

Phil 300: Ethics

Fall 2025

T/Th 12:25-2:05pm

Instructor: Nathaniel Greely Email: ngreely@callutheran.edu

Office Hours: 8:30am-9:30am T/TH HUM 224

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to ethical theory. We will examine the most prominent accounts of what makes something morally right or wrong. These accounts include Utilitarianism, Deontology, Social Contract Theory, Divine Command Theory, Cultural Relativism, Ethical Egoism, Care Ethics, and Virtue Ethics. We will also cover prominent accounts of justice by Nozick, Rawls, and Nussbaum. Our approach will be analytic, meaning that arguments for and against each theory will be constructed and then evaluated for internal consistency and consistency with empirical data. No previous knowledge of philosophy, logic, or ethics is required or assumed, though contributions from students with previous training in various disciplines is welcome.

Learning Outcomes:

Students should be able to demonstrate their understanding of ethical theory by engaging in discussions, completing written exams, and writing and revising an original essay that argues for a specific thesis related to ethical theory.

Textbook:

The text for this course is *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* by James Rachels, 9th Edition. The text is available in the bookstore and is widely available in other venues. Earlier editions are acceptable (and cheaper), but you must obtain some version of the text. I will also post a pdf to Canvas. There will be other readings in addition to the Rachels text which will also be posted to Canvas.

Assessments:

The assessments in this course are largely designed to keep you engaged with the lectures, readings, discussions, and other students in the course. Your grades for discussion, quizzes, essay proposal, and rough draft total 55% of your grade. It should be easy to do well on these components if you stay engaged. The midterm, final exam, and final draft of your essay will be graded on quality, and to get top marks on these components you will be required to demonstrate understanding of the material (for the midterm and final exam) and some original philosophical insight (for the final essay). Your grade in the course will be composed of the following:

Attendance and Participation – 15%

Each student is required to post weekly to the Canvas discussion board, **due each Sunday 11:59pm**. The subject of the post will be one of the readings for the upcoming week. The post can be an objection to some claim or argument in the reading, a request for clarification of some claim or argument in the reading, or an extension of some claim or argument from the reading. You should avoid merely summarizing points from the reading. Original thought is the goal. The hope is that these posts will help you begin to formulate an original thesis for your essay.

Quizzes – 15%

At the end of each two-week unit, we will devote one class period to review, followed by a short quiz on that unit. The goal of the quizzes is to assess whether students are keeping up with reading and lectures. They are designed to be quite easy for students who do so.

Midterm – 15%

The midterm will consist of two short essays (1-2 pages each). Students will be given four essay prompts and may choose to write on any two of them. The essay prompts will be on topics from Units 1-3 of the course. The short essays should demonstrate understanding of the claims and arguments from the readings and lectures on the given topic. **The essay prompts will be posted 10/2 by 11:59pm and the midterm will be in class on 10/9.**

Presentations – 10%

Students will give a brief presentation in class in which they explain the general topic of their term papers, the thesis, and the original argumentative strategy they intend to pursue. The paper idea needn't be polished at this stage, but it should reflect an honest attempt to construct an original argument. Students will receive feedback from me and their colleagues, which they should consider when writing the rough draft. After the midterm on 10/9 I will post several essay prompts to Canvas. These prompts are meant as examples of the sort of paper you could write. You are not required to write on one of these prompts, but you may. Presentations will occur in class on 10/28, 10/30, and 11/4.

Essay draft – 15%

One of the most important parts of writing an essay is revision. Students will be required to turn in a rough draft of their final essay, **due Sunday, 11/18 by 11:59pm, submitted through Canvas.** The essay should present and develop an original thesis on some topic from the course material. Prompts will be provided, but students are welcome to develop their own essay topics, possibly based on a discussion board exchange. The essay should be narrowly focused on a very specific claim, likely a single premise in an argument presented in a lecture or reading. Provide an original argument for your view about that claim and consider objections to your argument. There is no length requirement, but 5-7 pages is a rough target length. The rough draft will be returned with comments on how the essay might be developed and improved. It should be easy to get full points for your draft so long as it reflects an honest effort to make a cogent argument.

Final Essay – 15%

Students will revise their essay drafts based on the comments they receive. You are almost certainly expected to make significant changes to your essay in order to get top marks. The final draft will be graded on quality, not merely on effort. **The final draft will be due 12/4 at 11:59pm, submitted through Canvas.**

Final Exam – 15%

The final exam will be similar in format to the midterm. Students will be given four essay prompts and may choose to write on any two of them. The essay prompts will be on topics from Units 4-6 of the course. The short essays should demonstrate understanding of the claims and arguments from the readings and lectures on the given topic. The final exam questions will be posted 12/3. The final exam will be **in class 12/9 at ?**

Course Schedule

Unit 1 – Objective Morality

8/26 – Course Introduction
8/28 – Rachels Ch. 1 & 2
9/2 – Rachels Ch. 3; Hume
9/4 – Review and Quiz

Unit 2 – Religion, Egoism, Social Contract

9/9 – Rachels Ch. 4; Plato
9/11 – Rachels Ch. 5; Rand
9/16 – Rachels Ch. 6; Hobbes
9/18 – Review and Quiz

Unit 3 – Utilitarianism

9/23 – Rachels Ch. 7
9/25 – Rachels Ch. 8
9/30 – Mill; Singer
10/2 – LeGuin; Midterm Prompts Posted
10/7 – Review and Quiz (review for Midterm also)
10/9 – Midterm; Essay Prompts Posted

Unit 4 – Deontology

10/14 – Rachels Ch. 9
10/16 – Rachels Ch. 10
10/21 – Kant; Korsgaard
10/23 – Review and Quiz
10/28 – Essay Proposals
10/30 – Essay Proposals
11/4 – Essay Proposals

Unit 5 – Virtue Ethics, Care Ethics, Conclusions

11/6 – Rachels Ch. 11; Aristotle
11/11 – Rachels Ch. 12; Gilligan
11/13 – Rachels Ch. 13
11/18 – Review and Quiz; Essay Draft Due

Unit 6 – Theories of Justice

11/20 – Nozick
11/25 – Rawls
11/28 – Thanksgiving Break
12/2 – Nussbaum; Review and Quiz; Final Exam Prompts Posted
12/4 – Review for Final; Final Essay Due
12/9 – Final Exam?

GRADING

Numeric	Grade	Numeric	Grade
Over 93%	A	73% to 76%	C
90% to 92%	A-	70% to 72%	C-
87% to 89%	B+	67% to 69%	D+
83% to 86%	B	63% to 66%	D
80% to 82%	B-	60% to 62%	D-
77% to 79%	C+	<60%	F

CARNEGIE/STUDENT WORKLOAD -

Activity	Instructor-Led		Independent		Remarks
	Weekly	Course	Weekly	Course	
Class Meetings	4	60			
Course Readings			4	60	
Midterm Prep				5	
Research Proposal				10	
Essay Draft				10	
Final Essay				20	
Quiz Prep				10	
Final Exam Prep				5	
Total Hours		60		120	

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS FOR BLACKBOARD

Even though this is an on-ground, on-campus, face-to-face, in-person class, some components of your class could be placed on Blackboard (e.g., syllabus).

Hardware & Software

	Windows	Mac OS X
Operating System	Windows 10	OS X 10.12 or later version

Java	Most recent version	Most recent version
------	---------------------	---------------------

Browser

Your browser must always be up to date. We recommend Firefox and Chrome for all Blackboard functions. If you are experiencing problems on another browser, please switch to Firefox or Chrome. To check your browser and system compatibility with Blackboard, please use the Blackboard Browser Checker below to view your functionality. *Please note that checkmarks on all functions does not guarantee a seamless experience.*

Click here: [Blackboard Browser Checker](#)

Internet

Bandwidth: recommended requirement is 5 Mbps per device or higher; anything less will cause potential issues.

Note: Bandwidth is affected by distance from the wireless router or access point, use of Netflix video streaming and number of users on the wireless network.

Streaming services: Sites or applications that use the internet like YouTube, Netflix, P2P, Spotify, or Pandora must be closed before starting a Zoom session.

Connection: You must be connected to the internet via an ethernet cable or Wi-Fi. Hotspots do not have the bandwidth to handle Zoom sessions.

Wi-Fi: Be as close to the router access point as possible to get the best connection. Be aware that locations with free Wi-Fi, i.e. Starbucks or Barnes & Noble, cannot provide enough bandwidth for Zoom sessions and should not be used.

Use the following link to check your speed. Click here: <http://speedof.me>

Diversity and Inclusion:

Individuals of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, genders (and identities & expressions thereof), national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ability - and other visible and non-visible differences are welcome in this course. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. We will be discussing controversial topics in this class and students may confront views that they find wrong or even reprehensible. Where possible I would like to confront those views with reasoned arguments. If you find that a particular reading or assignment is so emotionally charged that it interferes with your ability to complete it, send me an email and we'll see if there is a solution that we can all be happy with.

Academic Accommodation:

If you require any form of accommodation on the grounds of disability, please visit this link: <https://www.callutheran.edu/students/disability-services/register.html> well in advance so that you can submit the necessary documents.

Contact information is dss@callutheran.edu, Phone: (805) 493-3464, Disability Support Services, 60 W. Olsen Rd. #5300, Thousand Oaks, CA, 91360

Religious Accommodation:

If you require any accommodation on religious grounds, please alert me in writing as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity:

All instances of academic offences including plagiarism, cheating on exams, and multiple submission of work, will be handled in accordance with official policy, which can be found here:

<https://catalog.callutheran.edu/undergraduate/academicpolicies/>. Please read the policy and ensure that you understand it.