

Introduction to Ethics

PHL 2306

Instructor Information

Instructor

Dr. Justin Morton

Email

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Office Hours

Tues/Thurs. 11 AM – 12:30 PM
And by appointment

Office: CAS 113

General Information

Description of Course Content

You are all in college because you think it will make your life better. But what makes a life good?

When I was little, I used to pick on my little brother just for fun, and that was wrong. But why was it wrong?

Caligula was a notoriously sadistic Roman emperor. Suppose that he really thought he was doing the right thing in torturing someone—would it still be wrong? Or does its wrongness depend somehow on what Caligula believes?

These are some of the kinds of questions we will be considering this semester. We will investigate the nature of the good life, when and why acts are morally wrong, whether moral truths are objectively or only relatively true, and whether (and how) God is necessary for morality. The promise of this course is that you will understand and be able to reason clearly about some of the deepest questions about morality.

Course Objectives

- Understand and articulate basic ethical theories, such as utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and Aristotelian virtue ethics
- Reconstruct philosophical arguments for ethical positions using the tools of deductive logic
- Apply ethical theories to cases
- Give novel arguments for and against positions in ethics
- Analyze and evaluate extant arguments for positions in ethics
- Apply virtue ethics to one's own life by tracking one's own attempt to gain a single virtue

Course Materials

Required Materials

- All materials will be made available on Canvas

Course Schedule

Note: “RSL” refers to our course textbook—Russ Shafer-Landau’s *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. All readings outside this text are marked with an asterisk (*) and will be provided on Canvas.

Week	Topic	Readings and Major Assignments
Week 1	Introduction and Syllabus/ Basic Logic/	<i>Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking</i> , sections 1.1, 1.2, 1.6
Week 2	Logic	<i>Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking</i> , sections 1.3-1.5 Logic Exam
Week 3	Hedonism	Excerpt from Epicurus Nozick, “The Experience Machine
Week 4	Utilitarianism	Mill, excerpt <i>Utilitarianism</i> Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”
Week 5	Kant	Kant, selection from <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
Week 6	Aristotle	Aristotle, excerpt from the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
Week 7	[Case Studies]	No assigned reading
Week 8	[Midterm]	No assigned reading—midterm schedule given in class

Week	Topic	Readings and Major Assignments
Week 9	Relativism and Objectivism	Reading on relativism TBD David Enoch, “Why I am an Objectivist About Ethics”
Week 10	Why Be Moral?	Plato, selection from the <i>Republic</i>
Week 11	God and Morality	Plato, excerpt from <i>Euthyphro</i>
Week 12	Applied Ethics: Abortion	Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”
Week 13	Political Philosophy	Selections from Hobbes and Locke
Week 14	Political Philosophy: Is there an obligation to obey the law?	Plato, selection from <i>Crito</i>
Week 15	Final Exam	Final Exam

Evaluation

Virtue Journal | 10%

Quizzes | 15%

Logic Exam | 15%

Argument Reconstructions | 15%

Case Study | 10%

Midterm | 10%

Final Exam | 25%

*Extra credit: You can receive 5 points on your final grade if you successfully avoid *all* use of electronic devices (phones, computers, tablets, etc.) in class for the duration of the semester.

Virtue Journal. You will keep a journal throughout the semester chronicling your experiences trying to attain a virtue you will choose in our first week of class. This is a pass/fail grade.

Quizzes. Quizzes will be over the week's reading, and will be done in-class. They will typically be short, low-stakes, and gauge *basic* understanding of the reading. Quizzes cannot be made up but several will be dropped (which could include some you miss and subsequently get 0's on).

The **logic exam** will help you develop the ability to construct and evaluate formal arguments.

Argument Reconstructions. After the logic unit, we will start class most days with an "argument reconstruction." Your job in this part of class is to take an excerpt and accurately and validly reconstruct its core argument. I will circulate through class to help you construct and revise it.

Case Study. After we cover the 3 major ethical theories (Utilitarianism, Kantianism, and (Aristotle's) Virtue Ethics), we will spend a week in groups analyzing a case study. Your group will spend one day finding and evaluating a case according to one or multiple ethical theories, and then one day presenting your findings.

Group Verbal Midterm Exam. You will be organized into groups and be given time to prep. You will come into class on the day of the exam and I will ask you questions about the material we have covered. Your grade will be determined as a group, unless it's clear that one person did significantly better or worse than the other group members.

Final Exam. This will be cumulative and will be a mixture of types of question.

Grading Scale

A: 90-100%

B: 80-89%

C: 70-79%

D: 60-69%

F: 0-59%

Course Policies

AI Use

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

For this course, I expect all work students submit for this course to be their own. I have carefully designed all assignments and class activities to support your learning. Doing your own work, without human or artificial intelligence assistance, is best for your efforts in mastering course learning objectives. For this course, I expressly forbid using ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for any stages of the work process, including brainstorming. Deviations from these guidelines will be considered a violation of UT Tyler's Honor Code and academic honesty values.

Attendance

Attendance has no designated percentage of the course grade. However, quizzes are given in-class and cannot be made up; similarly with argument reconstructions, the case study, virtue journal entries, and the midterm.

In addition, I will drop you from the course if you are counted absent and unexcused for more than 6 classes.

Arriving late or leaving early by more than 10 minutes will be counted as an absence, unless excused in consultation with the instructor. Please arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class. Anything else is disruptive. If you foresee having to violate this policy, see me ahead of time; if an emergency arises and you can't consult me ahead of time, follow up as soon as possible via email.

If you miss a class, there is no need to email asking to be caught up on what you missed. Make sure you have completed all reading/assignments, and attend office hours if you have any questions.

Cell Phone/Computer Use

I expect phones to be put away for the entirety of class, unless you are accessing an e-book. Laptops and tablets should be used only for class-related material (e.g., e-books, notes). Excessive use of such devices for purposes unrelated to class will result in being counted absent for the day (in which case, see the attendance policy). All devices will be put entirely away for quizzes and argument reconstructions, which are completed on paper.

Communication Policy

I communicate outside of class primarily over email. I will reply to emails within 48 hours (not counting weekends/holidays). Sometimes an email slips through the cracks—I get a lot of email. If you haven't gotten a reply in this timeframe, you will not offend me by politely sending another reminder email.

Makeup exams

Exams can be made up in the case of, but only in the case of an excused absence. The excusability of the absence must be documented. This should be addressed as early as possible ahead of the absence. However, in rare cases an emergency prevents coordination ahead of time, and in such cases I don't expect advance notice/documentation (though such is still required as early as is reasonable after the absence). See me to coordinate.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. In cases where it occurs, penalties may range from failure of the assignment to failure of the course. You will also be turned in to UT-Tyler's Office of Student Conduct and Intervention, and the university will assess further penalties. You are responsible for knowing what counts as plagiarism, and penalties will be assessed regardless of intent.

Late Work

Very few assignments can be turned in late. In the event that it is permitted on an assignment, a 5% penalty per day late will be assessed (where 1 minute past the deadline counts as a day late, and 1 minute past 24 hours counts as 2 days late, etc.).