

Ethical Theory
PHIL 340
Spring 2022
Meets T/Th 10:05-11:30 in LN 2405

Professor Lisa Tessman

Pronouns: she/they.

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Office hours on Zoom: Mon 4:30-5:30 PM & Wed 9:00-10:00 AM or by appointment.

Zoom link for office hours: <https://binghamton.zoom.us/j/99619382395>

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the main Western philosophical theories of ethics, both historical and contemporary. Students will examine how particular moral problems are treated within frameworks that each emphasize different considerations, such as what sort of person is morally admirable, how one should live, what good motives for action are, whether there are certain actions that are morally obligatory or morally prohibited, whether one should consider anything other than the consequences of one's actions, what role the moral emotions should play, when impartiality is appropriate, and what the value of care is. The course includes work by feminists and critical race theorists who argue for the importance of examining moral life under real conditions, including conditions of oppression.

Course Objectives:

- To survey historical and contemporary work in Western philosophical ethics.
- To have students develop their own original, critical thinking about each of the theories studied, and identify and articulate their own position in ethics.
- To have students learn and practice philosophical skills.

This course satisfies the Humanities ("H") General Education Requirement.

Learning Outcomes: Students in H courses will demonstrate an understanding of human experience through the study of literature or philosophy.

Text:

Moral Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction by Daniel DeNicola (Broadview Press, 2018).

Please purchase the textbook by the first day of class.

All other readings are available as PDFs on Brightspace.

Office hours offer an opportunity for students to meet individually with me via Zoom.

Please make use of this time to ask questions or engage in further discussion of the course material. You don't need a specific reason to come to office hours – feel free to come to chat!

Course Requirements:

This course is a 4-credit course, which means that in addition to attending and participating in class meetings, students are expected to do at least 9.5 hours of course-

related work *outside of class* each week during the semester. This includes time spent completing assigned readings, taking notes and reflecting on the readings, writing responses, and studying for tests.

Class participation:

Students are expected to attend class unless you are ill or quarantining, etc. (see below about covid safety requirements and guidance on when to miss class). You do not need medical documentation for missing class, but you do need to email me at least one hour before class time to let me know if you must miss class, and your email must tell me your reason for missing class; if you are able, it may be possible to participate in class via Zoom, but you must arrange this with me via email at least an hour before class time. If I give you permission to attend via Zoom, I will send you a link. Non-emergency travel or other similar situations are not acceptable reasons for missing class or requesting to attend class via Zoom. Four or more missed classes without an acceptable reason will result in failure of the class.

Do give serious attention to the *quality*—not just the quantity—of your participation in discussions. If you find it difficult to speak in class discussions, please talk to me about this *during the first week or two of the semester* and we will devise a plan for you to practice this kind of speaking and for me to grade your participation appropriately. Otherwise, expect both to be called on and to volunteer regularly to speak.

If I, or your classmates, are pronouncing your name wrong, using the wrong pronouns for you, etc., please correct us! Also please let me know if there is anything I can do to facilitate your learning or accommodate your particular learning style.

Written responses (150-200 words each):

There are 10 written responses due, as listed in the schedule. They are due by 5:00 PM on the evening before the topic will be discussed in class and are to be submitted via Brightspace. The word limits are strict: each response must be between 150 and 200 words long. Late responses will not receive credit, nor will responses that are outside of the word limits. I may share selected responses for discussion in class, anonymously. You may write “please don’t share this response” (or something similar) on your response if you do not want it to be shared. Please feel free, but not obligated, to reveal that you are the author of a response that is shared in class.

There are two types of responses assigned:

- 1) Responses to “Questions for Discussion” (not to be confused with “Questions for Personal Reflection.”) These questions can be found at the end of each chapter of *Moral Philosophy*.
- 2) “Are you a _____?” responses (for example: “Are you a moral relativist?”). Each of these responses must begin with either “Yes,” “No,” or “It’s complicated,” and then go on to explain (why are you a _____? what are the claims made by _____ that you agree with?) and justify (that is, offer reasons in support of) your response. It is fine to change your mind about your position as the course progresses! (So, if in week 5 you claim that you are a Utilitarian, but then in week 6 you decide you are really a Kantian, your responses should reflect this change).

All responses should demonstrate a clear understanding of the relevant reading(s) and should engage critically with the reading(s). Imagine you are writing for an audience who has not read the assigned reading, so first you have to explain the relevant points in the reading before you can respond to the question. All responses will be graded anonymously—I will see your names only after I have submitted grades for all responses.

Points given for written responses:

- 0 = did not complete the assignment (on time), or outside of word limits, or showed little or no understanding of the reading, or very poorly written, etc.
- 2 = showed at least some understanding of the reading and at least some development of and argument in support of the response.
- 4 = showed a good or excellent understanding of the reading and developed and supported the response well.

Exams:

There will be four exams, each on approximately one quarter of the course material.

You must write your exam responses on an electronic device. You may not communicate with others (electronically or otherwise) during the exams. You may use all notes that you have taken yourself, and you may refer to all assigned readings. However, you may not look at sources that were not assigned (e.g. Wikipedia, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, etc.) or access anything online other than the assigned materials and the document on which you are writing your responses. Any student who violates these rules will receive a zero on the exam. There are further consequences for any student who plagiarizes (see section on Academic Honesty below).

The exam questions will be posted on Brightspace (click on the exam under Assignments) at 10:05 on the appropriate day, and the exam must be submitted by 11:30. Students who are unable to come to the classroom on that day (due to illness, quarantine, etc.), and who have gotten permission from me via email at least an hour in advance, may write and submit the exam from a remote location. If an emergency or illness causes you to miss an exam entirely, notify me before the time of the exam if possible, and schedule a make-up time. Students who miss an exam and who do not contact me within 24 hours of the exam to schedule a make-up time will receive a zero on the exam.

Because you have access to notes and texts for the exams, you do not need to memorize anything in this course. However, don't let this fool you into thinking that you don't need to study. Exam questions will require critical, original thinking about the material. An exam response that simply explains the text in the same way that it has been explained or discussed in class will receive a low grade. Exams will include some questions that require 3-5 sentence answers, and one short essay. Exams will be graded anonymously.

Grading:

Written responses: 4 points each; 40 points total

Exams: 15 points each; 60 points total

A: 94-100 points

A-: 90-93 points
B+: 87-89 points
B: 84-86 points
B-: 80-83 points
C+: 77-79 points
C: 74-76 points
C-: 70-73 points
D: 60-69 points
F: 59 or below

The final grade may be raised or lowered by a plus or minus (e.g. from a B- to a B, from an A- to a B+, etc) depending on the quality of class participation.

Disability-related equal access accommodations:

I am happy to make accommodations (e.g. extended time) for any student with a documented need for it. Students needing accommodations to ensure their equitable access and participation in this course should register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office as soon as they're aware of their need for such arrangements. [Visit the SSD website](#) or call 607-777-2686 for more detailed information. Students who are registered with SSD and who wish to make use of their accommodations should discuss with me the details of how the accommodations can best be implemented in this class.

Academic Honesty:

I follow the Philosophy Department guidelines on academic honesty (below). Students are responsible for being familiar with, and abiding by, the [Student Academic Honesty Code](#).

Philosophy Department Guidelines on Academic Honesty

The Philosophy Department considers plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty to be serious breaches of the code of ethics governing academic life. They are also violations of Harpur College and Binghamton University policies.

In order to contribute to a culture of Academic Honesty within both the Department and the University, the Philosophy Department has agreed on the following guidelines:

- 1) Instructors will include a statement describing their policy regarding Academic Honesty on all course syllabi.
- 2) When a student commits an act of academic dishonesty, the instructor will formally bring the violation to the attention of the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee by either:
 - a. submitting an Admission of Dishonesty Form that has been signed by the student,
 - or*
 - b. initiating a hearing before the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee.
- 3) When a student commits an act of academic dishonesty, the instructor for the course will not give the student credit for the assignment, whether or not the student re-submits honest work.

- 4) Instructors will decide what further grade consequences are appropriate in response to the dishonesty at their own discretion; the typical consequence is a grade of 'F' for the course.

Schedule

Week 1:

Tues, Jan 25

Introductions

Wed, Jan 26

Written response #1: Questions for Discussion #5 for *Moral Philosophy (MP)* chapter 1.

Due by 5:00 PM.

Thur, Jan 27

MP: Chapter 1, "Ethical Theory, Moral Concerns."

This first chapter of the textbook is available as a PDF for students who are unable to get the book on time, but because of copyright restrictions no further chapters can be provided.

Week 2:

Tues, Feb 1

MP: Chapter 2, "Morality and Religion."

Thur, Jan Feb 3

MP: Chapter 3, "Relativism."

Week 3:

Mon, Feb 7

Written response #2: "Are you a moral relativist?"

This written response must engage with both the textbook reading and Wong's article.

Due by 5:00 PM.

Tues, Feb 8

David Wong. 2010. "Pluralism and Ambivalence," in Michael Krausz, Ed., *Relativism: A Contemporary Anthology* (pgs. 254-267).

Available as a PDF.

Thur, Feb 10

MP: Chapter 5, "Egoism."

Week 4:

Mon, Feb 14

Written response #3: "Are you an ethical egoist?"

This written response must engage with both the textbook reading and Batson's article.

Due by 5:00 PM.

Tues, Feb 15

C. Daniel Batson. 2012. "The Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis: Issues and Implications," in Jean Decety, Ed., *Empathy: From Bench to Bedside* (pgs. 41-54).

Available as a PDF.

[Paul Bloom, "Why Empathy Is Not the Best Way to Care"](#) (8 minute video).

Thur, Feb 17

Exam #1

Week 5:

Tues, Feb 22

MP: Chapter 6, "Utilitarianism."

Wed, Feb 23

Written response #4: "Are you a Utilitarian?"

This written response must engage with both the textbook reading and Mill's chapters.

Due by 5:00 PM.

Thur, Feb 24

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter II and Chapter IV.

Available as two PDFs.

Week 6:

Tues, March 1

MP: Chapter 7, "Kantianism."

Wed March 2

Written response #5: "Are you a Kantian?"

This written response must engage with both the textbook reading and Kant's chapter.

Due by 5:00 PM.

Thur, March 3

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, Chapter I.

Available as a PDF.

Week 7:

Tues, March 8

MP: Interlude, "Principled Ethics."

[Iyad Rahwan, "What moral decisions should driverless cars make?"](#) (14 minute video).

Wed, March 9

Written response #6: Questions for Discussion #3 for *MP* chapter 8.

Due by 5:00 PM.

Thur, March 10

MP: Chapter 8, "Contractarianism."

Week 8: Spring Break

Week 9:

Tues, March 22

Review/Q&A

Thur, March 24

Exam #2.

Week 10:

Tues, March 29

MP: Chapter 9, “Virtue Ethics.”

Wed, March 30

Written response #7: “Are you a virtue ethicist?”

This written response must engage with the textbook reading and Aristotle’s chapters.

Due by 5:00 PM.

Thur, March 31

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I and II.

Available as two PDFs.

Week 11:

Tues, April 5

[Chris Lebron, “Black Love and Rage in America: the Burden of Hope”](#)

(Watch the first 40 minutes of this video – skip the Q&A.)

Wed, April 6

Written response #8: Questions for Discussion #5 for *MP* chapter 10.

Due by 5:00 PM.

Thur, April 7

MP: Chapter 10, “Emotions and Moral Sentiment Theory.”

Week 12:

Tues, April 12

Jonathan Haidt. (2001). “The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment,” *Psychological Review*, Vol. 108, No. 4 (2001), pp. 814-834.

Available as a PDF.

Thur, April 14

Amia Srinivasan. (2018). “The Aptness of Anger,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol 26, No. 2, pp. 123-144.

Available as a PDF.

Week 13:

Tues, April 19: no class (Monday classes meet)

Thur, April 21

Exam #3.

Week 14:

Tues, April 26:

MP: Chapter 11, “Care Ethics and the Feminist Standpoint.”

[Eva Kittay, "Care Is No Longer Personal. Care Is Political."](#) (17 minute video).

Wed, April 27

Written response #9: "Are you a care ethicist?"

This written response must engage with the textbook reading and Bhandary's article.

Due by 5:00 PM.

Thur, April 28

Asha Bhandary. 2017. "The Arrow of Care Map: Abstract Care in Ideal Theory." *Feminist Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 3, Issue 4.

Available as a PDF.

Week 15:

Mon, May 2

Written response #10: Questions for Discussion #8 for *MP* chapter 14.

Due by 5:00 PM.

Tues, May 3

MP: Chapter 14, "Moral Theory and the Good Life."

Thur, May 5

Susan Wolf. "Moral Saints." In *The Variety of Values: Essays on Morality, Meaning, and Love*.

Available as a PDF.

Week 16:

Tues, May 10

Exam #4.