

PHILOS 241: Introduction to Ethics

Instructor: Eric Wilkinson
Email: wilkinse@uwm.edu
Lectures: 1:00pm – 2:15pm, Tuesday & Thursday
Classroom: Curtin Hall 309
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10:00am

Course Description:

To live is to be confronted with moral decisions. Should I help a stranger in distress? Should I keep a promise despite the hurtful consequences? Should I donate time or money to this cause? Without an understanding of which principles should guide our actions, even everyday moral dilemmas can seem insurmountable. Ethics is the study of how one ought to conduct themselves, and it is ethical theories that provide principled answers to how one should act and what they should do in a given situation. The course begins by broaching fundamental questions about whether there are objective moral values, before examining some of the most prominent ethical theories, such as utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. This introduction to ethics is accessible to students with no previous background in philosophy. Upon completing this course, students will have a strong understanding of moral philosophy, and will have refined their critical reasoning and analytical writing abilities.

Assessment & Grading:

<i>Assignment:</i>	<i>Due Date:</i>	<i>Weight:</i>	<i>Description:</i>
Participation	Ongoing	10%	Contributing to in-class discussion groups.
Reading Responses	Weekly	10%	A weekly, written response to the readings.
Quizzes	See Schedule	20%	Six short-answer quizzes.
Midterm	March 27 th	30%	A midterm exam of short-answer questions.
Final Exam	TBD	40%	An exam of short and long answer questions.

Communication Policy: Before emailing, please consult the syllabus for an answer to your query. When emailing, use your university email address and allow at least 48 hours to receive a response.

Late Policy & Extensions: The penalty for late assignment submission is five percent (5%) a day. Extensions will be assessed individually and granted mainly for medical reasons or bereavement.

Disability Accommodations: Those who require disability accommodations must register with the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC). ARC will assist students in determining their needs and will help to communicate the accommodations for registered students to the course instructor.

Academic Integrity: The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee values academic integrity. Thus, students should understand the consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences.

Course Schedule

January 21st – May 8th, 2025
Schedule of Lectures & Readings

Date:	Lecture Topic:	Primary Reading:	Secondary Reading:
January 21 st	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?</i> – Part 1 (Russ Shafer-Landau) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Syllabus
January 23 rd	The Status of Morality		
January 28 th	Moral Skepticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?</i> – Part 2 (Russ Shafer-Landau) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Additional Readings
January 30 th			
February 4 th	Ethical Objectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?</i> – Part 3 (Russ Shafer-Landau) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Additional Readings
February 6 th	Quiz #1		
February 11 th	Divine Command Theory & Egoism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Egoism and Moral Skepticism” (James Rachels) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Euthyphro</i> [excerpts] (Plato)
February 13 th			
February 18 th	Utilitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Utilitarianism</i> [excerpts] (John Stuart Mill) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> [excerpts] (Jeremy Bentham)
February 20 th			
February 25 th	Critiques of Utilitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Experience Machine” (Robert Nozick) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (Ursula K. Le Guin)
February 27 th	Quiz #2		
March 4 th	Deontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> [excerpts] (Immanuel Kant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A Simplified Version of Kant’s Ethics” (Onora O’Neill)
March 6 th			
March 11 th	Critiques of Deontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Kant’s Principle of Universal Law” (Joshua Glasgow) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Paradox of Deontology” (Christopher McMahon)
March 13 th	Quiz #3		

March 18 th	Spring Recess: No Lectures	• No Readings	• No Readings
March 20 th			
March 25 th	Review Session	• No Readings	• No Readings
March 27 th	Midterm Exam		
April 1 st	Virtue Ethics	• <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> [excerpts] (Aristotle)	• “Normative Virtue Ethics” (Rosalind Hursthouse)
April 3 rd			
April 8 th	Critiques of Virtue Ethics	• “On Some Vices and Virtues of Virtue Ethics” (Robert B. Louden)	• “Skepticism about Character Traits” (Gilbert Harman)
April 10 th	Quiz #4		
April 15 th	Moral Pluralism	• “What Makes Right Acts Right?” (W.D. Ross)	• “Pluralism and the Value of Life” (John Kekes)
April 17 th			
April 22 nd	Critiques of Moral Pluralism	• “An Unconnected Heap of Duties?” (David McNaughton)	• “Ross-Style Pluralism Versus Rule Consequentialism” (Brad Hooker)
April 24 th	Quiz #5		
April 29 th	Feminist Ethics	• “An Ethic of Caring” (Nel Noddings)	• <i>The Ethics of Care</i> [excerpts] (Virginia Held)
May 1 st			
May 6 th	Critiques of Feminist Ethics	• <i>Moral Boundaries</i> [excerpts] (Joan Tronto)	• “Autonomy, Integrity, and Care” (Victoria Davion)
May 8 th	Quiz #6		

Course Readings:

All course readings are available on Canvas from the beginning of the course and consist of either standalone articles or excerpts from books. Each week there is a primary reading and a secondary reading. To understand the lectures and succeed on assignments, students must read both readings.