

# PHIL 1003W: Intro to Ethics

Spring 2024 | M/W 1:00-2:15 pm | Anderson 370



18<sup>th</sup>-century Tibetan depiction of Nagarjuna with the Thirty Great Adepts (Mahasiddhas)

## Instructors:

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**Course Description:** This course will survey some of the most influential moral-ethical perspectives in Eastern and Western traditions. Topics include why or whether it is reasonable to be selfless, the fundamental virtues of human character, the role of family and relationships in ethical life, the basic rules of moral conduct, and the bearing of our actions' consequences on their moral value. The course will conclude with philosophical challenges to the legitimacy of moral-ethical theory itself.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students in the course will **understand diverse philosophies and culture within and across societies**.

### Addressing the outcome

In this course students will carefully study some of the most influential ethical perspectives in Eastern and Western society. Throughout our discussions, comparisons will be made with perspectives outside those represented in the assigned readings, including the social and cultural realities of the students themselves. The aim will be to enrich our own ethical perspectives by careful attention to the diverse moral philosophies throughout the world.

### Assessment of learning related to the outcome

The learning related to this outcome will be evaluated through regular participation in class discussion, and a series of critical papers in which students will be required to clearly explain a variety of ethical perspectives as well as to compare and critically evaluate them.

**Required Texts:** There are no required textbooks for this course. All readings will be provided on Canvas.

## Course Requirements:

1. Weekly Discussion Posts (10 total) 10%
2. Canvas Reading Quizzes (5 total) 10%
3. Three papers
  - a. First Paper (2 pages) 15%
  - b. Second Paper (2-3 pages) 20%
  - c. Third Paper (3-5 pages) 25%
4. Participation 20%
  - a. Attendance
  - b. Quality of Discussion Posts
  - c. Class Discussion

### Major Deadlines:

Discussion Posts	Wednesdays before midnight
Readings Quizzes	See Course Schedule
Paper 1	Sat Feb 24 by midnight
Paper 2	Sat April 6 by midnight
Paper 3	Sat May 4 by midnight

## Description of Requirements

**1. Discussion posts (10%):** Students will be required to write a weekly discussion post (a minimum of 1 paragraph, roughly 5 *thoughtful* sentences) that responds to a question posed by the instructor. The purpose of the discussion posts is for students to state as clearly as possible *their own answer* to the question posed. The question will be relevant to the readings assigned during that week of class, but students *are not required* to discuss the assigned readings in their discussion post (though they can if they so desire). To be clear: the purpose of the discussion posts is for students to state *their own opinion* – as clearly, thoughtfully, and respectfully as possible – in response to a question related to class.

Students can optionally (and are strongly encouraged to!) *write a response* – clearly, thoughtfully, and respectfully – to a discussion post written by one of their peers. It is not sufficient to write

something like, “I agree with so-and-so, thanks for writing a great post!”; rather, a response must make a *substantive* contribution to the discussion (and as with an original post be at least 1 paragraph, roughly 5 *thoughtful* sentences). Options include: offering an example that illustrates the idea expressed in the original post, an objection (either one’s own or “playing devil’s advocate”) to the original post, a comparison of the original post with the ideas of some author studied in the course, a further question that the original post brought to mind for you. Be creative!

**Students are allowed to skip 3 of the assigned discussion posts.** Since 13 discussion posts are assigned, students are required to complete 10 discussion posts throughout the semester.

Discussion posts are simply graded for completion, but their general quality will be factored into one’s *Participation grade*.

**2. Canvas Reading Quizzes (10%):** There will be 5 Reading Quizzes administered via Canvas. These quizzes are multiple-choice format, with 5-10 questions on the material we’ve read and studied in previous weeks. Students will be given the questions (at least) one week before the quiz deadline. The quizzes will open on Monday of the relevant week and will close the following Saturday at midnight.

**3. Three Paper Assignments (%15 - %20 - %25):** Three total writing assignments are required for this class (to be submitted via Canvas). Papers should be submitted as a Word document, double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman, with 1-inch margins. More detailed instructions for each will be posted online.

a. *First Paper (Expository):* The goal of this assignment will simply be to explain (as clearly as possible) *either* Plato *or* the Buddha’s answer to the question, “Why should we be moral?”.

b. *Second Paper (Critical):* The goal of this assignment will be to practice *critical* writing. Students will be required to raise a challenge or objection to some philosopher’s view. They will then be required to consider how that philosopher would respond to their objection. They will then explain to the reader what we should conclude from the debate.

c. *Third Paper (Hybrid):* Students will now combine their skills in exegetical and critical writing. They will explain a topic of special interest and then engage with it critically.

**4. Participation (20%):** Discussion is the core of this class. That is why participation counts for 20% of your course grade. You should come to *every class and recitation* prepared to talk about the assigned readings and the course topics. The participation component of your grade will also factor in your attendance record as well as the regular completion and quality of your forum posts. Please feel free to check in with your TA at any point in the semester if you are ever concerned about your participation.

## Course Schedule

- \* Schedule is subject to change. \* Complete readings prior to class.
- \* Required (and optional) audio/video content will be posted on Canvas.

### **Introduction**

Wed Jan 17 – Syllabus & Introduction to class

### **Why be moral?**

Mon Jan 22 – Overview of Plato's Republic  
C.D.C. Reeve, 'Introduction [to the *Republic*]'

Wed Jan 24 – Thrasymachus Praises Injustice  
Plato, *Republic* Book 1 (Examination of Thrasymachus)

### **Interrogating the 'Self': Plato and the Buddha's Moral Psychology**

Mon Jan 29 – Plato's Tripartite Theory of the Soul  
Plato, *Republic* Book 4 (Justice in the Soul)

Wed Jan 31 – Philosophy as the Means to Enlightenment  
Plato, *Republic* Book 7 (Allegory of the Cave)

Mon Feb 5 – Intro to Buddhism  
John M. Koller, 'Buddhism: The Basic Teachings'

Wed Feb 7 – Ending Suffering, Universal Love & No Self (*Anatman*)  
'Basic Teachings According to the Early Texts'  
Optional: 'Eastern Philosophy says there is no self – Science agrees' (Big Think)  
<https://tinyurl.com/54rxch47>

### ***Saturday Feb 10 – Reading Quiz 1 due by midnight***

Mon Feb 12 – Emptiness & Unselfing  
*The Heart Sutra*  
Thich Nhat Hanh, 'Emptiness as Fullness'  
'Iris Murdoch: "Unselfing" is Crucial for Living a Good Life' (Philosophy Break)  
<http://tinyurl.com/8raswwbd>

Wed Feb 14 – Tips on Writing Philosophy

## **Virtues of Character: Aristotelian and Confucian Virtue Ethics**

Mon Feb 19 – Aristotle on Virtues of Character  
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Selections)

Wed Feb 21 – Virtue Theory: Objective or Relative?  
Martha Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach”  
(Selections)

### ***Saturday Feb 24 – First (Expository) Paper Due by midnight***

Mon Feb 26 – Confucian Ethics  
John M. Koller, ‘Confucianism: The Thought of Confucius’  
Confucius, *Analects* (Selections)

Wed Feb 28 – Confucian Feminism & Care Ethics  
Chenyang Li, “The Confucian Concept of Ren and the Feminist Ethics of Care”  
(Selections)  
Sungmoon Kim, “The Way to Become a Female Sage” (Selections)

### ***Saturday March 2 – Reading Quiz 2 due by midnight***

**Spring Break:** Mon March 4<sup>th</sup> - Fri March 8<sup>th</sup>

## **Consequences and Impartiality: Mohism and Utilitarianism**

Mon March 11 – Mozi’s Consequentialism  
Bryan Van Norden, “Mohist Consequentialism”  
Mozi, ‘Impartial Caring’

Wed March 13 – Utilitarianism (& Hedonism)  
Julia Markovits, “Utilitarianism Part 1” (Youtube video)  
John Stuart Mill, “Hedonism”

Mon March 18 – Utilitarianism: Uncomfortable Implications  
Julia Markovits, “Utilitarianism Part 2” (Youtube video)  
Ursula K. LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas”

Wed March 20 – Utilitarianism: Uncomfortable Implications  
Philippa Foot, “Utilitarianism and the Virtues”

### ***Saturday March 23 – Reading Quiz 3 due by midnight***

## **Kant's Humanity Principle**

Mon March 25 – Kant on Autonomy and Respect

Russ Shafer-Landau, 'The Kantian Perspective: Autonomy and Respect'

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Selections)

Wed March 27 – Kant & Korsgaard on the Value of Non-Human Animals

Immanuel Kant, "Duties Toward Animals"

Kristine Korsgaard, "On the Value of People and Animals"

Mon April 1 – Tips on Writing Philosophy

## **Beyond Morality: Nietzsche, Susan Wolf and Daoism**

Wed April 3 – Break for Paper Writing – Open Office Hours

### ***Saturday April 6 – Second (Critical) Paper Due***

Mon April 8 – Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morality* (Selections)

Wed April 10 – Nietzsche's Ethics of *Amor Fati*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Book 4 (Selections)

### ***Saturday April 13 – Reading Quiz 4 due by midnight***

Mon April 15 – Should we be "Moral Saints"?

Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints"

Wed April 17 – The *Daodejing*

Bryan Van Norden, "The *Daodejing* and Mysticism"

*Daodejing* (Selections)

Mon April 22 – Zhuangzi's Therapeutic Skepticism

Bryan Van Norden, "[Zhuangzi chapter]"

Zhuangzi, "Equalizing Assessments of Things"

Wed April 24 – Striving to do Better

Kathryn Norlock, "Perpetual Struggle"

### ***Saturday April 27 – Reading Quiz 5 due by midnight***

Mon April 29 – Review, Reflection, & Final Paper Prep

### ***Saturday May 4 – Final (Hybrid) Paper Due by midnight***

## Course Policies

1. **Late Work:** Unless special permission is obtained in advance, late papers will not be accepted without grade penalty. The penalty for late papers is 5% for every day the paper is submitted past the official deadline. Discussion posts cannot be made up and must be completed on time for credit. Extended deadlines *on paper assignments* are granted liberally **only if they are within one week of the official deadline**, but you *must* receive permission from your TA. Further extensions on papers or discussion posts will require a formal excuse with evidence, such as a medical note or a note from a parent in the case of a family emergency.
2. **Grading:** Final grades will be calculated using the following scale.

F	D-	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A
0	62	65	68	72	75	78	82	85	88	92	95

Below is a list of criteria that will be used to evaluate your papers. Note that the %'s only give a *rough* indication of how important these aspects are, and that not all of the criteria will apply equally to each of the different assignments; this is not a mathematical scale. There will be slightly different standards for each of the individual assignments, which I will state when those assignments are announced.

- Quality of ideas (50%)
    - *Range and depth of argument; fair representation of philosopher's position; logic of argument; quality and/or originality of thought; appropriate sense of the complexity of the topic; appropriate awareness of opposing views.*
  - Organization and Argumentation (40%)
    - *Clarity of thesis statement in the introduction; logical and clear arrangement of ideas; effective use of transitions; unity and coherence of paragraphs; good development of arguments through supporting details and evidence.*
  - Clarity, style, and grammar (10%)
    - *Ease of readability; appropriate voice, tone, and style for the assignment; clarity of sentence structure; grammatically correct sentences; accurate spelling; careful proofreading.*
3. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will result in a final grade of F for the course. If you have any questions about plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, do not hesitate to ask any of your instructors. According to the UMN Student Conduct Code: "Plagiarism shall mean representing the words, creative work, or ideas of another person as one's own without providing proper documentation of source".

4. **ChatGPT:** (TLDR: You are *not* allowed to use ChatGPT for this course.) The Board of Regents Student Conduct Code states the following in Section IV, Subd.1: Scholastic Dishonesty:

"Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarism; cheating on assignments or examinations, including the unauthorized use of online learning support and testing platforms; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work, including the posting of student-generated coursework on **online learning support and testing platforms** not approved for the specific course in question; taking, acquiring, or using course materials without faculty permission, including the posting of faculty-provided course materials on online learning and testing platforms; ..."

Artificial intelligence (AI) language models, such as ChatGPT, and online assignment help tools, such as Chegg®, are examples of **online learning support platforms**: they can not be used for course assignments except as explicitly authorized by the instructor. The following actions are prohibited in this course:

- Submitting all or any part of an assignment statement to an online learning support platform;
- Incorporating any part of an AI generated response in an assignment;
- Using AI to summarize or contextualize source materials.

If you are in doubt as to whether you are using an online learning support platform appropriately in this course, I encourage you to discuss your situation with one of your instructors.

5. **Disability Accommodations:** If you have, or think you have, a disability in any area such as mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) <https://ars.unc.edu/> to arrange confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations. If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact your TA early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in this course.
6. **Sexual Misconduct.** Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence) includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior is prohibited in the University setting.

Per the [U of M policy on sexual harassment](#), *I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct* with the campus Title IX office. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive as possible to your requests for confidentiality and support. You can also, or alternately, choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include:



- The Aurora Center 24hr Helpline (612-626-9111)
- Boynton Mental Health (612-624-1444)
- Student Counseling Services (612-624-3323)

**7. Other Useful Resources:**

- Technology resources for remote learning: <https://it.umn.edu/working-learning-campus/get-internet-access-campus>
- University Policies: <https://policy.umn.edu/>
- Student Writing Support: <http://writing.umn.edu/sws/>
- Disability Resource Center: <https://disability.umn.edu/>
- Student Counseling Center: <https://counseling.umn.edu/>
- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu>