

INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

PHIL 1330

I. Course Description

This course is an introduction to some of the main questions and theoretical approaches in philosophical ethics. It is divided into three parts.

The first part of the course is an attempt to explain what is distinctive about *philosophical* ethics. We will do this by considering some skeptical doubts often raised about the effort to subject ethical standards to philosophical scrutiny and to lead one's life only in accordance with standards that withstand such scrutiny. What will emerge, I hope, is at least a preliminary vindication for the philosophical investigation of ethical questions that we will engage in throughout the remainder of the course.

In the second part of the course, we will examine three debates within what is often, though misleadingly, called "applied" ethics. This is the philosophical attempt to establish the moral status of *specific* types of acts or practices. In particular, we will investigate the moral status of abortion and affirmative action, and we will ask whether those living in developed countries have a duty to help alleviate global poverty.

The third, and by far largest, part of the course will focus on normative ethics. This is, roughly, the philosophical attempt to build theories that can tell us, at a fairly *general* level, what makes actions right, ends valuable, or people good. We will read some of the seminal texts of utilitarian, Kantian, and virtue ethics, and will seek to develop a sense of the theoretical strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

II. Course Objectives

The goals of the course are to:

- Develop essential philosophical skills, chief among which is the ability to identify, charitably interpret, and critically evaluate arguments.
- Develop your expository and critical writing skills.
- Introduce you to some of the central views in Western normative ethics and to some important debates in applied ethics.
- Introduce you to some of the central texts of Western normative ethics and to cultivate habits of close reading
- Enable you to clarify and systematize your own ethical intuitions.

III. Teaching Method

Instruction will consist of two main components: biweekly lectures and weekly recitations.

Lectures may sometimes need to meet synchronously on Zoom or be pre-recorded, but my hope is that this will happen only rarely, if at all (e.g., if I have COVID-like symptoms, if I must be out of town for a conference, or if I have a childcare emergency). For similar reasons, recitations may

sometimes need to meet synchronously.

IV. Evaluation Method

Your final grade will consist of the components described briefly in the following table. *No extra credit will be offered in this course.*

Assignment	Value	Tentative length	Description/Comments
First argument analysis	5%	3-4 pages	Argument analyses are structured writing assignments meant to train your philosophical skills. They will be based on arguments either in course texts, or in short texts I will make available specifically for the assignments.
Second argument analysis	10%		
Midterm exam	15%		A partial assessment of the skills we have trained, and material we have covered, through (roughly) the midpoint of the semester.
Paper	25%	6-7 pages	A critical philosophy paper on normative ethics.
Final exam	30%		A comprehensive assessment of the skills developed and the material covered in the course.
Attendance and participation	15%		Based on attendance to both lecture and recitation, on online discussion activities or reflections (if any), and on participation during recitation.