

## PHI 2730 – Introduction to Ethics

Monsoon 2020, AC02 TR002 except actually just online, Wednesday and Friday 8:30 AM – 10:00 AM

**Professor:** Danny Weltman | danny.weltman@ashoka.edu.in | **Office Hours:** by appointment

### About This Course: Topic and Goals

Every day we face countless ethical choices. Is it okay to eat meat, or is this immoral? Should you cheat on your physics exam? Or should you burn down AC03 in the hopes of delaying the exam long enough to study? Which political parties should you support? Some of these questions are easier than others, but all of them require engaging in ethical analysis. This course is about that sort of thing.

Below are the **goals** for this course.

- Learn about some of the key approaches to and topics in ethics
- Get practice with reading, writing, talking about, and thinking about ethics in an academic setting

### Course Content

We will read a few of the key works in the history of Western ethics because they have been very influential. The rest of the topics we study will be chosen by your votes. All readings are available on the course web site at <https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/2123099>. Do the assigned reading for each class before that class. ***Please bring the readings to class meetings***, either printed out or in *easily accessible* electronic form. It may be helpful to print the readings out even for our remote meetings so that you can write on them, easily flip through them, and refer to them without having to switch what you are looking at on your computer screen.

### Assignments and Grading

There are five kinds of assignments in this class: **reading quizzes**, **discussion questions**, **500 word papers**, **paper revisions**, and **Perusall participation**. Late assignments will lose 10% per day they are late, up to a maximum of 50% off. The late penalty is calculated per hour (0.42% lost per hour).

**Reading Quizzes** (10% of your grade) are to help you focus on the important parts of the reading and to get instant feedback on whether you have understood the reading. Quizzes are due 11:59 PM the night before we discuss the relevant reading. There is 1 quiz per class session, for a total of 26 quizzes. The 16 lowest scoring quizzes will be ignored.

**Discussion Questions** (10% of your grade) help you think about the texts more deeply and evaluate your own gaps in understanding or potential criticisms. There is 1 question per week, for a total of 13 questions. The 8 lowest scoring questions will be ignored. You can post these either on Canvas or via Flipgrid video.

**500 Word Papers** (35% of your grade) are your opportunity to get more practice writing concisely about philosophy. They should summarize a point from one of the readings, and then offer a **question**, an **extension of the idea**, or a **critique of the idea**. There are 7 due. The 3 lowest scoring papers will be ignored.

**Paper Revisions** (35% of your grade) are for you to get practice incorporating feedback and revising your writing. There are 7 due. The 4 lowest scoring revisions will be ignored.

**Perusall Participation** (10% of your grade) is a chance to improve your reading skills by collaboratively commenting on the reading assignments. Comments are due by 11:59 PM the night before we discuss the

relevant reading in class. Probably some number of Perusall commentaries will be dropped but I'm not sure how many since I have not used Perusall before and I have to figure out what works best.

### Grade Breakdown:

- 10% - Reading Quizzes** (26, lowest 16 ignored)
- 20% - Discussion Questions** (13, lowest 8 ignored)
- 30% - 500 Word Papers** (7, lowest 4 ignored)
- 30% - Paper Revisions** (7, lowest 4 ignored)
- 10% - Perusall Participation**

### Class Grade Rubric:

- |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| 100-97% = A+ | <80-77% = C+ |
| <97-94% = A  | <77-74% = C  |
| <94-90% = A- | <74-70% = C- |
| <90-87% = B+ | <70-67% = D+ |
| <87-84% = B  | <67-64% = D  |
| <84-80% = B- | <64-60% = D- |
|              | <60-0% = F   |

## Online Logistics

While our course is online (which may be the entire semester) this course will be largely *asynchronous*: this means you will not be required to attend course meetings during our scheduled class time. However, during our class meeting times, we will have online course meetings. Sometimes these will be Q&A sessions in which I will answer the discussion questions you have posted and any other questions. Other times they will just be open sessions for discussion. You can attend these sessions live and ask follow-up questions and new questions, and to discuss the readings with me and with your other classmates. These sessions will be recorded and posted so that you can watch them if you are not able to attend.

## Disabilities

If you have disabilities which require some form of accommodation, contact me ahead of time. I can provide transcriptions of recorded videos as long as I have enough advanced notice.

## Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Any time you use **words, phrases, ideas, or anything else** in your writing that you did not think up on your own, you must **cite** your source the best of your ability. Words and phrases from others must be enclosed in quotation marks to show that you did not write them yourself. Failure to cite a source is **plagiarism** and it's not okay. Plagiarism may result in a zero on the assignment or in other point reductions. You should not need to use (or cite) outside sources for this class, but if you do use them, you must cite them. It is perfectly okay to use points made by your classmates in class or in discussion questions, *as long as you cite them to the best of your ability*. The one exception is that you do not need to cite my lectures for your writing assignments in this class.

## Office Hours, Email Communication, and Due Date Extensions

If you have questions or comments about the course you can email me to set up a time to meet. If you contact me via email, please include "PHI 2730" in the subject line so that I know you are emailing about this course. All of the assignment due dates are available in advance, so if you anticipate not having enough time to do the assignment right before it is due, you should do the assignment earlier, rather than asking for a due date extension. Thus you should plan for exigencies like illness or Internet unavailability, rather than asking for an extension on assignments. But, if you think that there are relevant concerns that suggest that you should be granted an extension, please ask me as soon as possible.

## Extra Credit

You earn an automatic 2% extra credit towards your grade in this course by reading and understanding this

syllabus. This credit will be added to your grade by default at the end of the course and the only way to lose it is by emailing me a question which is already answered on the syllabus at some point during the course.

## Resources

My website has resources on reading, writing, and researching at <http://danielweltman.com/resources.html>. These resources include a glossary for unfamiliar words or phrases. I encourage you to examine these resources.

## Initial Schedule and Readings

2 September: Course Introduction and Moody-Adams, "Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance" **Quiz Due 1 September, 11:59 PM**

4 September: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1 **Quiz Due 3 September, 11:59 PM**

9 September: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Books 2 and 3 **Quiz Due 8 September, 11:59 PM**

11 September: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 4 **Quiz Due 10 September, 11:59 PM**

16 September: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 7 **Quiz Due 15 September, 11:59 PM**

18 September: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 10 **Quiz Due 17 September, 11:59 PM**

23 September: Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Preface and Section 1 **Quiz Due 22 Sep**

25 September: Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Section 2 up to page 42/Ak 4:425 **Quiz Due 24 Sep**

26 September: Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Section 2 page 42/Ak 4:426 through the end **Quiz Due 25 Sep**

30 September: Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Section 3 **Quiz Due 29 Sep**

7 October: Mill, *Utilitarianism* Chapters 1 and 2 **Quiz Due 6 Oct**

9 October: Mill, *Utilitarianism* Chapters 3 and 4 **Quiz Due 8 Oct**

21 October: Mill, *Utilitarianism* Chapter 5 **Quiz Due 20 Oct**

The readings for the rest of the semester will be determined by votes.

## Possible Topics

The readings listed below for each topic may vary to some degree once we pick our final topics, so as to accommodate a sensible reading and assignment schedule. We will read at least one topic from each of the three sections (metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics). If you have suggestions for potential topics you would like added to the list, please tell me.

## Metaethics

**Bernard Williams:** Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" and "Persons, Character, and Morality"

**Evolutionary Debunking of Morality:** Street, “Does Anything Matter or Did We Just Evolve to Think it Did?”; Isserow, “Evolutionary Hypotheses and Moral Skepticism”

**Is Morality Objective:** Enoch, “Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)”; Williams, “The Truth in Relativism”

**Moral Deference:** McGrath, “The Puzzle of Pure Moral Deference”;

**Moral Skepticism:** Mackie, selections from *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*; Brink, “Moral realism and the sceptical arguments from disagreement and queerness”

**Moral Uncertainty:** Harman, “The Irrelevance of Moral Uncertainty”

**Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives:** Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”

**Morality without God:** Plato, *Euthyphro*; Brink, “The Autonomy of Ethics”; Rogers, “God and Moral Realism”; Zagzebski, “Does Ethics Need God?”

**Saints and the Difficulty of Being Moral:** Wolf, “Moral Saints”; Adams, “Saints”

**The Self-Torturer Puzzle:** Tenenbaum and Raffman, “Vague Projects and the Puzzle of the Self-Torturer”

## **Normative Ethics**

**Advanced Consequentialism:** Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality”; Brink, “Some Forms and Limits of Consequentialism”

**Advanced Virtue Ethics:** Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach”; Schaubert, “How Bad Can Good People Be?”; Wilson, “Avoiding the Conflation of Moral and Intellectual Virtues”

**Advanced Deontology:** Brennan, “Moral Lumps” and “Moderate Deontology and Moral Gaps”

**Care Ethics:** Gilligan, “In a Different Voice”; Noddings, “An Ethic of Caring”

**Communicative Ethics:** Habermans, Selections from *The Inclusion of the Other*

**Contractarianism:** Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism”

**Existentialist Ethics:** Beauvoir, Selections from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

**Feminist Ethics:** Frye, “Sexism”; Baier, “The Need for More than Justice”; Walker, “Feminist Skepticism, Authority, and Transparency”

**Moral Particularism:** Dancy, “An Unprincipled Morality”; Little, “On Knowing the ‘Why’: Particularism and Moral Theory”; Dworkin, “Unprincipled Ethics”

## **Applied Ethics**

**Abortion:** Warren, “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion” and “The Moral Difference Between Infanticide and Abortion: A Response to Robert Card”; Card, “Infanticide and the Liberal View of Abortion”; Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”

**COVID-19:** Arunachalam and Halwai, “An analysis of the ethics of lockdown in India”; Li, Jecker, and Chung, “Reopening Economies during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Reasoning about Value Tradeoffs”; Venkatapuram, “How Should We Allocate Health and Social Resources During a Pandemic?”

**Drug Legalization:** Husak, “Four Points about Drug Decriminalization”; Sher, “On the decriminalization of drugs”; de Marneffe, “Against the legalization of heroin”; Hunt, “Epilogue: What good are drugs anyway?”

**Eating Animals:** Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People”; Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People”; Warren, “Eating Meat as a Morally Permissible Moral Mistake”

**Multiculturalism and Sexism:** Okin, “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?”; Selected replies

**Non-Human Animals:** Singer, “All Animals are Equal”; Steinbock, “Speciesism and the Idea of Equality”

**Patriotism and Nationalism:** Nathanson, “In Defense of Moderate Patriotism”; Gomberg, “Patriotism is Like Racism”; Hurka, “The Justification of National Partiality”; Lichtenberg, “Nationalism, For and (Mainly) Against”

**Same-Sex Marriage:** Benn, “The Gay Marriage Debate – Afterthoughts”; Card, “Gay Divorce: Thoughts on the Legal Regulation of Marriage” and “Against Marriage and Motherhood”; Hartley and Watson, “Political Liberalism, Marriage and the Family”

**Terrorism:** Wellman, “On Terrorism Itself”; Held, “Legitimate Authority in Non-state Groups Using Violence”; Jaggar, “What Is Terrorism, Why Is It Wrong, and Could It Ever Be Morally Permissible?”; Medina, “Unconditional vs. Conditional Critics of Terrorist Violence”; McPherson, “Is Terrorism Distinctively Wrong?”; Glasgow, “A Straightforward Analysis of Terrorism”

**The Annihilation of Caste:** Ambedkar, “The Annihilation of Caste”; Gandhi, “A Vindication of Caste”; Ambedkar, “A Reply to the Mahatma”