

PHIL-P 141: Introduction to Ethical Theories and Problems

Indiana University, Fall 2021

Professor: Dr. Aleksy Tarasenko-Struc

Contact: atarasen@iu.edu

Office location: Sycamore Hall 109

Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, 4h–5h PM—and by special appointment

Associate Instructors: [redacted]

Lectures:

Class: [redacted]

Time: Monday, Wednesday: 10h–10h50 AM

Location: [redacted]

Discussion Sections: [redacted]

Course Description

Ethics is the philosophical study of morality—of right and wrong, and how it is that we ought to live. In this course, we will address a range of questions within ethics. What makes an action right or wrong? How far into our lives do our moral obligations extend? Is morality objective or more like a matter of taste? Does morality have priority relative to our other concerns? Why should we be good in the first place? We will approach these questions by taking a look at concrete moral issues that arise in daily life: Is it morally permissible to sacrifice one person to save many people from death? How demanding are our duties to aid the needy? Do we have obligations towards animals? If so, what are they?

Course Readings

There is no required textbook for this course. Readings will consist in articles or book chapters, which will be made available on Canvas. For those seeking an overview of the subject, I recommend these:

Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*

James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*

Simon Blackburn, *Being Good*

We will also read substantial portions of these classic texts, which I encourage you to obtain and read:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*

Course Goals

This course is an introduction to ethics. It assumes no prior knowledge of ethics or even philosophy. It will also double as an introduction to the activities central to doing philosophy. You will learn to read a philosophical text closely and to reconstruct the arguments and views of others charitably. Much of our time will be spent discussing these lines of thinking in a way guided by the rules of logic, a desire for the truth, and a cooperative spirit. And you will learn the craft of analyzing and engaging with arguments in writing, as well formulating and defending your own views on the topics we study.

More generally, by the end of the semester, you should be able to

- identify substantive value judgments in both philosophical and nonacademic texts/media;
- articulate the reasons or arguments that might support various value judgments;
- understand how value judgments shape our conception of ourselves and the world;
- evaluate various views concerning morality, the good life, and matters of value generally;
- characterize and critically engage with these views, in writing, in a clear and cogent manner; and
- conduct discussions with others in a way guided by the virtue of intellectual humility.

Note: PHIL-P 141 has no prerequisite and counts toward the General Education Arts and Humanities requirement (3 credits). Specifically, this course will realize the following learning outcomes:

- knowledge of origins, varieties, and meanings of the expressions and artifacts of human experience, including (a) original written texts in various literary forms, (b) works of visual art and design, (c) musical compositions, and (d) dramatic performance (live theater, dance, film, video, digital, etc.);
- knowledge of the cultural, intellectual, and historical contexts through which these expressions and artifacts are interpreted;
- an understanding of the modes of symbolic expression and aesthetic and/or literary conventions that are used in these expressions and artifacts;
- the ability to develop arguments, ideas, and opinions about forms of human expression, grounded in rational analysis and in an understanding of and respect for the historical context of expressions and artifacts, and to express these ideas in written and/or oral form;
- the ability to explore one's own identity within prior and current intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural frameworks.

Course Requirements and Grades

Every student is required (1) to participate thoughtfully and respectfully in discussion sections and other activities; (2) to submit three essays; and (3) to complete six short reading quizzes.

Here is how each component of your final grade is weighted and the deadlines for each (if applicable):

- 15%: *Participation*

- 15%: *Paper 1* (2 pages): September 26
- 20%: *Paper 2* (3 pages): November 7
- 25%: *Paper 3* (4 pages): December 12
- 25%: *Quizzes*: September 5, September 19, October 10, October 24, November 14, December 12

Except in special circumstances, to pass this course you must submit all required written work to your AI. In addition to these assignments, there will be occasional opportunities for extra credit.

- **Participation:** Participation is very important in this course—as reflected by the fact that your participation score accounts for a significant proportion of your final grade. Everyone is expected to contribute to class discussion in some form. I especially encourage you to ask clarificatory questions about the material: if you are confused about some topic that we are studying in this course, it is *very* likely that other students are, too! This means that not only will you be penalized for failing to participate in course discussions, you will also lose out on an essential source of philosophical understanding: dialogue with others, the clash of differing points of view.

Your AI has discretion over whether to excuse an absence. Yet, as a general rule, absences are excused in case of (documented) illness, mental health issues, death of a friend/family member, or job interview, among others. Here are the standard penalties for multiple *unexcused* absences:

- 0–4 absences = 0 points deducted from final score
 - 5–7 absences = 2 points deducted from final score
 - 8–10 absences = 3 points deducted from final score
 - >10 absences = failure of the course
- **Quizzes:** You will complete six quizzes, all of them on Canvas, over the course of the semester. The aim of these quizzes is to ensure that you are reading regularly by testing your comprehension of the material. You will generally have at least a week to complete online quizzes.
 - **Papers:** You will write and submit three papers on topics that I will assign. These will be tightly structured argumentative essays with a substantial interpretive component. They will be graded according to how well they exemplify the virtues of philosophical writing: clarity of expression, organization, cogency, accuracy of interpretation, efficiency of communication, and charity.

Unless it is late or you have received an extension, your paper should be uploaded to Canvas.

Here is the grading scheme for papers:

A+	100	B+	89	C+	79	D+	69
A+/A	98	B+/B	87	C+/C	77	D+/D	67
A	96	B	85	C	75	D	65
A-/A	94	B/B-	83	C/C-	73	D/D-	63
A-	92	B-	81	C-	71	D-	61
A-/B+	90	B-/C+	80	C-/D+	70	F	60

Course Policies:

- **Respect:** Discussions in this course should be respectful, constructive, and inclusive. We will follow the NYU Guidelines for Respectful Philosophical Discussion, which can be found here:

<https://as.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/as/departments/philosophy/climate/initiatives/nyu-guidelines-for-respectful-philosophical-discussion.html>

- **Classroom Mask Requirement:** Starting Fall 2021, Indiana University is requiring that masks be worn indoors on campus, including in classrooms. An exception is allowed for presenters who are at least six feet away from their audience. This requirement will be in place until there is an officially announced change in policy. Please observe this requirement conscientiously as it is intended for the safety of everyone in the community.

Any students who come to class without a mask will be asked to wear one. If any students further refuse to wear a mask in class, they will be dismissed from the classroom on that day and will be expected to leave the room and the building. On the third such incident, the Chair of the Department of Philosophy will be notified, who will in turn notify the Dean of Students Office.

- **Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct:** As a student at Indiana University, you are expected to adhere to the standards detailed in the *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct*. Academic misconduct is defined as any activity that tends to undermine the academic integrity of the institution, including the following: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, interference, and facilitating academic dishonesty (by, e.g., uploading course materials to any website other than the course website). These activities are absolutely prohibited and typically carry severe penalties.

You are encouraged to discuss the material with your peers outside of class, but all work must contain your own thoughts, written in your own words. Feel free contact me for clarification concerning whether something counts as plagiarism or what proper citation consists in.

Common forms of plagiarism discovered in past iterations of this course have included these:

- borrowing wording from a handout (without quoting and citing it)
- borrowing wording from one of the readings (without quoting and citing it)
- borrowing wording from the essay prompt
- borrowing wording or ideas from an online source (without quoting and citing it)
- borrowing wording or ideas from another student's paper

You can find a definition of plagiarism, along with Indiana University's plagiarism policy, here:

<https://studentcode.iu.edu/responsibilities/academic-misconduct.html>

- **Course Materials:** The instructors of this course hold the exclusive right to distribute, modify, post, and reproduce course materials, including all written materials, lectures, assignments, exercises, and exams. Some of the course content may be downloaded, but you should not distribute, post, or alter the instructor's intellectual property. While you are permitted to take notes on the online materials and lectures posted for this course for your personal use, you are

not permitted to re-post in another forum, distribute, or reproduce content from this course without the express written permission of the instructor(s). Online class or discussion sessions should not be recorded individually by students and recordings of class sessions should be reposted or distributed in any forum. Violations of this course rule will be reported to the appropriate university offices and officials, including the Dean of Students, as academic misconduct.

- **Readings:** Required readings should be completed *before* the session for which they are assigned.

Some selections will be dense and difficult, so you may have to reread them once or twice.

- **Late Work:** It is important that you submit your work on time. Except in unusual circumstances, late work will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day (e.g., from A to A-, etc.).

Note: If you submit work late, you effectively waive your right to receive comments on time!

Note: If you submit work late, please send your paper to your AI directly.

- **Accommodations:** Students who require special accommodations for a documented disability should contact me immediately, so that necessary arrangements can be made in a timely manner. You can find useful links and information about how to request an accommodation here:

<https://studentaffairs.indiana.edu/student-support/disability-services/get-help/accommodations/index.html>

Accommodations may also be granted for religious reasons or extracurricular engagements.

- **Office Hours:** Office hours are two hours set aside each week for speaking with students about course-related matters or their intellectual trajectory generally. Please feel encouraged to meet with me, individually or in a group, for any academic reason—and particularly if you'd like to discuss course content or classroom dynamics. Please email me if you cannot make my office hours.

You should also consult with your AI if you would like information about their office hours.

- **Email:** I will strive to answer your emails within two business days, where this excludes weekends and holidays. If you have not received a response in this time, please remind me.
- **Sexual Misconduct and Title IX:** Indiana University policy prohibits sexual misconduct in any form, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, sexual exploitation, and dating and domestic violence. If you have experienced sexual misconduct, or know someone who has, IU can help. If you are seeking help and would like to speak to someone confidentially, you can make an appointment with the IU Sexual Assault Crisis Services at 812- 855-5711, or contact a Confidential Victim Advocate at 812-856-2469 or cva@indiana.edu.

It is also important that you know that IU policy requires me to share certain information brought to my attention about potential sexual misconduct with the campus Deputy Sexual Misconduct & Title IX Coordinator or the University Sexual Misconduct & Title IX Coordinator. In that event, those individuals will work to ensure that appropriate measures are taken and resources are made available. Protecting student privacy is of utmost concern, and

information will only be shared with those that need to know to ensure the University can respond and assist. I encourage you to visit stopsexualviolence.iu.edu to learn more.

- **Bias-Based Incident Reporting:** Bias-based incident reports can be made by students, faculty, and staff. Any act of discrimination or harassment based on race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability can be reported through these channels: (1) email biasincident@indiana.edu or incident@indiana.edu; (2) call the Dean of Students Office at (812) 855-8188; or (3) use the IU mobile App (m.iu.edu). Reports may be anonymous.

Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

1. What Makes Actions Right or Wrong?

August 23: [No Readings: Introduction to Topics and Mechanics of Course]
Recommended: David Foster Wallace, ‘This is Water’

August 25: Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, ch. 8 (‘Ethical Egoism’)

Sunday, August 29: Deadline to Drop Course without W

August 30: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chs. 1–2

September 1: Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, §3 (‘Negative Responsibility’)
Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, excerpt (‘The Experience Machine’)

Sunday, September 5: Quiz 1 Due by 11h59 PM

September 6: [No Class: Labor Day!]

September 8: Philippa Foot, ‘The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect’

September 13: W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, ch. 2 (‘What Makes Acts Right?’), pp. 16–34

September 15: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, §1

Sunday, September 19: Quiz 2 Due by 11h59 PM

September 20: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, §2, excerpt

September 22: [No Readings: Workshop on How to Write a Philosophy Paper]

Sunday, September 26: Paper 1 Due by 11h59 PM

2. The Morality of Saving and Taking Lives

September 27: Peter Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality'

September 29: Richard Miller, 'Beneficence, Duty, and Distance'
[skip: 'Ultimate Concerns and Relevant Limits', 'Beyond Limits']

October 4: Don Marquis, 'Why Abortion is Immoral' [skim/skip: pp. 195–202]

October 6: Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'A Defense of Abortion'

Sunday, October 10: Quiz 3 Due by 11h59 PM

October 11: David Foster Wallace, 'Consider the Lobster'
Alastair Norcross, 'Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases'

October 13: Norcross, 'Puppies, Pigs, and People', cont'd

October 18: Elizabeth Anderson, 'Animal Rights and the Values of Nonhuman Life'

October 20: [No Readings: Review]

Sunday, October 24: Quiz 4 Due by 11h59 PM

3. Is Morality Objective or Subjective?

October 25: Ruth Benedict, 'Anthropology and the Abnormal', excerpt

October 27: James Rachels, 'The Challenge of Cultural Relativism'

November 1: David Enoch, 'Why I Am An Objectivist (And You Are, Too)'

November 3: Enoch, 'Why I Am An Objectivist (And You Are, Too)', cont'd

Sunday, November 7: Paper 2 Due by 11h59 PM

4. Why Be a Morally Good Person?

November 8: Plato, *Republic*, Dialogues I and II, selections

November 10: Philippa Foot, 'Moral Beliefs', excerpt

Sunday, November 14: Quiz 5 Due by 11h59 PM

November 15: D.Z. Philips, 'Does It Pay To Be Good?' [skim/skip highlighted text]

November 17: Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, ch. 9 ('Forms of the Unthinkable'), excerpt

November 22: [No Class: Thanksgiving Break!]

November 24: [No Class: Thanksgiving Break!]

5. Morality and the Good Life

November 29: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, chs. 1–5, 7–8, 13

December 1: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II

December 6: Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints'

December 8: Vanessa Carbonell, 'What Moral Saints Look Like'

Sunday, December 12: Quiz 6, Paper 3 Due by 11h59 PM