

PHIL 2310: Theory of Ethics

Fall 2018

Marquette University

Section 702: Monday & Wednesday, 6:30 pm - 7:45 pm (Lalumiere Language Hall 192)

Instructor: Robert K. Whitaker

Office Hours: Wednesday, 3:00 pm - 4:30 pm, & Thursday, 1:30 pm - 3:00 pm; or by appointment (MH 424)

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Course Description

This course is an exploration of what it means to be a moral being in relation to other moral beings. This course also satisfies the “individuals and community” theme of the core Discovery Tier, and as such will include extended consideration of the individual’s place in a community of moral agents. For example, we will be exploring questions such as “Is individual good the only good?” (Week 2), “Are the standards of goodness relative to the nature of particular communities?” (Weeks 2-3), “Is the goodness or rightness of an individual action dependent on the consequences for the community?” (Week 4), “Are nonhuman animals members of the moral community?” (Week 4), “How is individual rationality and autonomy related to the duties we have toward one another in community?” (Weeks 5-6), “What is virtue, what does it have to do with individual happiness, and does individual happiness require a focus on other people in one’s community or family?” (Weeks 6-8), “What justifies the moral standards of a community, and where do these standards come from?” (Weeks 9-11), “How are notions of morality determined by the community’s shared hierarchies of gender, race, and power, and what are our communal obligations to disrupt these structures?” (Weeks 12-14). Our primary purpose is to consider these questions, learn the answers and reasons for them that some philosophers have given, and develop the tools to articulate our own positions on them. This process should also provide the student with a framework for approaching particular questions of right and wrong conduct, questions which might arise in medicine, politics, law, teaching, business, and many other areas of human endeavor. A secondary purpose is to give students an idea of how ethics as a discipline is structured, and what professional ethicists get up to on a daily basis. We will also be continually asking why it all matters and how it’s relevant to what real people value. A tertiary purpose is to learn how to think and write more clearly, and to learn to be critical and suspicious in a healthy, constructive way. We will do all this by examining the approaches to these questions taken by philosophers ranging from ancient Greece, through Christianity and non-Western traditions, into the present.

Texts

§ There is no required textbook for this class. All required and recommended readings will be available as PDF files on D2L.

Course Objectives and Assessment

By the end of the course,

1. The students will be able to state and provide reasons for the basic positions of the major philosophical theories of Western ethics, including virtue theory, natural law theory, deontology, and

- consequentialism/utilitarianism.
2. The student will be able to state and provide reasons for principle objections to major Western ethical theories, including ethical egoism and various forms of moral relativism.
 3. The student will be able to discuss a significant alternative to traditional Western ethics as it relates to Western ethics.
 4. The student will be able to compare and contrast positions of the ethical theories studied in the course.
 5. The student will be able to take and defend a position in ethics that addresses significant objections to the position.

Attainment of objectives 1-4 will be assessed primarily through reading quizzes, reading responses, in-class video responses, the midterm exam, and the final exam. Attainment of objective (5) will be assessed primarily through the critical paper. All objectives will also be assessed via class participation. All of these exercises contribute to the “individuals and community” theme of the core Discovery Tier, since all of them will address content which bears on the relation of the individual to the community (an unavoidable aspect of all major ethical theories).

Course Requirements

Course Composition:

Reading Responses	20%
Reading Quizzes	10%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Critical Paper	20%
Video Responses	5%
Participation	5%

The grading scale is as follows:

A	94 – 100	C	73 – 76.9
A-	90 – 93.9	C-	70 – 72.9
B+	87 – 89.9	D+	67 – 69.9
B	83 – 86.9	D	60 – 66.9
B-	80 – 82.9	F	... – 59.9
C+	77 – 79.9		

Reading Responses: There will be 8 short reading responses assigned throughout the course of the semester (see readings in the schedule marked with an “R”), of which you are responsible for **5**. You may write up to **6** of these. If you write 6, I will drop your lowest grade. If you wish, you may write only 5, but you will be stuck with the grades you get. I highly recommend writing all 6. These are to be **no more than a half-page, double spaced** (this should be roughly 2-3 paragraphs—do not exceed this!), and are to be purely exegetical. You will **summarize the main arguments of the author; do not provide your own**

opinion. The goal here is to develop the skills needed to read philosophy. Please cite the page number of the relevant reading for any quotations and major points; no outside sources will be necessary. **Hand in a hard copy at the beginning of class on the day the reading is assigned. Reading responses will not be accepted after the class for which they are assigned, and you must be present for the whole class on the day you turn in a response (unless you have a valid excuse).** Each response is worth **4 percentage points** of your final grade.

Reading Quizzes: Several times during the semester, I will assign a short reading quiz. The quizzes will be administered **via D2L** (see “Quizzes” tab). Each quiz is **due by class time on the day the reading is assigned.** Late quizzes will not be accepted. To ensure that you do not merely skim the readings for the answers, you will have **5 minutes** to complete each quiz (this will be plenty of time if you have completed the reading beforehand). Collectively, the reading quizzes will constitute **10%** of your final grade.

Midterm Exam: There will be a midterm exam on **Wednesday, October 17.** The exam will include multiple choice and short answer questions.

Final Exam: There will be a (non-comprehensive) final exam on **Wednesday, December 12, from 8:00 pm - 10:00 pm.** The exam will include multiple choice and short answer questions.

Critical Paper: The critical paper consists of an articulation and assessment of at least one of the philosophical views considered during the course of the semester. This does not have to be a direct response to one of the readings, though it should be conversant with at least one of the authors we’ve covered. As with the reading responses, you will need to identify and explain the argument or position you are responding to, but **the bulk of the paper should be your own argumentation.** This may take the form of critiquing the argument of an author, critiquing a philosophical position taken by one or more authors, critiquing an entire style of approach to a type of philosophical problem, and/or making a positive case for your own view over and against the view of one or more of our authors. I will provide a list of potential topics for this paper, and I encourage you to choose something that interests you. You may also suggest something that is not on the list. The critical paper is **due in the D2L dropbox Monday, November 19, by 11:59 pm.**

Specifications: 3-4 pages in length, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins, correct grammar, and proper citation.* See “Critical Paper Rubric” on D2L for further detail.

* I do not care what citation style you use, so long as whatever style you choose is consistent throughout, and so long as all sources, quotations, and borrowed ideas are properly cited (see below regarding academic honesty). No cover page or separate bibliography page is necessary, nor will such count towards page total. Footnotes are preferred over endnotes.

Video Responses: Five times throughout the course of the semester, I will assign short videos for you to watch before class (see places in the schedule marked with a “**V**”). The videos will typically feature a

philosopher or other thinker responding to a question relevant to the unit we are in at that time. You will prepare a question about the video(s) and bring it to class, typed and printed. **Handwritten questions will not be accepted.** We may watch portions of the video(s) again together in class, and then we will split into groups to discuss your questions. You will turn in your questions at the end of class. To receive credit, **you must be present for the whole class on the day you turn in a response (unless you have a valid excuse).** These will not be graded for content, but you will receive **one point** for each question you turn in, which together will constitute **5%** of your final grade.

Participation: Class participation involves two things: 1. class involvement, and 2. at least one 1-on-1 meeting with me. **Class involvement:** your involvement is essential to the success of this class and to your success in this class. This means that a) active listening and note-taking, b) open questioning, and c) creative discussion are expected of you. Note that all of these things require attendance; thus, if you miss too many classes, your grade will suffer. Class involvement constitutes **4%** of your final grade (though excessive absences will result in a greater than 4% grade reduction—see below under “Attendance”). **Individual meeting:** you are responsible for meeting with me at least once during office hours (or by appointment) **on or before December 5.** This meeting may be in relation to your paper, but this is not necessary. Stopping by for a 10-15 minute chat about questions you might have had in class or anything philosophical fulfills this requirement. Please do not delay in scheduling this meeting, as I cannot guarantee extra office hours by appointment. The individual meeting constitutes **1%** of your final grade.

Reading Incentive: In addition to regular reading quizzes, you will have the following opportunity: for each day of class, you may bring in a **single 4x6 note card** with notes you have taken from the required reading for that day, **completed prior to the class for which the reading is assigned.** These may be turned in at the beginning of class. **Please print your name clearly at the top of each note card.** On exam day (midterm and final), I will return to you any note cards you have turned in, and you may use them on the exam. If you don't turn them in, you don't get any help on the exams.

Late Work/Make-Up Work Policy: Five percentage points will be deducted from the student's assignment grade for each late day (including weekends). For example, a student who has earned an 85% (B) on an assignment but who has turned it in a day late may receive a maximum grade of 80% (B-). There will be no make-up opportunity for missed exams, except in extraordinary circumstances.

Extra Credit: I have included several **recommended readings** in the schedule. These are clearly marked as “Recommended” and appear in a slightly smaller font size. You are not required to read these for class, but if you choose, you may read one and write a short (2-3 paragraph) response summarizing the main argument of the article. These should be similar in style to a normal reading response, though each will be worth a maximum of **2 points**, rather than 4. You may write a maximum of **two** extra credit reading responses during the semester. These may be turned in any time up to and including **November 28.**

Grading: Grading rubrics for the critical paper and reading responses will be posted on D2L.

Writing: Good writing is a basic skill in any professional field, and I expect you to put in the necessary effort to make sure that all written assignments are lucid and well organized. A **“Tips for Writing Philosophy Papers”** document will be posted on D2L. Please use it. If you need additional help with

this, the Ott Memorial Writing Center, located on the second floor of Raynor Library, offers comprehensive guidance in writing for the entire Marquette community. In one-on-one sessions, tutors assist writers in identifying topics, revising, and creating final drafts. Appointments can be made by calling (414) 288-5542 or visiting <https://marquette.mywconline.com/>.

Reading: The reading for this course is difficult. Despite this, it is crucial that you keep up with the reading schedule and engage the material (especially since the lectures and all assignments are based on the readings). This means setting aside adequate time to engage the material *before class*. I have tried to keep the assigned readings to a length that allows you to wrestle with the material without getting overwhelmed. If something from the reading is unclear, you may always bring it up in class, or in a meeting with me. Remember that reading philosophy is a skill like any other, and you will get better at it with practice.

Attendance: Attendance is required. From the University Attendance Policy:

“Students are responsible for attending all class meetings for courses in which they are registered. Any absence, regardless of the reason, prevents students from getting the full benefit of the course and as such, no distinction is made between excused and unexcused absences, with the following exceptions:

1. Absences resulting from legal obligations (such as jury duty).
2. Absences due to religious observances.
3. Absences resulting from university sanctioned activities and related travel.”

For more info, see: <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>.

For a 2 day/week course such as this, **any unexcused absences beyond three will result in a lowering of your grade**. 4 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 2 participation points; 5 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 4 participation points. More than 5 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 4 participation points, plus a further 4 percentage points off the **final course grade** per absence over 7. Please discuss any planned absences with me long in advance. Additionally, punctuality is expected; if you come to class late, it is your responsibility to make sure I know you are there, preferably by seeing me at the end of class so I can mark you on the attendance sheet.

Academic Dishonesty: The College of Arts and Sciences and the Philosophy Department policies on academic dishonesty will be enforced. *Ignorance is not an excuse*. Please refer to these policies for more details or contact me with particular questions in order to avoid any problems. The College’s policies can be found in the Undergraduate Bulletin and online here: <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/>.

More information on what counts as academic dishonesty as well as tips on how to avoid it can be found here: <http://libguides.marquette.edu/plagiarism>, and here: <http://www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-101/what-is-plagiarism/>.

*A useful, but not foolproof, rule of thumb: When in doubt, err on the side of over-citing.

In this course you will be required to submit your critical paper in electronic form to a plagiarism detection website called Turnitin (this is done automatically via the D2L dropbox). Your assignments become a permanent part of the Turnitin database, but will not be used for any purpose other than checking for plagiarism.

Disabilities: Students with documented physical or learning disabilities wishing to have special accommodations should contact me as soon as possible. In addition, the Office of Disability Services is available to assist you. They can be reached by phone at (414) 288-1645 or online here: <http://www.marquette.edu/disability-services/>. The University policy on accommodation of disabilities can be found here: <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/personalresourcesandfacilities/#disabilityservices>.

Phones and Computers: Unless a legitimate reason is provided, mobile phones and computers are to be off and put away for the duration of the class. Texting, or any other form of electronic communication, is strictly prohibited. Use of phones, computers, tablets, etc., will lower your participation grade.

Food and Drink: Please try to avoid bringing food into the classroom. However, in the exceptional case, choose being engaged in class while eating a snack over not eating and being unable to focus. Beverages in closed containers are welcome.

Conduct: Disagreement is a basic feature of philosophy and all other academic discourse. In this class, we will be discussing important and controversial issues. We may be engaging in discussions which challenge some of our most deeply held beliefs, and disagreement is sure to arise. For this reason, it is vital for each student, and myself, to always conduct ourselves with the utmost generosity and sensitivity toward one another and our authors. I reserve the right to steer discussions in whatever way I deem most appropriate to the day's lesson, and I will not tolerate rude, disrespectful, or offensive comments. If you are unsure whether something you plan to say or do could possibly be offensive, always talk to me before sharing it with the class.

Tentative Schedule

All readings should be completed by the date assigned.

“R” indicates a Reading Response assignment

“V” indicates a Video Response assignment

Date	Text	Page #
Intro to Argument & Ethical Theory / The Immoralist		
Week 1 (8/27 - 8/29)	Intro to Course	
	What Is an Argument? (No Reading)	
	Pojman: “What Is Moral Philosophy” (from <i>Moral Philosophy: A Reader</i>)	ix-xiv
	Plato: “The Ring of Gyges”	1-3
Egoism / Relativism		
Week 2 (9/3 - 9/5)	NO CLASS: LABOR DAY	
	Feinberg: "Psychological Egoism"	3-10
	Rachels: “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism” (2.1-2.9) (from <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i>)	15-32
	<i>Recommended:</i> Rachels: “Ethical Egoism” (5.1, 5.3, 5.4) (from <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i>)	64-81
Relativism (Continued)		
Week 3 (9/10 - 9/12)	Rachels: “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism” (Continued)	
	Harman: “Moral Relativism Defended” R	1-3
	<i>Recommended:</i> Nussbaum: “Judging Other Cultures: The Case of Genital Mutilation”	15-24
	NO CLASS: INSTRUCTOR AWAY	
Utilitarianism		
Week 4 (9/17 - 9/19)	Pojman: “Utilitarian Ethics: Introduction” (from <i>Moral Philosophy: A Reader</i>) V	156-157
	Mill: <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Ch. 2 R	13-28
	<i>Recommended:</i> Robert Nozick: “The Experience Machine”	42-45
	<i>Recommended:</i> Ursula Le Guin: <i>The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas</i>	1-4
	Mill: <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Ch. 2	28-39
	Singer: “All Animals Are Equal”	328-336
	<i>Recommended:</i> Peter Carruthers: “Against the Moral Standing of Animals”	1-18
Deontology		
Week 5 (9/24 - 9/26)	Pojman: “Deontological Ethics: Introduction” (from <i>Moral Philosophy: A Reader</i>)	216-218
	Kant: from <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> R	186-194
	Kant (Continued)	
Deontology (Continued)		
Week 6 (10/1 - 10/3)	Kant (Continued)	195-200, 212-222
	Kreeft: “The Single, Simple Purpose and Point” R	161-171

Virtue Ethics		
Week 7 (10/8 - 10/10)	Hursthouse: "Virtue Ethics" (from <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>) Aristotle: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 1, Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13	1-9
	Aristotle: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 2, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; and Book 3, Chapter 1 <i>Recommended</i> : Hursthouse: "Virtue Theory and Abortion" <i>Recommended</i> : Halwani: "Outing and Virtue Ethics"	V 223-233 141-152
Confucian Ethics / Midterm Exam		
Week 8 (10/15 - 10/17)	Van Norden: "Kongzi and Virtue Ethics" (from <i>Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy</i>)	38-46
	Midterm Exam	
Contract Theory / Divine Command Theory		
Week 9 (10/22 - 10/24)	Hobbes: from <i>Leviathan</i>	1-6
	Rachels: "The Social Contract Theory" (6.3-6.5) (from <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i>) <i>Recommended</i> : Jean-Jacques Rousseau: from "Discourse on Inequality"	89-98 6-10
	Gensler: "Divine Command Theory" (from <i>Ethics and Religion</i>)	R V 9-28
Natural Law		
Week 10 (10/29 - 10/31)	Rachels: "The Theory of Natural Law" (from <i>The Elements of Moral Philosophy</i>)	54-57
	Aquinas: from "Treatise on Law"	171-183
	Aquinas: from "Treatise on Law" (Continued) Rachels: "The Theory of Natural Law" (Continued)	57-58
Natural Law (Continued) / Nietzsche		
Week 11 (11/5 - 11/7)	Gensler: "Natural Law and Rationality" (from <i>Ethics and Religion</i>)	57-83
	Nietzsche: "The Madman" (from <i>The Gay Science</i>) Westphal: "The Big Lie" (from <i>Suspicion and Faith</i>)	232-237
Feminist Ethics		
Week 12 (11/12 - 11/14)	Lindemann: "What is Feminist Ethics?" Grimshaw: "The Idea of a Female Ethic" <i>Recommended</i> : Johnson: "Privilege, Oppression, and Difference"	R 663-670 221-238 12-40
	Grimshaw: "The Idea of a Female Ethic" (Continued)	V
Race		
Week 13 (11/19 - 11/21)	Yancy: "Elevators, Social Spaces, and Racism" <i>Recommended</i> : Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Letter from Birmingham Jail"	843-868 1-6
	*Critical Paper Due NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK	
Race (Continued)		

Week 14 (11/26 - 11/28)	Yancy: "Elevators, Social Spaces, and Racism" (Continued) Blum: "Can Blacks Be Racist?" (from <i>I'm Not a Racist But...</i>)	R	33-52
	Blum: "Can Blacks Be Racist?" (Continued) Race Videos	V	
Applied Ethics			
Week 15 (12/3 - 12/5)	TBD	R	
	TBD		
Final Exam			
Week 16 (12/12)	Wednesday, 12/12, 8:00 pm - 10:00 pm		