



# Philosophical Ethics

Spring 2024

## Instructor

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## Email

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## Hours

Tuesday & Friday 1:00-2:15 pm

Room: Faculty Memorial Hall 313

Office Hours: Tuesday 4-6 @ Collins 119

## General Information

### Description

As the saying goes, no person is an island. From the moment we are born to the day we die, we are constantly engaging with others: we rely on each other, we talk to each other, we help and hurt each other, and we place various demands and judgments on both ourselves and those around us. We are inescapably social and thus essentially moral beings. As such, several important questions are worth considering: How should I live? What is the good life? Does being moral mean following some kind of rule, looking for certain outcomes, or developing your own self as best you can? In this class, we will look into these questions by examining some of the key ethical texts and ideas of Western philosophical thought.

### Expectations and Goals

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Read and comprehend philosophical texts.
- Identify and evaluate arguments within those texts.
- Clearly articulate the reasoning in philosophical texts, both orally and in writing.
- Critically engage with arguments & develop your own insights in relation to them.
- Reflect and critically consider your own life as moral agents.

## Course Materials

### Required Materials

There are three required texts for this course. All other readings will be provided to the class on Blackboard:

- Aristotle – The Nichomachean Ethics: ISBN 978–0–19–921361–0
- Kant – Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: ISBN 0-87220-167-8
- John Stuart Mill – On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays: ISBN 978–0–19–967080–2

## Assignments & Grade Breakdown

### Oral and Written Participation 15%

Participation will be graded as follows: **A (90-100)**: Attends class consistently, is prepared and has done the reading. Contributes positively to class discussion. Does not merely state opinions, but instead uses the texts to interrogate opinions and struggles honestly with the texts. **B (89-80)**: Attends class consistently, is prepared and has done the reading. Contributes to class discussion with some regularity. Sometimes unprepared or not participatory. **C (79-70)**: Attends class with some kind of regularity. Often prepared, though unencumbered by reading and thinking. **D (69-60)**: Attends class occasionally, without having prepared, and usually unencumbered by reading and thinking. **F (59-0)**: Does not attend class regularly or participate in discussions or show any preparation to engage with course material.

### Correspondence 20%

At the beginning of the semester, you will be assigned a correspondence partner. Every week, you will use a google doc to write a short letter to each other about the reading material. Partner A will submit their entry by our class on Tuesday morning and partner B will respond by Friday morning. Each letter should be at least a few paragraphs long and should *discuss* the reading. **It is NOT to be a summary.** You should rather give your thoughts *about* the reading. What does it make you think of? Do you see any problems with the arguments? Do they match with your own experience? How do you think this reading fits in with the rest of the class? Apart from discussing the theme, your letter should finally raise a few questions for your partner to answer. As the semester goes along, your discussion can build on whatever themes you find interesting.

### Midterm Exam 15%

About halfway through the semester, you will be given an exam on our class material. The exam will consist of short-answer questions and will principally deal with readings and material presented in lecture. The best way to study for this exam is to keep up to date with all readings and actively participate in class. This means asking questions during lecture and contributing to class discussion. There will be no surprises here.

### Open Format Final Project 30%

At the end of the semester, you will develop a final project in the format of your choosing. You could make a short film, write a piece of music, choreograph a dance, write a short story, or do whatever else you might think appropriate. Whatever you chose to do, your project should deal with a topic from our class and develop it philosophically. Your project will include a **project proposal, due Apr 16<sup>th</sup>** (5%), a **presentation, on April 26<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>** (12%), and a **written component (due when you present)** (13%) of at least 1000 words where you explain the reasoning behind your project, the argument or idea you are expressing, and how this idea is in discussion with our class readings. Your written component **must** engage with a primary text in some way.

### Final Exam 20%

At the end of the semester, you will complete a final exam. The exam is cumulative and like the midterm in format.

## Class Policies

### Attendance

This course is heavily discussion-oriented, so your attendance is absolutely imperative. Regular and punctual attendance at every session is expected. If you do have to miss a class, you are expected to get the material from a classmate, however, you are encouraged to come by and talk to me about the material afterwards. Excessive absence (more than 3-4 sessions) may result in failure of the course. **Repeated tardiness counts as absence. Using electronic devices in class counts as absence.**

## Electronics

Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices during class and refrain from eating or other activities that cause any kind of disturbing noise in the classroom. **The use of cell phones or any other digital devices during class will count as an absence for that session.** If your cell phone is in your lap or on the desk, it is assumed you are using it. Please put them away for the duration of the class session. The use of laptops is not permitted. Either print texts or take very careful notes for discussion.

## Turning in Written Work

All written assignments must be turned in on blackboard on time. Do not send papers by e-mail. Late assignments will be reduced by a letter grade per day they are late.

## Academic Honesty / Plagiarism

Plagiarism: Using any work or ideas that are not your own (this includes summarizing or quoting from a book, article, internet, or other source) without clearly indicating the author or source is considered plagiarism and will receive an automatic F for that assignment (**and possibly the course**). Generative AI tools are not permitted in this course. Students must rely on their own originality, creativity and critical thinking skills to complete assignments and engage with course material. **Use of ChatGPT or other language models will result in immediate failure of the class.** Please refer to the undergraduate standards of academic integrity and the University Code of Conduct.

## Disability Statement

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services.

## On The Principle of Charity

Reading philosophy texts can be difficult and time consuming. We will read texts written in a variety of styles: dialogues, essays, books, aphorisms, and newspaper articles. The texts we read will be from a variety of time periods, some written about 2500 years ago, some within the past couple of centuries, while others by still living authors. Whatever we read however, always make sure to read according to what people call *The Principle of Charity*: a way of reading a text where we try and understand the argument being made in its best, most persuasive way possible before criticizing it. As responsible readers and academics, we will always read with the principle of charity in mind.

- **Purpose:** As you read, constantly ask yourself what is going on. What is the main question the text is answering? Why is this particular idea being discussed right now? More importantly, as we read with the principle of charity in mind, ask yourself *how can what the author is saying make sense?* Try your hardest to make sense of the argument and to see how it could be convincing. Subsequent criticism only works if you really understand what a text is saying.
- **Pace & Attitude:** Reading philosophy is difficult. You will come across many words and ideas that are strange or that may not make sense at first. When you find a word you don't understand, try looking it up in a dictionary. Even then, it is likely that you may not understand something on your first read. That's ok. Read slowly. Read again. **READ AGAIN.** It's ok if you don't fully understand a text at first. Just stick with it and things will eventually become clear.

## Course Schedule

Date	Theme	Reading
Tuesday, January 16	Introductions (Diagnostic)	In class exercise
	<b>PART 1: WHY ETHICS?</b>	
Friday, January 19	What's at stake? Relativism & Ethical Thought	Appiah – Cosmopolitanism Intro and Chapter 2 (25 pages)
Tuesday, January 23	Relativism & Ethical Thought	Midgley – Trying out One's New Sword
Friday, January 26	Egoism / Social Contract	Hobbes – Egoism (Pojman)
Tuesday, January 30	Ethics and Death	Plato - The Apology
Friday, February 2	Ethics and Justice	Plato – Crito MLK – Letter from a Birmingham Jail
Tuesday February 6	Hedonism	Bentham - Hedonic Calculus (Pojman) Nozick – Experience Machine
	<b>PART 2: ETHICAL THEORIES</b>	
Friday, February 9	Virtue Ethics	Aristotle – Book I, sections 1-7
Tuesday, February 13	Virtue Ethics	Aristotle - Book I, sections 8-13
Friday, February 16	Virtue Ethics	Aristotle - Book II (all of it)
Friday February 23 (Tue 20 <sup>th</sup> follows Monday schedule)	Virtue Ethics	Aristotle - Book III sections 1-5
Tuesday, February 27	Virtue Ethics	Aristotle – Book VI (all of it)
Friday, March 1	Virtue Ethics	Aristotle Book VIII, Sections 1-4, 8 and Book IX Sections 3-4, 8-10
Tuesday, March 5	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	
Friday, March 8	Deontology	Kant - What is Enlightenment?

Date	Theme	Reading
Tuesday, March 12	Deontology	Kant -Groundwork Part I
Friday, March 15	Deontology	Kant - Groundwork Part II
Tuesday, March 19	Deontology	Reread Kant Groundwork 1-2 and Carol Hay "A Feminist Kant"
Tuesday, April 2	Deontology	"Duty & Desolation: Correspondence of Kant and Maria Von Herbert"
Friday, April 5	Utilitarianism	Mill – Chapter I and II
Tuesday, April 9	Utilitarianism	Mill - Chapter III and IV
Friday, April 12	Utilitarianism	Singer – "The Singer Solution to World Poverty" and Ursula Le Guinn – "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"
	<b>Part 3: Beyond Traditional Approaches</b>	
Tuesday, April 16	Genealogy	Nietzsche – Genealogy of Morals Essay 1
Friday, April 19	<b>Professor away at conference: Online activity</b>	<b>Project Proposal Due</b>
Tuesday, April 23	Ethics and Technology	Hans Jonas – Technology and Responsibility
Friday, April 26	<b>Presentations</b>	N/A
Tuesday, April 30	<b>Presentations</b>	N/A
May 10 – 1:30pm	<b>Final Exam</b>	N/A