

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>
Week 5	Utilitarianism	Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”
Week 6	Kant	Kant, selection from <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
Week 7	Kant	Cont’d
Week 8	Aristotle	Aristotle, excerpt from the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
Week 9	Relativism and Objectivism	Reading on relativism TBD

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

Virtue Journal | 10%

Quizzes | 20%

Logic Exam | 15%

Argument Reconstructions | 20%

Presentation: Case Study | 10%

Final Exam | 25%

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/or the videos. They will typically be short, low-stakes, and gauge *basic* understanding of the reading.

The **logic exam** will help you develop the ability to construct and evaluate formal arguments. (This will be very important for when you complete the Argument Reconstructions.)

Argument Reconstructions. Your job in these assignments is to take an excerpt and accurately and validly reconstruct its core argument.

Presentation: Case Study. After we cover the 3 major ethical theories (Utilitarianism, Kantianism, and (Aristotle's) Virtue Ethics), you will find and evaluate a case according to one or multiple ethical theories. You will then record a video where you present your research and evaluation.

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

*All assignments, with the exception of the virtue journal entries, the presentation, and the quizzes, will be administered with Respondus Lockdown Browser fully enabled

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.

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.

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 Submissions

Late submissions will be penalized at 5% of the total possible points of the assignment per day.