

PHIL010-11
Introduction to Ethics
ICC 107, MW 9:30-10:45 AM

Professor: Mark Murphy
Office: 235 New North
Office Hours: M 11-12, W 12:30-1:30,
and F by appointment

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Location: 235 New North

Course description

A lot of people think that the correct response to questions about what is morally right or morally wrong is a sort of skepticism: either there is no such thing as moral rightness and wrongness or, at the very least, we cannot have any confidence in any of our answers to these questions. There is somewhat less skepticism, though, about the idea of what people have good reason to do. In this course, we are going to think together about the various factors that are relevant to whether one has good reason to do something. We will then consider how reflection on these questions about good reasons is relevant to thinking clearly about morality.

Course objectives

Through active participation in this course, you will

- learn about what philosophy is, and how philosophers reason
- improve your ability to construct, defend, and criticize arguments
- gain understanding of the distinctive issues that arise concerning the evaluation of conduct

Course format

This class *looks* like a lecture class. True, we're in a big room in ICC, and the class may have up to 65 students, and I will be doing a good deal of lecturing on this material. Nevertheless, it is going to have a *lot* of discussion. You will not be invisible. Attendance will be required and recorded and participation is expected. You will learn a lot if you are not a lazy ass. **NO LAPTOP, SMARTPHONE, ETC. USE IN CLASS.**

Course requirements and grading

Each student must write four course papers and take two exams. Additionally, students are expected to attend and to be prepared to be active for every class.

Course papers

There are four course papers required, each 800-1000 words. Each must be e-mailed to Maddie before class on the due date listed later in the syllabus. The paper topics will be assigned about two weeks before the paper is due. These will be graded by Maddie. Late papers are immediately penalized a full letter grade for being late, and then one-third of a letter grade per day until turned in, unless there is a reasonable and verifiable excuse. *If you wish to turn a paper in late without penalty, make contact with the professor, not with the teaching assistant, as soon as it is clear that the paper will be late.* Normal difficulties of academic life — papers coming due at the same time, and so forth — do not constitute excuses for lateness. Neither do computer problems, unless they are of a spectacular and unforeseeable variety.

Exams

There is a midterm exam and a non-cumulative final exam. The midterm will be in class on October 31; the final will be December 19, 9-11 AM (which is the time designated by the registrar; I don't set it, I can't change it, and I won't be giving exams early due to a desire to bust out of here early). Exams will be graded by the professor.

Active and prepared attendance throughout the semester

Attendance is required and will be taken at the beginning of each class. Sign in with the TA at the beginning of class to register your attendance. If you are more than five minutes late for class, you may not sign in, and that will count as an absence. It constitutes academic dishonesty to sign in and then leave, or to sign in for someone else. Students have three free absences to use during the semester without excuse required. If you wish for an absence to be excused, contact the professor with a reasonable and verifiable excuse right away.

Again, the laptop/smartphone policy is that use of these is not allowed. If there are extenuating circumstances that require laptop use, get it documented, and we will work something out.

The final grade

The final grade is determined as follows: each of the four papers counts for 15% of your grade, and each of the exams for 20%. Each unexcused absence beyond the three allowed lowers the **final** grade one-third of a letter grade. (So: four unexcused absences drops the final grade by one-third of a letter grade; five unexcused absences drops it two-thirds of a letter grade; and so on. Missing a bunch of classes for no good reason is a recipe for *utter final grade disaster*.) No one passes the class without writing all four papers and taking both exams.

Readings

The readings will all be available as electronic documents through Lauinger reserves; these can also be accessed by way of the Reserves and Library Resources tab under Course Tools in Blackboard. (If you want them available in class, print them; any long passages I want to discuss I will put up on the screen.) The readings are not usually all that long, but they do vary in length, so take a look to plan your reading schedule. They are rich and difficult, and should be read *slowly* and *more than once*. If you aren't averaging at least three hours a week just working on the readings, you're not putting enough time into the course. I will post some remarks on the readings on a course blog, which can be accessed via Blackboard's Blogs tab under Course Tools.

Consulting

You can see Maddie, the T.A., during her scheduled office hours; if it is not possible for you to make these, make an appointment with her. If you would like to see me, try to come during office hours. If you can't make office hours, set an appointment with me for Wednesday, or for before 2:30 PM on Friday. I check e-mail pretty regularly. If academic calamity has befallen you, you may call me at home, but please don't call any later than 10 P.M. If there's some other sort of calamity — say, you're in jail, or something like that, and there's no one else to bail you out — please call.

Looking out for yourself

Sometimes life as a college student can become more than usually difficult and stressful. Georgetown has a lot of resources available to help you look after your own well-being. You can find contact information collected here:

<https://georgetown.app.box.com/s/34pf53jxccr3il83log4rrb2r350pyj9>

READING AND LECTURE/DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Reading (to be done <i>before</i> class)
8/31	Killing time during add/drop by dealing with tedious bureaucratic matters	None
9/5	<i>NO CLASS: UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY</i>	
9/7	Skepticism	Mackie, "The Argument from Relativity" and "The Argument from Queerness"; Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword"; Parfit, "Moral Scepticism"
9/12	Desire	Elster, "Rational Choice"
9/14	<i>NO CLASS: INSTRUCTOR OUT OF TOWN</i>	
9/19	Desire (cont'd)	Quinn, "Putting Rationality in its Place"
9/21	Well-being	Sumner, "The Concept of Welfare"; Parfit, "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best"
9/26	Well-being (cont'd)	Nozick, "The Experience Machine"; Wolf, "Happiness and Meaning"; Sumner, "Objective Theories"
9/28	Intrinsic value	Davison, "Preliminary Matters," "Possibilities," and "Degrees," from <i>On the Intrinsic Value of Everything</i>
10/3	What are the basic sources of reasons?	None: papers due / discussion day
10/5	Temporal neutrality	Brink, "Prospects for Temporal Neutrality"
10/10	<i>NO CLASS: UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY</i>	
10/12	Temporal neutrality (cont'd)	Parfit, "Different Attitudes to Time"
10/17	Personal neutrality	Sidgwick, "Philosophical Intuitionism"; Rachels, "Ethical Egoism"
10/19	Personal neutrality (cont'd)	Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?"
10/24	Must we be neutral, and in what ways?	None: papers due / discussion day
10/26	Maximization	None
10/31	MIDTERM EXAM	Exam covers material through 10/24

READING AND LECTURE/DISCUSSION SCHEDULE (continued)

11/2	Maximization (cont'd)	Quinn, "The Puzzle of the Self-Torturer"; Nussbaum, "Plato on Commensurability and Desire"
11/7	Doing and allowing, intending and foreseeing	Thomson, "Trolley Problem"; Murphy, "Intention, Foresight, and Success"
11/9	Promoting, respecting, expressing	Donagan, "The Limits of Purpose"; Adams, "Symbolic Value"
11/14	How to respond to reasons?	None: papers due/discussion day
11/16	Acts and rules	None
11/21	Side-constraints	Nozick, "Moral Constraints and Moral Goals"
11/23	<i>NO CLASS: BECAUSE NO ONE WOULD BE HERE ANYWAY</i>	
11/28	Authority and autonomy	Wolff, "The Conflict Between Authority and Autonomy"; Murphy, "Authority"
11/30	Rights and prerogatives	Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"
12/5	Some moral theories, dissected	None
12/7	What is the most defensible moral theory?	None: papers due/discussion day

ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

Date	Assignment
10/3	Paper #1 due, by e-mail to Maddie before beginning of class
10/24	Paper #2 due, by e-mail to Maddie before beginning of class
10/31	Midterm exam, in class
11/14	Paper #3 due, by e-mail to Maddie before beginning of class
12/7	Paper #4 due, by e-mail to Maddie before beginning of class
12/19	Final exam (at 9 AM, room TBA)

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Cheating of any form is wrong. It damages the cheater, those whose work is assessed alongside the cheater's, and the institution in which cheating takes place. Because a campus wide honor system is in place, any case of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Council. Anyone found in violation of the honor code for cheating in this class in a premeditated fashion will receive a failing grade for the semester.

The form of cheating to which there seems to be the greatest temptation in philosophy courses is plagiarism. For your information, the university's Honor System brochure describes plagiarism in the following way: "Plagiarism is the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another" (p. 3). It also emphasizes that "plagiarism can be said to have occurred without any affirmative showing that a student's use of another's work was intentional" (p. 3). This means that plagiarism can occur through sloppiness as well as through malice: failure to cite one's sources is plagiarism even if one just forgot to cite it. This means that the burden of care is on **you**.

General guidelines:

If it is a direct quotation, **cite it**.

If it is a paraphrase, **cite it**.

If it is an idea that you got from a particular source — whether a publication or a person — **cite it**.

If you are in doubt about whether it should be cited, **cite it**.

The only items that are not cited are those that one thought up on one's own or those that belong to general knowledge.