



**FORDHAM UNIVERSITY**  
THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

**Philosophical Ethics (PHIL 3000-R13)**

**Professor: Christopher R. Myers (cmyers18@fordham.edu)**

**Fordham University, Spring 2025**

**Keating Hall 218: Mon. & Thurs. 10:00am-11:15am**

**Office Hours (Collins Rm. 121): Mon. & Thurs. 12:45pm-1:30pm & 5:15pm-6pm & by appt.**



In this course we will study some of the major normative ethical theories of Western philosophy. It is important to emphasize our concern with *normative ethics* rather than *applied ethics*, as our course will not focus on questions of the type 'what should one do if...?' Instead, our course will focus on the nature of *ethical reasons*. We are interested in the question, 'what makes an action ethical?', or even better, 'what different kinds of reasons can we appeal to when we make claims about ethical behavior?'

**Course objectives:**

The aim of our course is to offer an introduction to the major normative ethical theories of Western philosophy. We will study the differences between dominant philosophical approaches to ethical reasoning, and we will consider different possible answers to our guiding question: 'what kinds of reasons can we give to support ethical claims?' Our course objectives include the following:

- To acquire an understanding of the major ethical theories and the range of questions and reasons that make-up the study of philosophical ethics
- To practice and develop the analytical skills required to interpret our course readings accurately (including skills in reading, writing, and speaking)
- To practice and develop the critical thinking skills required to compare and evaluate different normative positions (including skills in critical reading, writing, and speaking)
- To improve students' facility in thoughtful, critical philosophical discourse (including class discussions and writing assignments)

Required texts:

- Aristotle. [Nicomachean Ethics](#), Trans. Terrence Irwin. Hackett 2nd Edition, 1999. [ISBN#: 978-0872204645]
- Kant, Immanuel. [Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals](#), Ed. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmerman. Cambridge, 2012. [ISBN#: 978-1107401068]
- Mill, John Stuart. [Utilitarianism](#), Ed. George Sher. Hackett 2nd Edition, 2002. [ISBN#: 978-087220652]

Course requirements:

[1] Attendance/participation	10%
[2] Coursework (on Blackboard)	22.5%
[3] Quizzes (5 total)	17.5%
[4] Midterm paper	25%
[5] Final paper	25%

[1] Attendance/participation

I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. You are allowed two unexcused absences before I must start taking points away from your overall attendance/participation grade. I will excuse an absence for a religious holiday, a serious illness, a death in your immediate family, or your participation in a university-sponsored holiday. To get an absence excused, you must send me a formal, written explanation *before* the class in question.

Your attendance grade is also dependent on (a) your active participation during class time, and (b) your bringing all required reading materials to class (either by physical copy or computer access). Concerning class participation: our in-person class meetings will be devoted *entirely (100%)* to discussion about the assigned readings, and this means that your active participation during class time is absolutely essential. My expectation is that you will not only maintain strong attendance throughout the semester, but also contribute your thoughts during class discussions and act respectfully toward your classmates. Listen thoughtfully, keep an open mind, and contribute what you think. Philosophy is most worthwhile when it is enlivened by discussion and exchange.

[2] Coursework (on Blackboard)

Every week this semester you must contribute to our class' coursework discussions in the 'Discussions' section of the course Blackboard page. More specifically, every week you must (a) start a new discussion and post a coursework paragraph which analyzes one passage, claim, or concept from the assigned text (at least 150 words) and (b) respond to one of your classmates' coursework paragraphs (at least 25 words).

Your coursework paragraphs must be submitted before 5pm on the day of your selected reading, and these paragraphs must follow the instructions laid out in our 'Guide for Coursework on Blackboard' handout (including the minimum word

requirement of 150 words). The aim of these analyses is to engage more deeply with the readings. You can write on anything from the text—for example, you might focus on a particular passage, an argument, a concept, or you might pursue a thought that was prompted by what the author discusses—but in every case your task is to first clarify the author’s reasoning, and *then* reflect on it. When you comment on a classmate’s coursework paragraph, moreover, your task is to respond in such a way that you contribute new questions, additional thoughts, or new conclusions to the discussion they have already started. I want these coursework discussions to be enjoyable to write (and read!), so challenge yourself and see what new thoughts you can produce.

### [3] Quizzes

If you look at the reading schedule below, you will see that our assigned readings are organized into five class modules. At the end of each of these class modules, we will have a quiz on the readings that were included within the module (so five total quizzes over the course of the semester). Don’t let the word ‘quiz’ frighten you. These quizzes will be short, and they will only include questions about the general features of our readings: main arguments, key concepts, etc. If you are completing the assigned readings, reviewing our class PP presentations, and participating in class discussions, you will receive high marks on these quizzes.

### [4] + [5] Midterm and final papers

We will have two major writing assignments this semester: a midterm paper and a final paper. The purpose of these papers is to improve your philosophical writing—they are opportunities for you to practice reconstructing normative ethical theories from the text, and evaluating these theories with thoughtful analysis. These papers must be 5-7 pages (12 font, double-spaced), and they must be written in line with the requirements laid out in our class guide to writing philosophy papers. I will give you the prompt for both papers at least two weeks in advance.

### Course policies:

#### Late penalty policy:

For every day (weekend days included) that a paper is late, that paper will be penalized. If you suspect that you will not be able to turn a paper in on time, reach out to me *at least 24 hours in advance* and we can talk about extending the deadline. I am considerably generous about extending paper deadlines - but I will not extend deadlines *immediately before the deadline*. (Unfortunately coursework paragraphs cannot be submitted late.)

#### Technology policy:

During class time you are permitted to use a computer, laptop, or tablet. Your use of these devices is restricted to class use, however, and I expect that you will not allow these devices to divert your attention or the attention of others away from discussion. Remember: this course revolves around active discussion and

participation. If your use of electronic devices inhibits class discussion, I reserve the right to adjust our technology policy accordingly.

Academic integrity:

All students are expected to abide by the rules of academic integrity as laid out in the Fordham Handbook. This especially includes plagiarism. Any assignment that is found to have involved plagiarism will automatically receive a failing grade.

Furthermore, your professors (including me) are obliged to automatically report all cases of plagiarism to the Dean. With this in mind, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with what qualifies as plagiarism.

The Fordham Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: "Plagiarism occurs when individuals attempt to present as their own what has come from another source. Plagiarism takes place whether such theft is accidental or deliberate." In a nutshell, plagiarism involves taking credit for someone else's work in one's own writing – intentionally or unintentionally. Plagiarism might mean copying an idea or quotation exactly as it is written elsewhere (in a book, online article, Chat GPT, a newspaper, etc.), paraphrasing an idea or quotation without properly including a citation, or using an idea that is not your own without citing the author(s) of this idea. To avoid plagiarism make sure you properly cite the sources you use. If you're unsure of whether you are properly citing something, come and ask me before you submit the assignment. Stay on the safe side.

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ChatGPT and GenerativeAI policy:

ChatGPT is capable of many things, but ChatGPT is not you. Having a bot answer questions or generate essays is not the same as working out your own thoughts. This semester our class will adhere to three guidelines concerning AI technology: (1) If you use ChatGPT/GenAI in any way, you *must* cite it—that is to say, you must cite the AI technology you used, indicate what prompt you gave it, and indicate how you revised it. (2) Uses of ChatGPT/GenAI without citation will be penalized. Submitting ChatGPT/GenAI products without citation is a violation of Fordham's academic integrity policies—specifically, it is a form of plagiarism and outsourcing. (3) ChatGPT/GenAI are tools and they are here to stay—so we will keep our channels of communication open about their advantages and the best frameworks in which to deploy them. Additionally, we will use the reading skills we develop in this class to reflect critically *on* information that ChatGPT/GenAI provide about the history of philosophy. We will do this during class time, but you might consider doing this also in your coursework paragraphs.

Students with special needs and/or disabilities:

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 disability that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, classwork, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule a meeting to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Phone number: 718-817- 0655). (Locations: Lincoln Center – Lowenstein, Room 207; Rose Hill - O’Hare Hall, Lower Level).

Further study in philosophy:

If you enjoy the material we study in this course, you should consider a minor or major in philosophy. The minor requires 6 courses, including the 2 core courses, ‘Philosophy of Human Nature’ and ‘Philosophical Ethics’—so at the end of this course you’ll already be on your way. Gabelli students can also count their BLBU 3443 Ethics in Business course towards the minor as well. The major requires ten total courses, including the two core courses. Philosophy works very well as a complement to other disciplines across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, so you could also think about double-majoring.

For further information on the major and minor, you can contact the Department Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies: Professor Gschwandtner (gchwandtner@fordham.edu).

Reading Schedule:

[ Any readings that are not in the required texts will be available on Blackboard. They are marked below with an asterisk (\*) ]

Date:                      Reading:                                      Notes:

**Introductory Module**

Mon. Jan. 13 <sup>th</sup>	(Introduction to philosophical ethics)
Thurs. Jan. 16 <sup>th</sup>	Plato’s <i>Republic</i> , Book II, 357a1-367c1* & Nussbaum’s <i>The Therapy of Desire</i> , Selections*
Mon. Jan. 20 <sup>th</sup>	-- No class meeting --
Thurs. Jan. 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Rachels’ “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”*
Mon. Jan. 27 <sup>th</sup>	Appiah’s “Moral Disagreement”*

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
Thurs. Jan. 30 <sup>th</sup>	Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion"*	<b>Introductory Module Quiz</b>

**Module Two: Utilitarianism**

Mon. Feb. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Chapter 1-2	
Thurs. Feb. 6 <sup>th</sup>	Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Chapter 3-4	
Mon. Feb. 10 <sup>th</sup>	Singer's "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"*	
Thurs. Feb. 13 <sup>th</sup>	Williams' "A Critique of Utilitarianism"*	
Tues. Feb. 18 <sup>th</sup>	(Class discussion about philosophical writing)	<b>Module Two Quiz</b>

**Module Three: Deontology**

Thurs. Feb. 20 <sup>th</sup>	Kant's <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Preface and Section One	
Mon. Feb. 24 <sup>th</sup>	Kant's <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Section Two p. 21-37	
Thurs. Feb. 27 <sup>th</sup>	Kant's <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Section Two p. 37-55	
Mon. March 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Langton's "Duty and Desolation"*	
Thurs. March 6 <sup>th</sup>	Allais' 'Kant's Racism'*	
Mon. March 10 <sup>th</sup>	(OPEN)	<b>Module Three Quiz</b>

Wed. March 12<sup>th</sup> **— Midterm Paper Assignment Due —**

Thurs. March 13 <sup>th</sup>	-- No class meeting --
Mon. March 17 <sup>th</sup>	-- No class meeting --
Thurs. March 20 <sup>th</sup>	-- No class meeting --

**Module Four: Virtue Ethics**

Mon. March 24 <sup>th</sup>	Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Bk. I
Thurs. March 27 <sup>th</sup>	Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Bk. II

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
Mon. March 31 <sup>st</sup>	Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Bk. VIII (Sec. 1-8) and Book IX (Sec. 4-12)	
Thurs. April 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Sartre's <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i> *	
Mon. April 7 <sup>th</sup>	Cordova's "Ethics: The We and the I"*	<b>Module Four Quiz</b>

**Module Five: Care Ethics**

Thurs. April 10 <sup>th</sup>	Gilligan's "Moral Orientation and Moral Development" Moral Development"*	
Mon. April 14 <sup>th</sup>	Ruddick's "Maternal Thinking"*	
Thurs. April 17 <sup>th</sup>	-- No class meeting --	
Mon. April 21 <sup>st</sup>	-- No class meeting --	
Thurs. April 24 <sup>th</sup>	Collins' "Black Women and Motherhood"*	
Mon. April 28 <sup>th</sup>	(OPEN)	<b>Module Five Quiz</b>

[ TBD ]

— *Final Paper Assignment Due* —