

Instructor: J. Neil Otte (jeffotte@buffalo.edu)
Class Room: #
Fall 20--

PHILOSOPHY 107: INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

Course Description

This course will introduce you to some of the most important historical ideas in philosophical ethics. We will look at four primary figures—Aristotle, Mill, Kant, and Nietzsche—in some depth, but we will also look at contemporary philosophers who are working on similar problems and approaches. Some of the topics we will be discussing include: the foundations of ethical theory; the major theories of normative ethics including Kantianism, Utilitarianism, Contractarianism, and Virtue Ethics; skeptical challenges to normative ethics including Relativism, Subjectivism, and Egoism; the relationship between religion and ethics; the origin of moral values. If time allows, we may also look at specific moral issues such as abortion, economic inequity, euthanasia, and capital punishment, though we'll likely be referring to issues like these throughout the class.

In order to do well in this course, you must prepare the assigned reading before each class. There are two tests and a paper covering the readings, as well as the occasional quiz. You should plan on spending an hour outside of class preparing for each hour inside class (this means identifying the argument(s) in the reading and reviewing them in preparation for the following class, as well as identifying any questions you have about the text). Philosophy is, in some ways, like learning a new language, so you will need to look through each reading slowly, looking up terms when they're unfamiliar, and carefully reconstructing arguments and positions. I am available during my office hours, by appointment, and I check my e-mail frequently so feel free to reach out to me if you have questions along the way.

Required Readings

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Second Edition. (ISBN: 0-87220-464-2)
Mill, J. S. *Utilitarianism*, Second Edition. (ISBN: 0-87220-605-X)
Kant, Immanuel, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (ISBN: 0-87220-166-X)

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. (ISBN: 978-0-39471-985-6)

For further readings: See Course Documents on BlackBoard

Recommended (but Not Required) Reading

[The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#): This is a valuable tool for clarifying ideas, but should **not** be used as a source in papers.

[The Elements of Moral Philosophy](#): by James and Stuart Rachels. This widely used text serves as an excellent introduction to many of the debates we'll be exploring in class. It's pricey for what it is, but there are used copies available if you find these issues interesting.

[UB Library Philosophy Resources](#): The databases should be used for finding an additional source for your paper. I particularly recommend Philosopher's Index and JSTOR.

Learning Outcomes

COURSE GOALS	METHOD OF EVALUATION
Demonstrate comprehension of important articles in moral psychology	Weekly Online Quizzes and Exams
Actively analyze and critique textual arguments	Online participation
Develop clear, original criticisms of the arguments and positions we read.	Assignments, Papers

Grade by Percentage

30%	Participation, Assignments, and Quizzes
25%	Exam 1
25%	Exam 2
20%	Paper

Grading Scale

A = 92-100%
A- = 90-91%
B+ = 88-89%
B = 82-87%
B- = 80-81%
C+ = 78-79%
C = 72-77%
C- = 70-71%
D+ = 68-69%
D = 60-67%
F = 59% and below

Online Reading Quizzes

Every article we read will be accompanied by an online reading quiz. These quizzes are meant to ensure that you are reading carefully, and to help you focus on the main issues and arguments in the text. Some quizzes may ask you to provide a definition from the text, while others might ask you to spell out the author's argument in your own words.

Examinations

There will be two exams: a midterm and a final. These will cover only the material within those periods. A week in advance, you will receive a list of possible short answer essay questions (twenty to twenty-five questions). You will need to prepare answers to these, and I recommend you work with others. On the day of the exams, you will not be able to use any preparation. The exams will present you with five of the possible questions from the list and you will need to answer four (i.e. you will need to choose one answer to leave blank). This means each answer will be worth 25% points. Answers should be clear, concise, and complete.

Paper

Students will need to write one research papers of 6-10 pages (not including the reference page). These papers can criticize one of our authors, or articulate an original argument on the basis of the evidence. You will need to run your topic by me in advance. The paper will need to use [MLA format](#) and include a separate page for references. See the paper topics and instruction handout for more details.

Accessibility Resources

Students who require accommodation should contact me within the first three days of the session, so that we can make appropriate arrangements with the accessibility office. To contact Accessibility Resources, please follow [this link](#).

Academic Honesty

As the world is increasingly online, it has become very easy to present the words and ideas of others as our own. This can be particularly tempting in an online course like this. *Resist this temptation*. All student work may be scanned by online plagiarism checkers, which are remarkably good at catching plagiarized work. Students who are discovered to have plagiarized will be dealt with according to the university's academic integrity policy. In particular, no work that includes plagiarism will be graded or allowed to be made up, and evidence of plagiarism may be grounds for filing a report with the academic integrity office. It is your responsibility to know what plagiarism is and to avoid it. There will be no exceptions. To educate yourself on what counts as plagiarism, please visit [this link](#) or reach out to me if you have specific questions. For more information on the University at Buffalo's policy on academic integrity, visit [this link](#).

Why Philosophy

I find a majority of students love philosophy, but increasingly, I encounter students who forego majoring because they are worried about paying student loans and getting a job. Contrary to their reputation, philosophy undergraduates do very well on the job market compared to many other majors. See [this link](#) for further information about pursuing philosophy. You don't need to choose between studying what you love and getting a job.

Course Schedule

September

Week One – *Philosophical Methods*

Week Two – *Plato*
Read: Euthyphro and Apology

Week Three – *Plato*
Read: Meno and Crito

Week Four – *Aristotle*
Read: Nicomachean Ethics

October

Week One – *Aristotle*
Read: Nicomachean Ethics

Week Two – *Aristotle*
Read: Nicomachean Ethics; Midterm 1

Week Three – *Mill*
Read: Utilitarianism

Week Four – *Mill*
Read: Utilitarianism

November

Week One – *Kant*
Read: Groundwork

Week Two – *Kant*
Read: Groundwork, Enlightenment

Week Three – *Hobbes*
Read: Leviathan

Week Four – *Nietzsche*
Read: The Gay Science Book 3

December

Week One – *Nietzsche*
Read: The Gay Science Book 4 and 5; Paper Due

Week Two – *TBA*
Read: TBA

Final Exam Due the Last Day of Class