics as much as possible. Understanding the concepts and engaging with discussion are far more important than writing down all the details for you to do well in this course.

AI Policy: this course aims to develop creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, all assignments should be prepared by you and you may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Using AI-generated text or other content is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism and reported.

Course Schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Assignment Due</i>
<i>Week 1</i>	<i>Consequentialism</i>		
M Jan 13	Introduction		
W Jan 15	Mohist Consequentialism	1. Mozi , intro, ch. 16, 17, 26	
<i>Week 2</i>			
M Jan 20	[MLK Day]		
W Jan 22	Classic Utilitarianism	2. Utilitarianism , ch. 2-4	Prompt release
<i>Week 3</i>			
M Jan 27	Preference Utilitarianism	3. Heathwood (2016)	Practice Reflection due
W Jan 29	Rule Consequentialism	4. Hooker (1990)	
<i>Week 4</i>			
M Feb 3	Sophisticated Consequentialism	5. Railton (1984)	
W Feb 5	The Repugnant Conclusion	6. Reasons and Persons , ch. 17	Prompt release
<i>Week 5</i>			
M Feb 10	Animal Welfare	7. Singer (1989)	Theoretical Reflection 1 due
W Feb 12	Effective Altruism	8. Singer (1972)	Prompt release

<i>Week 6</i>	<i>Deontology</i>		
M Feb 17	[President's Day]		
W Feb 19	Kant's Formula of Universal Law	9. Groundworks , p.21-51	Application Reflection 1 due
<i>Week 7</i>			
M Feb 24	Kant's Formula of Humanity	9. Groundworks , Introduction by Korsgaard	Possible Paper due date 1
W Feb 26	Interpretation of Kant	10. Korsgaard (1986)	
<i>Week 8</i>			
M March 3	Rossian Deontology	11. Ross (1930)	
W March 5	Contractualism Part I	12. What We Owe To Each Other , ch. 4	
<i>Week 9</i>			
M March 10	Contractualism Part II	12. What We Owe To Each Other , ch. 5	
W March 12	Paradox of Deontology	13. Scheffler (1985)	Prompt release
<i>Week 10</i>	[Spring break]		
<i>Week 11</i>			
M March 24	Self-Respect and Obligation to Self	14. Hill (1973)	Theoretical Reflection 2 due
W March 26	Ethics of War	15. Nagel (1972)	Prompt release
<i>Week 12</i>	<i>Virtue Ethics</i>		
M March 31	Aristotle Part I: Eudaimonia and the Virtues	16. Nicomachean Ethics , book 1 & 2	Application Reflection 2 due
W April 2	Aristotle Part II: Practical Wisdom and Weakness of Will	16. Nicomachean Ethics , book 6 & 7	
<i>Week 13</i>			
M April 7	Mengzi's Virtue Ethics	17. Mengzi , intro, 2A6, 6A6, 6A8, 6A15, 7B31	Possible Paper due date 2
M April 9	Virtue Ethics Revival	18. Anscombe (1958)	
<i>Week 14</i>			
M April 14	Modern Virtue Ethics	19. Hursthouse (1999)	
W April 16	Do Virtues Really Exist?	20. Harman (1999)	Prompt released
<i>Week 15</i>			
M April 21	Virtue Ethics and Abortion	21. Hursthouse (1997)	Theoretical Reflection 3 due
W April 23	Climate Change and Virtues	22. Jamieson (2007)	Prompt released
<i>Week 16</i>	<i>Review</i>		
M April 28	TBD; e.g., normative uncertainty, <i>On What Matters</i>	TBD	Application Reflection 3 due
W April 30	Review & Summary		
F May 2	[Classes End]		Possible Paper due date 3
W May 14	[Last day of Exams]		Paper Revision due date

Readings (with library links)

Part I - Consequentialism

1. Mozi, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy (3rd Edition)*, ed. Ivanhoe and Van Norden (2023), Hackett Publishing Company
2. *Utilitarianism*, John Stuart Mill, the Floating Press
3. “Desire-Fulfillment Theory”, Chris Heathwood (2016), in *the Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*, p.135-147, ed. G. Fletcher
4. “[Rule-Consequentialism](#)”, Brad Hooker (1990), *Mind* 99, p.67-77
5. “[Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality](#)”, Railton (1984), *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13, p.134-171
6. *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit (1984) (chapter 17), Oxford University Press
7. “All Animals Are Equal”, Singer (1989), in *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, p.215-226, ed. Regan & Singer. [On Brightspace]
8. “[Famine, Affluence and Morality](#)”, Singer (1972), *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, p.229-243

Part II - Deontology

9. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Immanuel Kant (*NOTE that we will be using this version: ed. Gregor and Timmerman (2012), Cambridge University Press)
10. “[The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil](#)”, Korsgaard (1986), *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 15, p.325-349
11. “[What Makes Right Acts Right?](#)”, in Ross (1930), *The Right and the Good*, Oxford University Press
12. *What We Owe to Each Other*, Scanlon (1998) (chapters 4 & 5)
13. “[Agent-Centered Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues](#)”, Scheffler (1985), *Mind* 94, p.409-419
14. “[Servility and Self-Respect](#)”, Hill (1973), *the Monist* 57, p.87-104
15. “[War and Massacre](#)”, Nagel (1972), *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, p.123-144

Part III - Virtue Ethics

16. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (*NOTE that we will be using this version: ed. Crisp (2014), Cambridge University Press)
17. Mengzi, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy (3rd Edition)*, ed. Ivanhoe and Van Norden (2023), Hackett Publishing Company
18. “[Modern Moral Philosophy](#)”, Anscombe (1958), *Philosophy* 33, p.1-19
19. “Right Action”, in *On Virtue Ethics*, Hursthouse (1999), Oxford University Press
20. “[Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error](#)”, Harman (1999), *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99, p.315-331
21. “[Virtue Theory and Abortion](#)”, Hursthouse (1997), *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20, p.223-246
22. “[When Utilitarians Should be Virtue Ethicists](#)”, Jamieson (2007), *Utilitas* 19, p.160-183

Academic Conduct: The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university’s mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular

programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), 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.

Support Systems:

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-2500
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101
Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call
Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call
Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu
Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.