

NOTE: This is the syllabus from the last time this course was offered; the 2021/22 syllabus will be very similar but not exactly the same.

Philosophy 230A-002: Introduction to Ethics

Winter Session, Term 2, 2020-21

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Course overview

This course is intended to survey the western, European tradition of philosophical writings on morality and ethics, with a view to learning about the historical development of our contemporary ethical views, the structure of different ethical positions, and the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical approaches to morality. This is by no means an exhaustive treatment of the subject, but it will prepare students for further study of philosophical ethics, as well as provide invaluable background to the intellectual traditions of the West over the last 2500 years.

Although this is a course in moral philosophy, you will not be asked to announce or defend your own moral views (though you may wish to do so at various points). Instead, you will be expected to read carefully and think critically about the views of the philosophers (and others) we study, and to identify the arguments they make. You will also be expected to be able to explain clearly some of the important aspects of those views, including the implications of those views for how one should live (if one accepts that the view considered is well grounded). As a result of study in this course, you should be able to read and write more carefully than you might otherwise, and be able to think through the foundations of some widespread and powerful moral views (including, perhaps, some of your own).

Prerequisites/Target audience

This course is appropriate for all undergraduate students, both those who are new to philosophy, and those who are majoring in philosophy but who are relatively new to moral philosophy. There are no prerequisites for this course, and it assumes no special prior knowledge of philosophy.

Politically Sensitive Topics

During this pandemic, the shift to online learning has greatly altered teaching and studying at UBC, including changes to health and safety considerations. Keep in mind that some UBC courses might cover topics that are censored or considered illegal by non-Canadian governments. This may include, but is not limited to, human rights, representative government, defamation, obscenity, gender or sexuality, and historical or current geopolitical controversies. If you are a student living abroad, you will be subject to the laws of your local jurisdiction, and your local authorities might limit your access to course material or take punitive action against you. UBC is strongly committed to academic freedom, but has no control over foreign authorities (please visit <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,33,86,0> for an articulation of the values of the University conveyed in the Senate Statement on Academic Freedom). Thus, we recognize that students will have legitimate reason to exercise caution in studying certain subjects. If you have concerns regarding your personal situation, consider postponing taking a course with manifest risks, until you are back on campus or reach out to your academic advisor to find substitute courses. For further information and support, please visit: <http://academic.ubc.ca/support-resources/freedom-expression>.

Given that this is a course in ethical/moral philosophy, it will cover some material that may be considered objectionable some places. While most of the readings are likely to be considered banal most

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places, discussion will likely take up topics related to justice, equality, human rights, freedom, and the proper authority of the state and citizens. While I do not know that any of the readings here would be objectionable in other places, I cannot give any assurance that these topics and readings would be regarded as banal in every country. If there are some specific topics/readings you believe would create a danger for you in your locale, I will work with you to try to find alternative readings/topics for some portion of the course.

Course format

This course is a combination of recorded lectures and synchronous discussion sessions on Zoom. Every Monday and Wednesday of the term (prior to March 31), I will record a lecture and post it online, more or less at or before our regular meeting time. All of the Fridays, and our last two Wednesdays, we will meet synchronously to discuss that week's readings; some of these discussions will be as a whole; some will be in smaller "break-out" groups. Some Fridays there may also be some additional short news-ish items to read; if so, these will be announced in the week's recorded lectures, and posted to the Canvas "Schedule of Readings and Events" page.

Synchronous discussions will be recorded and posted online shortly after they take place.

Course readings

This course has one required book, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and a collection of downloadable readings available at the Canvas website for this course. It is highly recommended that you print out these readings in order to make best use of them; in any case, you should make sure you have the handy to refer to during our synchronous discussions on Fridays.

You should take steps, as soon as possible, to purchase the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Ed./Trans. by Terrence Irwin, 3rd Edition, from the Hackett Publishing Company. [This is a link to their website](#); a list of e-book sellers where it may be available as well is [here](#). It is also available at other online book-sellers. You may, however, use any edition of this text to which you have access; this includes using translations that are available online. However, there are many advantages to using the Hackett edition I have specified above, and it is not very expensive. So purchasing that book is highly recommended.

The online downloadable readings are either used in accordance with Canadian copyright law's standards for fair dealing, or are in the public domain. Some are available via online databases subscribed to by the UBC library.

Please note: it is unlikely you will be able to do well in this course without having done the readings carefully in advance of the sessions in which I lecture on them and/or we discuss them.

Attendance

The Academic Calendar says: "Regular attendance is expected of students in all their classes (including lectures, laboratories, tutorials, seminars, etc.). Students who neglect their academic work and assignments may be excluded from final examinations. Students who are unavoidably absent because of illness or disability should report to their instructors on return to classes."

Regular attendance at our synchronous discussion sections is strongly recommended. It will be very difficult to do well in this course if you do not make use of the readings, the lectures, and in-class discussions. However, I will not take attendance on a regular basis, and you do not need to make a formal request to miss a class. If you know that you will be absent in advance, please let me know, and I will help you keep up during your absence; synchronous discussions will also be recorded to the extent possible for your use afterwards.

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Grading

I hope that you will find that the intellectual work required in this course is challenging and rewarding because of its very nature. Facing up to and tackling the kind of challenges philosophy presents is critical to higher education. The purpose of grading in a course like this is three-fold: First, it gives you a very rough measure of your progress in learning and using the material that is the subject matter of the course. Second, it gives others a very rough measure of the quality of your intellectual work while at the University. Third, it gives you some external incentive to perform the reading assignments, attend the lectures and discussion sections, and do the thinking that is part of studying philosophy, as well as to avoid some of the shortcuts or dishonest practices that undercut the value of attending a University. Grading is, however, only a blunt instrument in any of these areas, and it is, from my perspective, one of the least important aspects of this course or of a university education.

The marks for this course will be determined on the following basis:

- One ethical question/paper topic proposal: 5%
- Three short papers: 15% x 3 = 45%
- One longer wrap-up paper, based on the two earlier papers: 25%
- Final exam: 25%

Instructions about the writing assignments and final exam will be provided via the Canvas website well in advance of the due dates for the tasks.

There will be a variety of in-class exercises, many of which will be impromptu, and will contribute to your overall course grade. Unless there are extenuating circumstances such as a prolonged illness, there will be no make-ups given for these in-class exercises.

Students are not allowed to rewrite papers for this course. You may, however, consult the instructor or the TA about the papers before submission, and seek (some) feedback on drafts, though a full set of comments on a draft may be more than you can expect.

The date of the final exam will be announced as soon as possible. Please notify the instructor of any conflicts with the final exam as soon as possible.

Standards for grading this course will be in accordance with those given in the Academic Calendar and the grading guidelines published in the university calendar. See:

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,42,0,0>

The information below is copied verbatim from the above webpage:

In most faculties, individual courses are normally graded as follows:

Percentage (%)	Letter Grade	Percentage	Letter Grade
90-100	A+	64-67	C+
85-89	A	60-63	C
80-84	A-	55-59	C-
76-79	B+	50-54	D
72-75	B	0-49	F (fail)
68-71	B-		

Faculties, departments and schools reserve the right to scale grades in order to maintain equity among sections and conformity to university, faculty, department or school norms. Students should therefore note that an unofficial grade given by an instructor might be changed by the

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faculty, department or school. Grades are not official until they appear on a student's academic record.

The instructor hopes to be able to determine overall scores for the course by simply adding the scores from the individual components, but I reserve the right to scale the final scores for the same reasons mentioned in the Academic Calendar. (Please consult Canvas for a record of your grades.)

Students should retain a copy of their submitted written assignments, in case of loss. You should also save frequently, and to a variety of backup locations, in the process of writing your papers, so as to avert difficulties in completing the assignment on time.

Policy on late or missing work

The dates on which the writing assignments are due are found in the schedule. Barring rather disastrous turns of events, these dates will not change. Hence, it is your responsibility to ensure that your work is submitted on or before these dates. Work turned in after the specified date will be marked down for lateness, with increasing penalties as time goes by. Assignments should be turned in via the Canvas website's assignment function

If you must submit a paper late, you must attach to it a completed "Late Work Form," which you can find on our course's Canvas website. You can complete the text of this form and include it as the first page of your paper. Late papers will not be accepted without this form included.

Academic honesty

I take academic honesty very seriously, as it is essential both to your ability to get full value from this course, as well as for treating fairly those who do their own work. I strongly encourage you to work together in reading and discussing the material, in preparing for the final examination, and thinking about the writing of your papers. Nonetheless, your work on the papers and examinations must be your own work. Cheating, copying, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty (including assisting others in dishonest activity) will be punished to the fullest extent provided for by the University. If you are unclear on what counts as honest or dishonest methods, you should read the Faculty of Arts' pamphlet on plagiarism (<http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/resource-guides/avoid-plagiarism/>) as well as the University's policy on academic misconduct (<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/?tree=3,54,111,959>), and ask me specific questions about what is and isn't allowed in this course. I will not think worse of you for wanting to be clear about this. I will, however, be vigilant in hindering, uncovering and punishing those who fail to take this warning seriously.

In this course you will be required to submit your papers in electronic form. These papers may be submitted to a service to which UBC subscribes, called TurnItIn. This is a service that checks textual material for originality. It is increasingly used in North American universities.

Canvas Website

By virtue of being registered for this course, you will have access to the "Canvas" course website, a web-based program (<https://canvas.ubc.ca>) we will use to supplement a number of areas of the course. Almost all of the readings for the course will be linked to via this site; in addition, you will frequently find optional reading assignments, bibliographies, suggestions for excelling in the course, paper assignments, feedback/grades, announcements, and general course and philosophical information. You will also be required to turn your papers in via the Canvas website. Please check it periodically to see if the schedule has been updated or resources or assignments have been added. If you have trouble accessing Canvas, please let me know.

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One caution, however: unless I have sent you one to which you are responding, please **do not send me instant messages (IMs) via Canvas**. I do not check messages regularly on Canvas; instead, please send any messages you have for me to my UBC mail account, **scott.anderson@ubc.ca** .

Equity and special arrangements

Your instructor takes seriously the importance of making sure all students are given equal and full opportunities to participate and learn. The University accommodates students with disabilities who have registered with the Disability Resource Centre. The University accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. Please let me know as soon as possible, preferably in the first week of class, if you will require any accommodation on these grounds. Students who plan to be absent for varsity athletics, family obligations, or other similar commitments, cannot assume they will be accommodated, and should discuss their commitments with me before the drop date.

If you require any particular arrangements in the classroom to facilitate your participation or learning, please let me know, and I will do what I can to make things suitable for you.

The UBC-V Senate Policy V-130 mandates the inclusion of the following paragraph on course syllabuses:

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available here (<https://senate.ubc.ca/policiesresources-support-student-success>) .

If you encounter serious health or personal difficulties during the term, please let me know of these at your earliest opportunity. There are lots of things more important in life than this class, and when one of those things goes wrong, this class should not add to the burdens you may then confront. Especially in the present circumstances with an ongoing pandemic affecting all of us, I will do my best to try to support students who are confronting unforeseen difficulties that affect your schoolwork. Within reason, I will do what I can to work around any genuine, serious difficulties you may confront, but it will be helpful to know of them as soon as you are able to notify me.

Office hours

I will hold regular office hours at the times noted at the top of the syllabus – no appointment is necessary – as well as by appointment at other times. I will be available on the Zoom room indicated at the top of the syllabus at those times; just drop in using the room number and password provided there. You are strongly encouraged to come visit me at office hours and/or to make time to talk with me outside of class. You may want to bring specific questions about material in this course, or you may want to show up just to talk about whatever school- or philosophy-related issues are on your mind. Getting to know the teachers at your university is one of the most valuable parts of your higher education; unfortunately, it is unlikely to occur here unless you take at least a small bit of initiative. I will do what I can to reciprocate in getting to know you.

Schedule of readings/topics/assignments for the term

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It is my intention to stick to the following schedule very closely, barring unforeseen disasters, etc. However some alterations to the schedule of readings may be necessary as time goes on. The dates of the assignments, however, will not change unless absolutely necessary.

All readings, except for those in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, are to be found available for download from the Canvas website, either as downloadable files or as links to files in online databases.

Day/Date	Readings	Assignments
Mon, 1-11	Introduction	
Wed, 1-13	What are ethical questions? What is ethical philosophy? Midgley, "On Trying Out One's Sword on a Chance Wayfarer," pp. 218-223 from <i>The Essential Mary Midgley</i> ; Shafer-Landau, "Ethical Relativism"	
Fri, 1-15	Discussion	
Mon, 1-18	Old Testament (excerpts from Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus)	
Wed, 1-20	New Testament (excerpts from Matthew, Luke, Romans, 1 st Corinthians); Taliaferro, "Early Christian Thought"; Porter, "Trajectories in Christian Ethics"; Curran, "Christian Ethics"	
Fri, 1-22	Discussion	Ethical question/topic proposal due 11:59 p.m. Fri., Jan 22.
Mon, 1-25	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Chs 13-15, 17 (pp. 1-12)	
Wed, 1-27	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Chs. 18, 21 (pp. 12-17); Gauthier, " A Society of Individuals " sections 1-3, 5-7	
Fri, 1-29	Discussion	
Mon, 2-01	Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Understanding</i> , II.III.I-III.I.II, pp. 9-28)	
Wed, 2-03	Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Understanding</i> , III.II.I-III.II.II and III.III.I (29-41 and 45-52; optional: III.II.V, 41-45)	
Fri, 2-05	Discussion	First short paper due 11.59 p.m., Sun., Feb 7
Mon, 2-08	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Preface	
Wed, 2-10	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Chapter 1	
Fri, 2-12	Discussion	
Mon, 2-22	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Chapter 2 through p. 26, column 1.	
Wed, 2-24	Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Chapter 2, pp. 26 column 2-end.	
Fri, 2-26	Discussion	
Mon, 3-01	Bentham, <i>Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> (excerpts; read the parts from chs. 1-3, 7, 12 and 17 with care; you may read chs. 4-6 more casually); Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , pp. 1-11 (up to *****)	
Wed, 3-03	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , pp. 11-27	
Fri, 3-05	Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"; Nozick, "The Experience Machine" / Discussion	

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Day/Date	Readings	Assignments
Mon, 3-08	Homer, <i>Iliad</i> ; optional: JACT, <i>The World of Athens</i> , Chs. 3-4.	Second short paper due 11:59 p.m., Monday, March 8.
Wed, 3-10	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 1 (chs. 1-5, 7-11, 13) and Book 2 (chs. 1-9).	
Fri, 3-12	Discussion	
Mon, 3-15	Aristotle, <i>NE</i> , Book 3 (chs. 1-7, 9-10) and Book 6 (chs. 1-13); Optional: Book 4 (chs. 1, 5)	
Wed, 3-17	Aristotle, <i>NE</i> , Book 7 (chs. 1-4, 7-14); Book 10 (chs. 1-5)	
Fri, 3-19	Discussion	
Mon, 3-22	Aristotle, <i>NE</i> , Book 5 (chs. 1-8, 10); Book 10 (chs. 6-9).	
Wed, 3-24	Aristotle, <i>NE</i> , Book 8 (chs. 1-6); Book 9 (chs. 4-12).	
Fri, 3-26	Discussion	
Mon, 3-29	Aristotle, <i>NE</i> , Book 8 (chs. 9-12); Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> (excerpts)	3rd short paper due 11:59 p.m., Sun. Mar. 28
Wed, 3-31	Epictetus, <i>The Manual</i> (or <i>Enchiridion</i>) (especially §§1-20); discussion	
Wed, 4-07	Wolf, "Moral Saints"	
Fri, 4-09	Held, "Feminist Transformations of Moral Theory"	
Mon, 4-12	TBA	
Wed, 4-14	Discussion / Course wrap-up	Longer paper due 11:59 p.m. Fri., Apr. 16

Other important dates

Friday, January 22, 2021: Last day for changes in registration and for withdrawal from most Term 2 courses without withdrawal standing of W recorded on a student's academic record.

Friday, March 12, 2021: Last day for withdrawal from most Winter Session Term 2 courses with withdrawal standing of W recorded on a student's academic record.

Finally

I hope that this course is a good experience for all of us, and that we all have the chance to learn from each other. If you have suggestions, complaints, or questions as the term goes along, please raise them with me; this course will work best if you take an active role in its direction and intellectual work. For my part, I will do my best to make this an enjoyable and rewarding experience for everyone.