

# Introduction to Moral Philosophy

Course Number/Semester

Lecture: TBD

Location: TBD

Office Hours: TBD

Instructor: Ekin Zeytinoglu

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## Course Description

Morality matters to us. But what exactly is its significance? Should we really care about being moral or have we been fooled? If we should care, is there something special about morality in comparison to other things we care about? And, what anyway is morality? In looking for answers to these questions, we will also consider specific moral issues: Are there certain actions which are forbidden no matter their consequences? What, if any, obligations do we have to those living in precarious conditions? Can a person be oppressed by her own voluntary choices? Finally, we will turn to more general questions about the nature of morality: Are there universal moral truths or is morality relative to a given culture? How should we think of tolerance, and should our thinking be affected by whether we think morality is objective or not? Along the way we will read Plato, Kant, Mill, Sartre, Thomson, Shelby, Foot, Midgley, and others.

## Course objectives

In addition to considering the questions above, a major objective of this course is to provide exposure to philosophical writing and argumentation. Learning basic philosophical skills will serve you in a variety of settings, within academia and outside it. The only way to learn these skills is by practicing, and you will be asked to read, write, and discuss regularly.

Because the goal of this course is to *practice* these skills, you will have the opportunity to improve your grade by rewriting each assignment in response to feedback at least once.

## Course Requirements

Reading responses: 30%

Course participation: 10%

Paper 1: 25% (3-4 pages, submission due date TBD, rewrite due date TBD)

Paper 2: 35% (5-6 pages, submission due date TBD, rewrite due date TBD)

## Responses:

I will post questions for each new reading (except for the first day) on the course website. These will (generally) include a few interpretive questions about the text and one more open ended question for you to engage with the text critically. You are expected to submit only 15 responses over the course of the semester. They are due at 8 am on the day of class. You will have the opportunity turn your response into a very short (~1 page) reflection paper. On the first day of class I will explain what would make a good response and a reflection paper.

**Course Participation:** I expect that you will do the required reading and actively take part in the discussion of the reading. This usually includes regular attendance and engagement in class and section, but also can be accomplished by other methods such as coming to office hours, writing discussion posts, highlighting relevant news articles, etc. Raising thoughts, questions, concerns, confusions are all possible (and helpful!) ways of participating.

**Papers:** You will have a chance rewrite a each paper in response to feedback. I highly recommend that you do so, but it is not required. Please remove all identifying information other than a student ID number from your submission. There will be a deduction of 1/3 a letter grade for every day the paper is late. Except for emergencies, extensions will not be granted in the last 48 hours.

## Readings

All readings will be posted online.

## Tentative Schedule

- Lecture 1 — Introduction
- Lecture 2 — The Trolley Problem
  - Thomson, “Trolley Problem”
- Lectures 3-7 — Utilitarianism and its discontents
  - Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Ch. 1 & 4;
  - Nozick, “The Experience Machine”
  - Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 2 & 5
  - Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”
  - Taurek, “Should the Numbers Count”
  - Le Guin, “Those who walk away from Omelas”
- Lectures 8-10— Why be moral? Rationality and Morality
  - Plato, *Republic*, Book 1 & 2 (Selections)

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Book 15, par. 4-8
- Cudd, “Oppression by Choice”
- Lectures 11-12 — Does it depend on God? On being human?
  - Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Ch.2, par. 4 & 6;
  - Plato, *Euthypro*
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 (selections);
    - Recommended: Foot, “The Grammar of Goodness,” (interview)
- Lectures 13-16 — Morality and Freedom: two approaches
  - Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism” (selections)
  - Kim, “Camus and Sartre on the Absurd”
  - Kant, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface (par. 1-2), Ch. 1&2 (selections)
- Lectures 17-19 — Does it depend on being able to look others in the eye? What do the unjustly treated owe?
  - Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism”
  - Shelby, “Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto”
- Lectures 20-22 — Relativism and Tolerance
  - Harman, “What is Moral Relativism”
  - Williams, “Interlude: Relativism”
  - Midgley, “Trying Out One’s New Sword”
  - Mill, *On Liberty* (selections)
- Lecture 23: Back to Plato’s challenge(s)
  - Nietzsche, “Genealogy of Morality,” First Essay
- Lectures 24-5 – Wrap Up
  - Nguyen and Williams, “Moral Outrage Porn”

## Academic Integrity

Students are expected to know and comply with University policies regarding academic integrity. All students should be familiar with the Student Conduct Code which can be found here: <https://deanofstudents.ucla.edu/student-conduct-code>. Please pay special attention to Section 102 on academic dishonesty. Without exception, any work suspected to be in violation of University policies will be reported to The Office of the Dean of Students for Investigation. If you have any questions, please come talk to me.

**Accommodations**

Students needing academic accommodations should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310) 825-1501 or in person at A255 Murphy Hall. For more information visit [www.cae.ucla.edu](http://www.cae.ucla.edu).

**Additional Resources**

The Center for Accessible Education (CAE): <https://www.cae.ucla.edu/> or (310) 825-1501.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): <https://www.caps.ucla.edu/> or (310) 825-0768

CARE: Advocacy Office for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Misconduct: <https://careprogram.ucla.edu/> or (310) 206-2465 (24 Hour Crisis Counseling (888) 200-6665)

UCLA Writing Programs: <http://www.wp.ucla.edu/>