

PHIL 361: Ethics (Spring 2021)

Syllabus

Instructor: Sumeet Patwardhan
(please just call me ‘Sumeet’)
Pronouns: he or they
Email: sumeetcp@umich.edu
(will respond within 48 hours,
except on weekends)

Lecture: MW 12-12:45 PM EST
Section 1: MW 1-1:50 PM EST
Section 2: MW 2-2:50 PM EST
Office Hours: R 12-2 PM EST,
and by appointment (just email me!)
All zoom links are on Canvas.

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

Description. How should someone live their life? This course is dedicated to a (brief) study of that question. First, we’ll talk about what kind of answer we can even give to such a question: Is there an ‘objective’ answer or is any answer in some way ‘relative’? The rest of the course will be dedicated primarily to two dimensions involved in any answer to the question of how to live. On the one hand, we can ask: What makes someone’s life go well, for them, and what makes it meaningful, for them? On the other hand, we can ask: What makes an action morally right? In particular, how are we obligated to treat others? Throughout the entire course, we will deliberate about these three main questions not just in the abstract realm of theory, but also in the concrete realm of life, by examining real-world issues in relationship ethics, the ethics of work, animal ethics, feminist ethics, philosophy of race, indigenous and environmental ethics, and the ethics of imprisonment. And in deliberating about these questions, we’ll aim to improve our philosophical thinking, reading, writing, and discussion, so that our learning is enriched not just by content acquisition but also by skills acquisition.

Learning Goals. In other words, by the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Describe prominent theories about the following: the status of morality; wellbeing and meaningful life; and morally right action
- Apply these theories to and evaluate them in the light of real-world issues in ethics
- Uncover and evaluate the argumentative structure for an ethical claim, whether it is your own or another’s; deliberately and critically reflect on your own ethical views; and notice the ethical dimensions of daily life
- Closely and charitably read difficult texts
- Improve the clarity, argumentative structure, and originality of your writing
- Respectfully discuss challenging topics with a diverse group of classmates

WHY LEARN IT?

Motivation. Issues in ethics affect all of us daily. This class will give you the tools to begin to think through and take a stand on such issues. Moreover, skills in philosophical thinking, reading, writing, and discussion will be directly useful in your academic and non-academic pursuits.

Wider Context. That said, this course is not the end-all, be-all of life, especially amidst a pandemic causing academic and personal stresses of many kinds. Please stay attentive to your overall wellness; don’t hesitate to reach out to me to talk through any issues you’re facing or to use the Canvas ‘Wellbeing’ tab to find wellness-related resources.

HOW WILL YOU LEARN IT?

Course components. All the course components will further the ‘content’-focused and ‘skills’-focused learning goals outlined above. The course readings will enable you to critically read and think about both ‘theoretical’ and ‘applied’ issues. The 45-minute lecture aims to outline the key points of those readings – which are to be done in advance – with time for reflection and discussion. The 50-minute section aims to cement comprehension of the lecture material and allow more time for small-group and full-class discussion. Finally, the course assignments will enable you not only to become more familiar with the various topics in ethics we will cover, but also to practice philosophical skills

Synchronous attendance. Synchronous lecture and section attendance are required, and the Zoom links are available on Canvas. If you expect that you won’t be able to consistently attend our synchronous meetings due to geographical considerations, please let me know ASAP so that we can talk through alternative forms of participation. For more details about excused absences, make-ups, and participation expectations, see the participation rubric on Canvas.

Recording. Lectures will be audio/video recorded and posted on Canvas, so that everyone can look back at them to review lecture content. Sections will not be recorded, since they will primarily involve activities and discussion. Thus, as part of your participation in lecture, you may be recorded. If you do not wish to be recorded, please email me the first week of class (or as soon as you enroll, whichever is latest) to discuss alternative arrangements.

General Zoom Guidelines. Since our course meetings will be over Zoom, we’ll have to follow certain guidelines to keep the course going well. To that end, I expect us – including myself! – to do the following:

- Be on time and ready to participate when class begins (just like an in-person class). I’ll open the Zoom room a few minutes before class starts; join early so that you can settle in.
- Stay focused and engaged. Feel free to wear whatever you want and join in from wherever you’re most comfortable, as long as it’s appropriate and as long as you can stay engaged.
- Display your preferred name on Zoom. I also strongly encourage everyone to display their pronouns. I do not require this in case people are uncomfortable doing so, in which case we will refer to you with the gender-neutral pronouns they/them.
- Keep your video on whenever possible. I know there might be important reasons to turn off your video at times, so use your discretion. But you’re likely to get more out of the course and be able to pay more attention if you approach it like a small group video call; it’s very hard to teach to blank screens; and keeping our video on will help us build more of a sense of classroom community and have robust discussions. For those reasons, please do keep your video on when you can. If you anticipate being consistently unable to have your camera on, please email me to give me a heads-up!
- Keep your audio muted when you’re not talking. Background noises and feedback can be distracting. But even if you’re muted, stay engaged through actively listening, critically thinking, and taking notes!
- Try, as much as possible, to avoid getting distracted by your computer or your meeting space. If something in your environment does disrupt you, don’t stress; just address the disruption and re-focus on the course as soon as you can.
- Not record or distribute any class activity without written permission from me, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations. Any approved recordings may only be used for your own private use.

Zoom Discussion Guidelines. During discussion times, we’ll also follow these guidelines:

- If you have a new question or comment: press the raise hand button.
- If you have a follow up question or comment related to what we’re currently talking about: press the green YES button.
- If you have a clarificatory question (you don’t understand something that was just said and you need a quick explanation before we move on): press the red NO button.
- You can post questions and observations to the chat. (As the course goes on, if the chat ends up being more distracting than helpful, I might keep it off.)

WHAT ASSIGNMENTS WILL ADVANCE AND DEMONSTRATE YOUR LEARNING?

Assignments:

1. Course Readings. Do readings before class. They influence quality of work in every other part of class.
2. Guided Reading Quizzes (30%). An assignment that will simultaneously guide you to understand the key ideas in each day's reading and demonstrate that you have understood those ideas. There will be one quiz due on Canvas before each day of class. There will be no restriction on how much time you have to complete the quiz before that deadline. Your lowest two quiz grades will be dropped, and the remaining ten will be worth three percent each, totaling to 30% of your grade. If you do the reading carefully and work on the quiz while doing so or soon afterwards, the quizzes should be straightforward.
3. Attendance and Participation (10%). Because lecture and section are back to back, you are expected to attend lecture and section synchronously each course day (unless you've talked to me about needing to attend asynchronously.) You may miss one lecture and one section, no questions asked, with no penalty. You may make up one lecture and one section, no questions asked, and you may make up even more lectures and sections in the event of long-term emergencies. For more details about participation expectations and make-up procedures, see the participation rubric on Canvas.
4. Argument Reconstruction and Objection Assignment (10%). An assignment to practice reconstructing an author's argument and objecting to it.
5. Objection and Response Assignment (15%). An assignment to practice objecting to an author's argument and responding to your own objection.
6. Reflection Assignment (15%). An assignment to critically reflect on what you can take away from this course.
7. Final Exam (20%). A comprehensive exam to allow you to apply and demonstrate your learning. The exam will be released on Canvas on 6/18. I will give you a list of questions, from which you'll get to choose a few to answer. The exam will be due on Canvas on 6/24 at 10 AM (the end of our assigned final exam slot). There will be no restriction on how much time you have to complete the exam before that deadline. However, the exam is designed not to take more than two hours (the length of our final exam slot).

Standards:

97-100 = A+	87-89 = B+	77-79 = C+	67-69 = D+
94-96 = A	84-86 = B	74-76 = C	64-66 = D
90-93 = A-	80-83 = B-	70-73 = C-	60-63 = D-

Policies:

1. Rubrics: I will share grading rubrics for section assignments (when their due dates come nearer) and for participation. Rubrics help to ensure consistent grading.
2. Anonymity: I will grade assignments anonymously, to ensure fair grading. Please do not put your name in the assignments or file names; use only your UMID number.
3. Group work: All of the assignments are to be done on your own; working in groups on assignments is not permitted.
4. Misconduct: Plagiarism and other academic misconduct take the intellectual property of others and/or produce unfair academic advantages. That's why I ask students to follow LSA's academic integrity standards (<https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity.html>). Instances of academic misconduct will be referred to the Office of the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education.
5. Extensions and Late Work: There will be no extension granted for the final exam and it will not be accepted late, given the extremely short time period within which I must grade all of the exams. There will also be no extension granted for the guided reading quizzes and they will not be accepted late, given that I will go over

the answers in lecture right after the deadline. For the three writing assignments (Reconstruction and Objection; Objection and Response; Reflection), everyone has a ‘grace period’ automatic extension of two calendar days, given that life is chaotic right now. After these two calendar days, your assignment grade will be lowered three percent per day. The assignment won’t be accepted once four total days after the original deadline have passed. That’s because accepting work after that point would make it very difficult for me to grade everyone’s assignments swiftly. In the case of longer-term emergencies, please don’t hesitate to email me and we can talk about whether a longer-than-two-day extension is possible.

6. Extra Credit: Extra credit will not be granted, as this can create the opportunity for unfair, ad hoc grade adjustments.
7. Grading Appeals: If you believe an assignment you submitted deserves a different grade than it received, please come talk to me in office hours or an appointment to explain why. After we talk, you may ask in writing for reconsideration. Your request must be submitted within one week, but no sooner than three days after the assignment is returned. Your written request must explain why you believe the assignment deserves a different grade. The opportunity to appeal is important to ensure student voice; the procedure for appeal ensures thoughtfulness in a decision to appeal and consistency across appeals.
8. General Grading Questions: If you have any questions about grading, just ask!

HOW CAN YOU *SUCCEED* IN YOUR LEARNING?

1. You can succeed through ~~brilliance~~ hard work and ownership over the course.

Hard work, not some innate spark, will be the first key to success. That’s why we will primarily be *learning by doing*. We will use individual and group exercises to examine ethical questions, theories, and issues.

The second key to success will be *making this course yours*. That’s why I’ll ask you to wrestle with your own moral views; to select a topic as a class for the second-to-last course day; and to write papers and exam answers that require original thought.

2. You can succeed by ~~never~~ seeking support when you need it.

Seeking support is not shameful; it’s smart! I recommend the following process:

- First, see if the syllabus and other course documents can answer your question.
- Second, ask your fellow peers. They will be an educational resource just as much as me!
- Third, come to my office hours or email me, with a question, confusion, insight, or inkling! I’ll respond to emails within 48 hours, except on weekends.
- At any stage, consult me if you’d like more resources about thinking/arguing/reading/writing philosophically!

Accommodations. Additionally, please talk to or email me if we can make accommodations that will make section more accessible for you. I also encourage you to talk with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (ssd.umich.edu; 734-763-3000), who can help secure accommodations without disclosing medical information to course instructors.

Sexual misconduct. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. I understand that sexual violence can undermine students’ academic success and I encourage anyone dealing with sexual misconduct to talk to someone about your experience, so that you can get the support you need. Confidential support and academic advocacy can be found with the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC) on their 24-hour crisis line, 734.936.3333 and at sapac.umich.edu.

3. You can succeed by doing the hard work ~~alone~~ with others.

Working by yourself not only traps you into your own worldviews, but also eliminates your ability to shape the worldviews of others. That's why we will strive to learn *from and with each other*.

To do so, we will follow norms of respectful and engaged participation. I've started us off with a few, but please do feel free to propose additional norms as the course continues. I expect us – including myself! – to do the following:

- Create an accessible and inclusive environment, by ensuring our words, actions, and body language include, respect, and affirm others.
- Stay focused and engaged.
- Make an effort to get to know each other. Refer to everyone by name in discussion, whenever we can.
- Make space for and hear from all voices – step up if we're shy; step back if we're talkative.
- Be courteous. No interruptions, no sidebars.
- Understand that we're all coming from different places and have different experiences.
- Listen carefully, especially if we disagree.
- Respond in a way that shows we've carefully listened to each other, e.g. give credit to others for their ideas.
- Criticize ideas, not people.
- Support our claims with evidence and reasoning, to ensure productive discussion.
- Don't tokenize people or inappropriately generalize about groups of people (even if we belong to that group).
- Take group-work seriously.
- Be especially considerate when discussing COVID-related issues. Even if you feel you have not been impacted significantly by the pandemic, remember that other classmates might have been impacted significantly.
- Recognize we're still learning – that's why we're here! Let us all grow from mistakes.

Thanks and acknowledgement due to CRLT, philosophy colleagues at and outside of UM, and The Chronicle of Higher Education for resources regarding syllabus construction.

PHIL 361 Schedule (Spring 2021)					
<i>All readings are on Canvas unless otherwise noted and are subject to change.</i>					
<u>Week</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Motivating Questions and Readings</u>	<u>Overarching Field in Ethics</u>	<u>Relevant Subfields in Ethics</u>	<u>Assignments</u>
1	May 5	Introduction to Course <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No reading 			Guided Quizzes explained First day questionnaire explained First day questionnaire due (by Friday 5/7)
2	May 10	Are Truths in Ethics Relative? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michele Moody-Adams, “Taking Disagreement Seriously” (Excerpt) Harry Gensler, “Cultural Relativism” (Excerpt) Is Non-Monogamy Always Morally Wrong? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> C.S.I. Jenkins and Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa, “On Being the Only Ones” 	Meta-Ethics: The Status of Morality	Relationship Ethics	Guided Quiz 1 due (before lecture, 5/10) Reconstruction and Objection assignment explained (in class)
	May 12	What Makes Someone’s Life Go Well? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Derek Parfit, “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best?” (Excerpt) How do Work and Leisure Relate to Wellbeing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heinrich Böll, “To Work or Not to Work”, trans. Hansjörg Bittner 	Theories of Wellbeing and Meaning	Ethics of Work	Guided Quiz 2 due (before lecture, 5/12)
3	May 17	What Makes Someone’s Life Meaningful? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Susan Wolf, “Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life” (Excerpt) How does Work Relate to Meaningfulness? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> David Graeber, <i>Bullshit Jobs: A Theory</i> (Excerpt) 		Ethics of Work	Guided Quiz 3 due (before lecture, 5/17)

	May 19	<p>How does our self-interest relate to morally right action?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> James Rachels, “Ethical Egoism” (Excerpt) <p>Is unethical distribution of domestic labor best understood in ‘egoist’ terms?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emma, “You Should’ve Asked”, available at <https://english.emmaclit.com/2017/05/20/you-shouldve-asked/> or as PDF on Canvas 	Theories of Right Action	Relationship Ethics, Feminist Ethics	<p>Guided Quiz 4 due (before lecture, 5/19)</p> <p>Reconstruction and Objection assignment due (on Canvas, Thursday 5/20 11:59 PM)</p>
4	May 24	<p>How do consequences relate to morally right action?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> J.J.C. Smart, “Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism” (Excerpt) <p>What obligations to animals does utilitarianism entail, and is this account of our obligations to them convincing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Earthlings” (0:00-10:17, 18:07-38:37) dir. Shaun Monson, narr. Joaquin Phoenix, <http://www.nationearth.com/>, <i>content warning: fatal violence</i> 		Animal Ethics	<p>Guided Quiz 5 due (before lecture, 5/24)</p> <p>Objection and Response Assignment explained (in class)</p>
	May 26	<p>How does the notion of ‘universalizability’ relate to morally right action?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>, trans. Mary Gregor (Excerpt) <p>What obligations to animals does Kantianism entail, and is this account of our obligations to them convincing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immanuel Kant, “We Have No Duties to Animals”, trans. Louis Infield Syl Ko, “Addressing Racism Requires Addressing the Situation of Animals” 		Animal Ethics, Philosophy of Race	<p>Guided Quiz 6 due (before lecture, 5/26)</p> <p>Reconstruction and Objection assignment returned (on Canvas, 5/28)</p>
5	May 31	<i>No Class: Memorial Day Holiday</i>			

	June 2	<p>How do virtues and vices relate to morally right action?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Excerpt) <p>What does it mean to be a ‘jerk’ rather than a ‘sweetheart’?</p> <p>How does this relate to virtues and vices?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eric Schwitzgebel, “A Theory of Jerks” 		Relationship Ethics	Guided Quiz 7 due (before lecture, 6/2)
6	June 7	<p>How does the notion of a social contract relate to morally right action?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Rawls, “A Theory of Justice” (Excerpt) <p>Does our modern prison system violate the two principles of justice Rawls discusses?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Angela Davis, “Introduction – Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?” (Excerpt) 		Ethics of Imprisonment	Guided Quiz 8 due (before lecture, 6/7) Reflection assignment explained (in class)
	June 9	<p>How do care and caring relate to morally right action?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virginia Held, “The Ethics of Care as Moral Theory” (Excerpt) <p>How do people care or not care for the environment? How does care contrast with other attitudes or relations we could have to the environment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> O.P. Dwivedi, “Bishnois: Defenders of the Environment” 		Feminist Ethics, Indigenous and Environmental Ethics	Guided Quiz 9 due (before lecture, 6/9) Objection and Response assignment due (on Canvas, Thursday 6/10 11:59 PM)

7	June 14	<p>Are all morally right actions part of a single unified kind, and is their moral rightness explained by their being of that kind? Moreover, is morality only present/future-oriented, or also in some way past-oriented?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> W.D. Ross, “What Makes Right Acts Right?” <p>What does Ross’s view entail with respect to returning stolen indigenous land, and is this account of our obligations to indigenous people convincing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NDN Collective, “LANDBACK Manifesto”, available at <https://landback.org/manifesto/> or as PDF on Canvas 		Indigenous and Environmental Ethics	Guided Quiz 10 due (before lecture, 6/14)
	June 16	<i>Topic of Class Choice, Readings TBD</i>			Guided Quiz 11 due (before lecture, 6/16) Reflection assignment due (on Canvas, Thursday 6/17 11:59 PM) Objection and Response assignment returned (on Canvas, 6/18) Final Exam questions released (on Canvas, 6/18)
8	June 21	<p>How do attention and imagination relate to moral conduct?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> David Foster Wallace, “This is Water” <p>What changes in moral attention and imagination do prison abolitionists call for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Angela Davis, “Introduction – Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?” (Excerpt) 	Ethics Beyond Practical Deliberation	Ethics of Imprisonment	Guided Quiz 12 due (before lecture, 6/21) Final Exam explained (in class)
Thursday, June 24, 10 AM: Final Exam Due (on Canvas)					