

PHI 192: Introduction to Moral Theory

Spring 2025

Instructor: Antonio Freiles	Place & Time: Lyman Hall 115B, TuTh 2:00pm - 3:20pm
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Course Description: In the second book of the [Nicomachean Ethics](#), Aristotle states:

“for we are not investigating the nature of virtue for the sake of knowing what it is, but in order that we may become good, without which result our investigation would be of no use.”

This course, too, focuses on goodness. Indeed, we will survey a series of questions about moral goodness, starting by acquiring the tools to establish philosophical conclusions to be able to answer these questions. We will ask whether goodness is objective or subjective, what criteria should be used to count actions as good, and what actions are good. The answers we will discuss shed light on what philosophers think are viable ways to theorize about moral goodness. Still, most importantly, these answers will teach us how to reason independently about *what is moral goodness* and *how we should pursue it*.

Learning Objectives:

- (1) How to become familiar with the philosophical views' main ideas, with particular attention to the main arguments used in their favor and the most popular objections against them.
- (2) How to read, interpret, and critically engage with philosophical texts.
- (3) How to formulate philosophical argument in premise-conclusion format.
- (3) How to object and reply to the arguments analyzed in class.
- (4) How to debate philosophical views as a philosophically rigorous but kind and respectful interlocutor.

Course Materials: All the required readings will be posted on Blackboard under the heading 'Content'. Original class materials (handouts, slides, etc.) are the course instructor's intellectual property. You may download these materials for your use in this class. However, you may not provide these materials to other parties (e.g., websites, social media, other students) without permission. Doing so is a violation of intellectual property law and of the student code of conduct.

To be ready for in-class discussion and activities, you must consult every required reading before the start of the lecture they are assigned for. Finally, reading philosophy is not an easy task. Readings are often complex and very time-consuming. Allocate some time of your day to read philosophy on the days the lectures are in session. Here, it is a very brief guide on what to look for when reading [philosophy](#).

Assessment: The assessment is in four parts.

1. *Quizzes:* 10% of your course grade. There will be ten in-class content quizzes; each quiz is worth 1% of your final grade. The quizzes are closed-book, and they test your understanding of the content discussed the previous week. Quizzes will include reconstruction of the arguments in premise-conclusion format and short answers to questions about the materials. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

2. *Attendance and Participation:* 10% of your course grade. Attendance is 5% of your grade, and it is required. However, I will excuse absences if it is due to religious observance or an email from Barnes Center informing me that the student cannot attend the class for health-related issues. Private doctor's notes will not be accepted. In-class participation is 5% of your grade, and it is required. You can participate in class, but if you prefer to avoid speaking in public, you must send me an email 24 hours before each class with a question about the material—except for when exams take place.

3. *Exams:* 70% of your course grade. You will take three in-class closed-book exams. The first exam is 20% of your course grade and covers the material studied in the first six weeks of the semester. The second exam is also 20% of your course grade and covers the material studied from week eight to week twelve. The final exam is 30% of your course grade and covers the entire semester's material.

4. *Debates:* 10% of your course grade. Before each exam, we will have a review of the material covered. For the first two exams, the [debates](#) will be an opportunity to review the exam materials. I will randomly choose a philosophical view discussed in the class with a lottery. One team, the opponents, will then defend the extracted view; the other team, the respondents, will object to the view. The class will have a total of four teams. So, there will be two debates per review. The grade for this assessment is equal for everyone and is the average of the performances of all teams.

Letter grade: A 93 - 100; A- 90 - 92.99; B+ 87 - 89.99; B 83 - 86.99; B- 80 - 82.99; C+ 77 - 79.99; C 73 - 76.99; C- 70 - 72.99; D+ 67 - 69.99; D 63 - 66.99; D- 60 - 62.99; F 0 - 59.99.

Course Policies: the following policies will be applied throughout the course.

Academic Integrity: Do not cheat! It's unfair to your instructors and fellow students. Any established academic integrity violation may result in course failure, regardless of violation level. For details on SU's academic integrity expectations and policies, visit: <http://class.syr.edu/academic-integrity/policy/>. All work submitted for quizzes and exams must be yours alone. Communicating about quizzes or exam questions with anyone during the quiz or exam period violates academic integrity expectations.

Religious Observances: If you need to miss a class or deadline due to religious observance, you will be entitled to make-up opportunities if you provide notice by the end of the second week of class.

You must do so through MySlice. You can find the relevant information [here](#).

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process. If you would like to discuss disability accommodations or register with CDR, please visit the Center for Disability Resources. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

Health: Mental health and overall well-being have a significant impact on academic success. It is important to develop skills and resources to effectively navigate stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the [Barnes Center](#) provides and seek out support for mental health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days a year, at 315.443.8000, and I encourage you to explore the resources available through [the Wellness Leadership Institute](#).

Email Policy: I will reply to your emails within 24 hours on weekdays.

Laptop Policy: laptops are not allowed for note-taking unless prior arrangements with CDR have been made. Tables with pencils and notebooks instead are. Students using laptops in class will not receive the attendance and participation grades for the lecture.

Deadlines Policy: absences for quizzes, debates, and exams are justified only if they satisfy the criteria illustrated in *Attendance and Participation*. If a student misses a single quiz without any previous notice, the quiz grade will count as the lowest and thus will be dropped. In contrast, if a student misses more than one quiz, a debate, or an exam without any previous notice, 10% of the grade will subtracted for each day of late notice (e.g., a student misses an exam and contacts me after five days to complete it, I will subtract 50% of the grade from the exam's final score).

Extra credit Policy: extra credits will not be granted. The assignments already allow you to excel and improve your grade.

Office Hours: I will hold office hours every Thursday after class. You must book them in advance [here](#). No-shows count as absences towards your participation grade. Similarly, your presence during office hours counts positively towards it (e.g., if you did not participate in a lecture, your participation during office hours would equalize the score).

Schedule: every reading shows its complete length in terms of pages. However, for every title's reading preceded by "excerpts from", we will not read the totality of the pages, only some parts.

Week 1, Introduction

- January 14, Syllabus & the Validity and Soundness of Philosophical Arguments.
- January 16, Russ Shafer-Landau, excerpts from *The Fundamental of Ethics*: "Eleven Arguments Against Moral Objectivity" (pp. 13).

Week 2, Objectivism

- January 21, *Quiz #1* & Russ Shafer-Landau, excerpts from *The Fundamental of Ethics*: "Eleven Arguments Against Moral Objectivity" (pp. 25).
- January 23, David Enoch, excerpts from *Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)* (pp. 19).

Week 3, Utilitarianism: Part I

- January 28, *Quiz #2* & John Stuart Mill, *What Utilitarianism Is* (around 6 pp.).
- January 30, Russ Shafer-Landau, excerpts from *The Fundamental of Ethics*: "Consequentialism and its Attractions" (pp. 30).

Week 4, Utilitarianism: Part II

- February 4, *Quiz #3* & Peter Singer, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality* (15 pp.).
- February 6, Robert Nozick, excerpts from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, "Experience Machine" (pp. 6), & Ursula K LeGuin, *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* (pp. 5).

Week 5, Deontology: Part I

- February 11, *Quiz #4* & Russ Shafer-Landau, excerpts from *The Fundamental of Ethics*: "The Kantian Perspective" (pp. 26).
- February 13, Nora O'Neill, *A simplified account of Kant's Ethics* (pp. 7).

Week 6, Deontology: Part II

- February 18, *Quiz #5* & Philippa Foot, *Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives* (pp. 12).
- February 20, Christine M. Korsgaard, excerpts from *The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil* (pp. 25).

Week 7, Exam Week I

- February 25, *First Exam Review*
- February 27, *First Exam*

Week 8, Applied Ethics: Virtue Ethics and Animal Rights

- March 4, *Quiz #6* & Julia Annas, *Virtue Ethics* (pp. 7) and Peter Singer, excerpts from *Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism* (pp. 9).
- March 6, Rosalind Hursthouse, excerpts from *Applying Virtue to Ethics to the Right of Animals* (pp. 19).

Week 10, Applied Ethics: Free Speech

- March 18, *Quiz #7* John Stuart Mill, excerpts from Chapter II of *On Liberty* (pp. 6).
- March 20, Sean Illing's interview to Brian Leiter, *A Philosopher Makes the Case against Free Speech* (pp. 3), & Michael Huemer, *The Scope of the Freedom of Speech* (pp. 18).

Week 11, Applied Ethics: Abortion

- March 25, *Quiz #8* & David Boonin, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 from *Why Abortion Should be Legal—Even if the Fetus is a Person* (pp. 17).
- March 27, Don Marquis, *Why Abortion is Immoral* (pp. 11).

Week 12, Applied Ethics: Risk

- April 1, *Quiz #9* & Hilary Greaves, William MacAskill, and Elliott Thornley, *The Moral Case for Long-Term Thinking* (pp. 9).
- April 3, Bales, D'Alessandro, & Kirk-Giannini, *Artificial Intelligence: Arguments for Catastrophic Risk* (pp. 13).

Week 13, Applied Ethics: Well-Being & AI

- April 8, *Quiz #10* & Roger Crisp, excerpts from the SEP article *Well-Being* (pp. 7).
- April 10, Simon Goldstein and Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini, *AI Well-being* (pp. 21).

Week 14, Exam Week II

- April 15, *Second Exam Review*
- April 17, *Second Exam*

Week 15, Final Exam

- April 22, *Final Review*
- April 24, *Final Exam*

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