

PHIL 2306-005 SYLLABUS ETHICS (3 CREDIT HOURS)

LOGISTICS

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Office location & phone: Worrell Hall 306, (915) 747-6617
Office hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 1:30-2:30pm
Also available online by appointment
Course date & location: University of Texas at El Paso, Spring 2023
Tuesday/Thursday, 12:00-1:20pm
Liberal Arts Building 209

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

An introduction to topics and core problems relating to the moral evaluation of human motivation and action. The course examines the positions of classical philosophers such as Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Mill, and Sartre, as well as contemporary moral problems that relate to human rights, animal rights and environmental ethics.

To begin this course, we will introduce the three central theories in normative and applied ethics: virtue ethics, consequentialism, and Kantian deontology. Then, we will use these theories to analyze contemporary ethical issues. Each unit will show why the initial theories are useful, as they will explain and justify many important values. But the units will also show how the initial theories fall short and demand supplementation by other traditions. This will demonstrate that philosophy is a living discipline. Contemporary debates show why we need values to make consistent judgments, but also why these values must be open to revision and expansion. For example, evidence from social psychology undermines some notions of character, and literary dystopias warn us about strict consequentialist or duty-based thinking. In short, we will examine whether theoretical systems of ethical/moral value hold up whenever they meet everyday problems. This is an introductory course, and I assume no familiarity with philosophy or any of the course’s material.

The objectives of this course are to teach you, broadly, to learn to read academic material carefully and to think critically about right and wrong action, as well as good and bad living and good and bad character. This will include being able to comprehend, communicate, and apply basic versions of Aristotelian virtue ethics, consequentialism, and Kantian deontology. And it will include being able to define and use the following terms: descriptive claim, normative claim, explanation, excuse, morally impermissible, morally permissible, morally obligatory, and morally supererogatory.

COURSE MATERIALS

No textbooks are required. All readings will be uploaded to Blackboard. So, you will need a computer with internet access.

You will also need short-notice access to movies announced in class, and access to a printer and paper for essays. (You might be able to find the movies online or in libraries for free, but you will probably need money for this and printing essays.)

¹ We cannot discuss specific grades over email, due to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Also, please don’t use Blackboard messenger, as the platform isn’t reliable for quick responses.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

This course uses specifications grading. So, students must choose at which level they will participate. You must complete **BOTH** components of the grade to earn the relevant score. Failing to complete either condition lowers the grade to the appropriate level.

- A: (i) score 12.5 or more on the midterm/final & (ii) pass 8 essays.
- B: (i) score 12 or more on the midterm/final & (ii) pass 6 essays.
- C: (i) score 11.5 or more on the midterm/final & (ii) pass 4 essays.
- D: (i) score 10.5 on the midterm/final & (ii) pass 2 essays.
- F: (i) score 10 or lower on the midterm/final & (ii) pass fewer than 2 essays.

Specifications grading allows you decide how best to prioritize your time and engage the material. It is designed to reward the effort that you choose to put in. I will do whatever in my power to help you get the grade you want in this course. I will try to make class engaging, and I will be prepared to answer any question to the best of my knowledge. You only need to show up to class on time and ready to ask questions about the class material. Each level reinforces the others too. If you come to class and do the essays, the midterm and final will be no problem.

EXAMS: The course will have two exams, one in the middle of the semester and one during the final week of classes. *You must take both the midterm and the final* (unless you score a perfect 13 on the midterm). The content will cover central definitions and ideas that are repeated throughout the semester in lecture. Each question represents a central idea, so the standards are higher than normal percentages. The exams are a baseline for competence in the material. I will give a review before the midterm that covers all the relevant material, which is the same material for the final. And each exam will be given in class. The exams will be graded based on how many questions are answered correctly. The goal is a perfect score, but the exam is only one page. Nothing here is meant to be tricky, vague, or ambiguous. I will tell you exactly what I'm looking for, exactly what I think an intro ethics student should know.

ATTENDANCE: I highly recommend you show up to class every day. Read the readings. Have questions you'd like to ask. Participate in classroom activities. If you don't, class will be incredibly difficult. If the school year gets complicated due to personal issues or illness, you do not have to share any personal information with me. I would recommend that you discuss things with the Dean of Students Office (DOS@utep.edu), who then can contact me without disclosing details to protect your privacy.

ESSAYS: 12 essay prompts will be given in class, one each week (except midterm and the two final weeks). *Prompts will not be uploaded to Blackboard.* The essays will always be due the next Tuesday. *Essays must be typed, printed out, and submitted in class. There are no exceptions for any reason.* Each essay will ask you to watch a movie and answer questions that ask you to apply the week's material to that movie. You only have 1 page to write. The essay must: (1) have your name on it, (2) have two epigraphs at the top, one from the readings and one from the film, and (3) address the readings for that week. You must address the prompt, paying special attention to summarizing the week's content. As long as you follow instructions, you will pass.

If you fail, you may appeal the grade in my office hours. You will need to prove to me that you understand the content. If you do, I may decide to overturn the grade. *I will not overturn grades for essays older than three weeks from the date of assignment.*

MAKEUPS: There are *no makeups for failed or missing assignments.* However, I give 12 essay prompts, and you only need 8 for the A. So, there is flexibility there. And once or twice per semester, I offer an extra credit assignment, which counts as essay credit.

SCHEDULE

Everything is subject to change, so please keep up with the course Blackboard. If anything changes, I'll try to give a week's notice. If you would like credit for one essay, print out or draw a picture of Leonid Pasternak's "The Passion of Creation" and slip it under my office door before class Thursday, January 19. Don't tell other students about this. This is bonus, no makeups. Complete the readings by the time class begins.

WEEK 1

Which experiences, abilities, and social interactions make life good? Which common errors thwart good living & thinking?

All work for the first week will be done in class.

Day 1

Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine"

Day 2

Veritasium, "Can You Solve This?"

David Foster Wallace, "This is Water"

WEEK 2

What is flourishing? How do good moral character traits/virtues or bad moral character traits/vices contribute?

Day 1

Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics"

Mark Alfano, "Identifying Virtues and Values through Obituary Data-Mining"

Day 2

John Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics"

In class: Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*

WEEK 3

What common characteristics do friends have? What impact does having bad friends have on your life?

Day 1

Cynthia Townley, "Friendship with Companion Animals"

In class: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, excerpts on friendship

Day 2

Dean Cocking & Jeanette Kennett, "Friendship and Moral Danger"

WEEK 4

Is morality instrumental? If morality is about promoting the good and avoiding the bad, what counts as good or bad?

Day 1

Shane Gronholz, "Consequentialism"

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Day 2

Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk away from Omelas"

In-class: Anti-utilitarian thought experiments by Bernard Williams and RN Smart

WEEK 5

Are there intrinsically right or wrong actions? Do circumstances change universal, absolute, categorical imperatives?

Day 1

Thomas Hill, "Kantian Normative Theory"

Day 2

Rae Langton, "Duty and Desolation"

WEEK 6

Should reason always rule emotion? When, if ever, can emotion help us to do the right thing?

Day 1

Jonathan Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn"

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"

Day 2

Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail"

WEEK 7

What are the three predominant normative theories of ethics? How do we make moral decisions?

Day 1

In-class review

Day 2

In-class midterm

WEEK 8

What is moral status, and what is it based on? Do non-human animals have it? Can we use animals in ways we can't humans?

Day 1

William B. Irvine, "Cannibalism, Vegetarianism, and Narcissism"

Day 2

Julian Koplin and Dominic Wilkinson, "Moral Uncertainty and the Farming of Human-Pig Chimeras"

SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9

What is moral luck? How does it affect our lives? What can we do in the face of it?

Day 1

Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck"

Day 2

Lisa Tessman, "Expecting Bad Luck"

WEEK 10

What is the myth of Sisyphus? Can we use it to understand life and meaning? Are life and meaning more complicated than the myth of Sisyphus?

Day 1

Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus"

Day 2

Richard Taylor, "The Meaning of Life"
boomer trujillo, "The Friends of Sisyphus: Or, The Meanings Relationships Give Us"

WEEK 11

Is immortality a good thing? Is death a bad thing? How do life and death affect how we value people or things?

Day 1

Felipe Pereira, "Is Immortality Desirable?"
John Martin Fischer, "Why Immortality Is Not So Bad"

Day 2

Aaron Smuts, "Love and Death: The Problem of Resilience"

WEEK 12

How is human life affected by the technologies we make? How should technology affect our relationships?

Day 1

Robert Mark Simpson, "The Ethics of Quitting Social Media"
Casey Newton, "The Trauma Floor: The Secret Lives of Facebook Moderators in America"

Day 2

Brian Earp, *et alia*, "If I Could Just Stop Loving You: Anti-Love Biotechnology and the Ethics of a Chemical Breakup"
Matthias Scheutz and Thomas Arnold, "Intimacy, Bonding, and Sex Robots: Examining Empirical Results and Exploring Ethical Ramifications"

WEEK 13

How do the impressions of others—both implicit and explicit—affect our evaluations of ourselves and our behavior?

Day 1

Eric Schwitzgebel, "Aiming for Moral Mediocrity"

Day 2

Justin Tosi and Brandon Warmke, "Moralizing to Impress"

WEEK 14

Is life a game? What effects does playing games have on our moral capacities?

Day 1

William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War"
Bernard Suits, "Is Life a Game We Are Playing?"

Day 2

Erica Neely, "The Ethics of Choice in Single-Player Video Games"

WEEK 15

Day 1

Last lecture (no readings assigned)

Day 2

In-class final

Syllabus prepared by G. M. Trujillo, Jr. on 17 January 2023

COURSE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

CAVEAT PHILOSOPHUS

Philosophy's hard. For everyone. The best students approach the subject with humility, curiosity, and a willingness to mess up. Insight has notoriously bad manners, coming when it pleases and resisting eloquent expression. I'll make mistakes discussing arguments, and you will too. The classroom is a lab for testing ideas, not a museum for pristine dogma. That's why we must be open-minded, civil, and cooperative in class. Respect each other's names, pronouns, and stances. And please do not advocate for the Devil, as he has adequate representation. I will not tolerate rudeness. We're here to become better thinkers. Sure, we'll construct and critique, explore and squabble. But never without realizing we're in this together. Be human in discussion. When you're unsure of whether you should say something, ask: Does it need to be said? By me? Right now? If no to any of those questions, maybe hold off and talk with me after class.

If the classroom environment is counter-productive in any way, you may always talk with me before or after class, send me an e-mail, or slip an anonymous note under my office door. I will do my best to foster a constructive environment. We're in this discussion together, and I learn a lot from my students. So, if you feel I've crossed the line, ignored an important perspective, or plain gotten something wrong, you may always confront me.

PARTICIPATION AND STUDENT SUCCESS

To take something from philosophy, you need to engage the ideas. That means reading the assignments with care and attention, as well as showing up to class with questions or comments about specific problems in the texts. Attentive readers often ask:

1. What's the author's thesis / main idea in the reading?
2. What is one argument that the author makes? Is it elegant or intricate, generalizable or reductive?
3. Is the conclusion of the argument true or false? Does the support offered connect strongly or weakly?
4. Which idea in the paper is the clearest / best / strongest? Why?
5. Which idea in the paper is the least clear / worst / weakest? How could the author improve it?
6. What's the author's main point on page X, paragraph Y? Why is it compelling/repulsive?
7. How does this work compare with others? Is the debate missing a perspective or idea?
8. Is there a word or phrase that seems important to the author that isn't clear?

Come up with a system to annotate your books. Put stars next to passages that you love. Put Xs next to passages that you hate. Put ?s next to passages or words you don't understand. Underline or **highlight** important ideas. Put a couple words out to the side to say what a page or paragraph addresses. The more you can do to be active while reading, the better.

For participation, you don't have to be an extrovert. If you don't like talking, chat with me in office hours, or share a passage from the text that struck you and ask the class what they think. Also note, just because you speak in class doesn't mean it's participation. Quality matters.

ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS

"Isn't it all just subjective/relative?" and "Doesn't this come down to semantics?" are questions that are usually unhelpful. Dig deeper. Try to figure out what evidence makes something subjective/relative, or which disagreement or equivocation makes something seem a mere semantic dispute. We can start with these questions, but we almost always need to go beyond them. As a general trick: get specific. Questions almost always start broad, but as you gain knowledge, they focus. Ask whatever. But when you think through issues on your own time, spend a few moments really feeling what bothers or intrigues you.

ACCOMMODATIONS

UTEP is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of University programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University. Students requesting an accommodation based on a disability must register with the UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS). Contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at (915) 747-5148, or email them at cass@utep.edu, or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another as one's own. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. All suspected violations of academic integrity at The University of Texas at El Paso must be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) for possible disciplinary action. Please visit HOOP: Student Conduct and Discipline.

CLASS RECORDING

Recording of class meetings in video or audio is prohibited. Doing so may result in disciplinary action.

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

All materials used in this course are protected by copyright law. The course materials are only for the use of students currently enrolled in this course and only for the purpose of this course. They may not be further disseminated.

MAKE-UP WORK

Make-up work will be given only in the case of a documented emergency. Note that make-up work may be in a different format than the original work, may require more intensive preparation, and may be graded with penalty points. If you miss an assignment and the reason is not considered excusable, you will receive a zero. It is therefore important to reach out to the instructor (in advance if at all possible) to explain with proper documentation why you missed a given course requirement. Once a deadline has been established for make-up work, no further extensions or exceptions will be granted.

DROP POLICY

According to UTEP Curriculum and Classroom Policies: "When, in the judgment of the instructor, a student has been absent to such a degree as to impair his or her status relative to credit for the course, the instructor may drop the student from the class with a grade of "W" before the course drop deadline and with a grade of "F" after the course drop deadline." See academic regulations in the UTEP Undergraduate Catalog for a list of excused absences. If you feel you are unable to complete the course successfully, notify the instructor and contact the Registrar's Office to initiate the drop process. If you do not, you are at risk of receiving an "F" for the course.

INCOMPLETE GRADES

Incomplete grades may be requested only in exceptional circumstances after you have completed at least half of the course requirements. Talk to me immediately if you believe an incomplete is warranted. If granted, we will establish a contract of work to be completed with deadlines.

TITLE IX & MANDATORY REPORTING

Sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and any other nonconsensual behavior of a sexual nature) and sex discrimination violate University policies. Students experiencing such behavior may obtain support from the Counseling and Psychological Services [(915) 747-5302] and Student Health and Wellness Center [(915) 747-5624]. Title IX violations should be reported. For more information, contact the Dean of Students Office [(915) 747-5648], the Title IX Office [(915) 747-8358], or UTEP Police Department [(915) 747-5611].

Disclosure to University faculty or instructors of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, or sex discrimination occurring on campus, in a University-sponsored program, or involving a campus visitor or University student or employee (whether current or former) *is not confidential* under Title IX. Faculty and instructors must forward such reports, including names and circumstances, to the University's Title IX officer.

COVID-19 ACCOMODATIONS

Students are not permitted on campus when they have a positive COVID-19 test, exposure or symptoms. If you are not permitted on campus, you should contact me as soon as possible so we can arrange necessary and appropriate accommodations. Students who are considered high risk according to CDC guidelines and/or those who live with individuals who are considered high risk may contact Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) to discuss temporary accommodations.

COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS

You must STAY AT HOME and REPORT if you (1) have been diagnosed with COVID-19, (2) are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, or (3) have had recent contact with a person who has received a positive coronavirus test. Reports should be made at screening.utep.edu. If you know of anyone who should report any of these three criteria, you should encourage them to report. If the individual cannot report, you can report on their behalf by sending an email to COVIDaction@utep.edu. Under no circumstances should anyone come to class when feeling ill or exhibiting any of the known COVID-19 symptoms. Students are advised to minimize the number of encounters with others to avoid infection.

You must wear a face covering over your nose and mouth at all times in this class. If you choose not to wear a face covering, you may not enter the classroom. If you remove your face covering, you will be asked to put it on or leave the classroom. Students who refuse to wear a face covering and follow preventive COVID-19 guidelines will be dismissed from the class and will be subject to disciplinary action according to Section 1.2.3 Health and Safety and Section 1.2.2.5 Disruptions in the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. Please note that if COVID-19 conditions deteriorate in the City of El Paso, all course and lab activities may be transitioned to remote delivery.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

But by the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Ask questions about a philosophical piece's word choice, argumentative structure, or overall purpose.
- Identify theses of philosophical arguments and evaluate the argument's evidence.
- Use the principle of charity to address enthymemes.
- Define key philosophical words and phrases.
- Express positions on issues lucidly and succinctly, considering relevant complexities and counterarguments.

Every day, students will read, evaluate, and synthesize texts from primary and secondary materials in preparation for class, and participation activities will allow students to practice these skills while the instructor offers feedback. The very nature of these issues requires that students learn to analyze the relationship between (a) sociocultural factors in their historical contexts, (b) the intellectual work that inquiry takes, and (c) the creativity expression that certain problems necessitate. The readings and units are designed to get students to see issues from multiple points of view—historical, social, cultural, and philosophical. And through participation activities,

writing reflections, and exams, students will learn to communicate effectively in both speech and writing, especially by making arguments that interpret the texts and offer evidence for the view expressed.

UTEP RESOURCES

Technology and Academic Resources

HELP DESK (Library, Rm. 300, helpdesk@utep.edu, (915) 747-4357 (HELP), utep.edu/technologysupport/):

Students experiencing technological challenges (email, Blackboard, software) can submit a work ticket to the UTEP Helpdesk for help. Contact the Helpdesk via phone, email, chat, website, or in person if on campus.

UTEP LIBRARY (ask@utep.libanswers.com, (915) 747-5643, utep.edu/library/):

Access a wide range of resources, including online, full-text access to thousands of journals and eBooks plus reference service and librarian assistance for enrolled students.

UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER (UWC) (Library, Main Floor, uwctutors@utep.edu, (915) 747-5112, utep.edu/uwc/):

Submit papers here for assistance with writing style and formatting, ask a tutor for help and explore other writing resources.

HISTORY TUTORING CENTER (HTC) (Liberal Arts Building, Rm. 320, history@utep.edu, (915) 747-5508):

Receive assistance with writing history papers, get help from a tutor and explore other history resources.

Individual Resources

MILITARY STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER (Mike Loya Academic Services Bldg., Rm. 130, mssc@utep.edu, (915) 747-5342, utep.edu/student-affairs/mssc/): Assists personnel in any branch of service to reach their educational goals.

CENTER FOR ACCOMMODATIONS AND SUPPORT SERVICES (Union East, Rm. 106, cass@utep.edu, (915) 747-5148,

utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/): Assists students with ADA-related accommodations for coursework, housing, and internships.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (Union West, Rm. 202, caps@utep.edu, (915) 747-5302, utep.edu/student-affairs/counsel/): Provides a variety of counseling services including individual, couples, and group sessions as well as career and disability assessments.

STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTER (Union East, Ste. 100, studenthealth@utep.edu, (915) 747-5624, utep.edu/chs/shc/):

Addresses health care needs of all UTEP students.

DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE (Union West, Rm. 102, DOS@utep.edu, (915) 747-5648, utep.edu/student-affairs/dean-of-students-office/):

Creates a culture of care for students by providing exemplary programs and services designed to enhance success.

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS (Union East, Rm. 301, studentaffairs@utep.edu, (915) 747-5076, utep.edu/student-affairs/):

Supports student success inside and outside the classroom.

OFFICE OF STUDENT FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS (utep.edu/student-affairs/student-fellowships-awards/index.html)

TITLE IX OFFICE (Kelly Hall, Rm. 312, TitleIX@utep.edu, (915) 747-8358, utep.edu/titleix/):

Protects students, employees, applicants for admission and employment, and other persons from all forms of sex discrimination including sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, and acts of sexual violence.

UTEP POLICE DEPARTMENT (4118 Sun Bowl Drive, next to Facility Services, police@utep.edu, (915) 747-5611)

SUBMIT A REPORT (utep.edu/student-affairs/osccr/report/): Online forms for reportable offenses at UTEP.