

PHI 192: Introduction to Moral Theory

Fall 2025

Instructor: Antonio Freiles	Place & Time: Newhouse 2 350, 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. 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 moral goodness is* and *how we should pursue it*.

Learning Objectives. By the end of this course, you will have learned:

- (1) How to become familiar with the main views in moral theory, 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 arguments in premise-conclusion format.
- (4) How to reply to the arguments analyzed in class succinctly and clearly.
- (5) 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 each required reading before the start of the class for which it is assigned. 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 is a very brief guide on what to look for when reading [philosophy](#).

Assessment: The assessment is in four parts.

1. *Quizzes*: 10 points of your course grade. There will be eight in-class content quizzes. 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 points of your course grade. Attendance is worth 5 points of your grade, and it is required. However, I will excuse absences if they are 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 worth 5 points 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.

3. *Exams*: 70 points of your course grade. You will take three in-class closed-book exams. The first exam, on October 9, is worth 20 points of your course grade and covers the material studied in the first seven weeks of the semester. The second exam, on November 20, is also worth 20 points of your course grade and covers the material studied between the two exams. The final exam, on December 16, is worth 30 points of your course grade and covers the entire semester's material.

4. *Debates*: 10 points 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 class with a lottery. Each debate involves two teams: one team, the respondents, defends the extracted view, while the other team, the opponents, objects to it. The class will be divided into four teams, so that every review session features two debates, each between two teams. The grade for this assessment is the same 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. Pencils, notebooks, and tablets are allowed instead. 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, the student will not receive a grade for that assignment.

Extra credit Policy: extra credit 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 reading whose title is preceded by “excerpts from”, we will not read all of the pages, only some parts.

Week 1, Introduction

- August 26, Syllabus Day.
- August 28, Russ Shafer-Landau, excerpts from *The Fundamentals of Ethics*: “Eleven Arguments Against Moral Objectivity” (pp. 25).

Week 2, Objectivism

- September 2, *Quiz #1* & Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*: “Eleven Arguments Against Moral Objectivity” continued.
- September 4, David Enoch, *Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)* (pp. 19).

Week 3, Utilitarianism: Part I

- September 9, *Quiz #2* & John Stuart Mill, *What Utilitarianism Is* (around 6 pp.).
- September 11, Russ Shafer-Landau, excerpts from *The Fundamentals of Ethics*: “Consequentialism and its Attractions” (pp. 30).

Week 4, Utilitarianism: Part II

- September 16, *Quiz #3* & Peter Singer, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality* (15 pp.).
- September 18, Robert Nozick, excerpts from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, “*Experience Machine*” (pp. 6), & Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* (pp. 5).

Week 5, Deontology: Part I

- September 23, *Quiz #4* & Russ Shafer-Landau, excerpts from *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, “The Kantian Perspective” (pp. 20)
- September 25, Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, “The Kantian Perspective” (continued).

Week 6, Deontology: Part II

- September 30, *Quiz #5* & Onora O’Neill, *A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics* (pp. 7).
- October 2, *First Exam Review*.

Week 7, Exam Week I

- October 7, Philippa Foot, *Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives* (pp. 12),
- October 9, *First Exam*

Week 8, Virtue Ethics

- October 14, Fall Break.
- October 16, Julia Annas, *Virtue Ethics* (pp. 7) and excerpts from Bryan W. Van Norden, *Mengzi and Virtue Ethics* (pp. 16).

Week 9, Applied Ethics: Animal Rights

- October 21, Shelly Kagan, *For Hierarchy in Animal Ethics* (pp. 18).
- October 23, Tyler Doggett, excerpts from *Moral Vegetarianism* (pp. 6).

Week 10, Applied Ethics: Free Speech

- October 28, *Quiz #6* & John Stuart Mill, excerpts from Chapter II of *On Liberty* (pp. 6).
- October 30, J. P. Messina, *Freedom of Expression and the Liberalism of Fear: A Defense of the Darker Mill* & Brian Leiter's interview, *A Philosopher Makes the Case against Free Speech*.

Week 11, Applied Ethics: Abortion

- November 4, *Quiz #7* & David Boonin, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 from *Why Abortion Should be Legal—Even if the Fetus is a Person* (pp. 17).
- November 6, Don Marquis, *Why Abortion is Immoral* (pp. 11).

Week 12, Applied Ethics: Risk

- November 11, *Quiz #8* & Bales, D'Alessandro, & Kirk-Giannini, *Artificial Intelligence: Arguments for Catastrophic Risk* (pp. 12).
- November 13, Bales, D'Alessandro, & Kirk-Giannini, *Artificial Intelligence: Arguments for Catastrophic Risk* (Continued).

Week 13, Exam Week II

- November 18, *Second Exam Review*
- November 20, *Second Exam*

Week 14, Thanksgiving Break

- November 25, No Class.
- November 27, No Class.

Week 15, Applied Ethics: AI & Well-Being

- December 2, Andrew Moore, excerpts from *Hedonism* (pp. 7).
- December 4, Simon Goldstein and Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini, *AI Well-being* (pp. 21).

Week 16, Final Week

- December 9, *Final Review*
- December 16, *Final Exam*: 8 am – 10 am.

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