

Philosophy 2131 – Ethics: Theory and Application
Fall 2019

The Basics:

Instructor: Tom Wilk
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Phone: 814-934-8844
Office Location: ROME 556

Meeting Location: SMTH 120
Meeting Times: MW 12:45PM - 02:00PM
Office Hours: MW 2:30p-3:30p and by appt.
Website: <http://tomwilk.net/phil-2131-fall2019/>

Graduate Assistant: Marissa DeShon

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What's this class about?

What ought I to do? This is a question we all face from time to time. Sometimes, when we ask it, we just mean to figure out what would be in our best interest or what would fulfill our immediate desires, but other times we mean it in an all-things-considered sort of way. We want to know what we should do from some broader perspective, what we're obligated to do, what's necessary, what's for the greater good. We want to know what we *morally* ought to do. This class is about some of the most influential ways that philosophers have thought we should go about answering this question. We will explore four theories in normative ethics: deontological ethics, care ethics, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. We will read foundational texts for each of these traditions and examine some important objections to each. To get a sense for how these theories might provide some insights into moral problems that we face and to get a better grasp of the theories themselves, we'll look at what each has to say about the case of animal welfare. We'll end the semester by asking whether moral theories are really necessary for moral reasoning.

What we'll be reading:

Mill, J. S. (2002). *Utilitarianism* (2nd ed.). Hackett Publishing Co.
Kant, I. (2012). *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals* (Revised). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Additional readings will be made available through the course website.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the course, successful students will:

- 1) **Recall, articulate, and discuss** some basic theoretical positions in moral philosophy;
- 2) **Interpret** moral-philosophical texts and **summarize** the arguments presented;
- 3) **Compare and contrast** moral positions;
- 4) **Evaluate and criticize** arguments;
- 5) **Construct** simple arguments.
- 6) **Build confidence** in their ability to publicly discuss moral and public policy issues.

Evaluation

Attendance and Participation	10 %	Daily
Weekly Reading Quizzes (on Blackboard)	15 %	Up to you
First Exam	25 %	October 16
Second Exam	25 %	November 20
Final Exam	25 %	TBD

Reading Quizzes will be posted to Blackboard prior to each Tuesday class meeting (there will be at least 12 of them). You are expected to complete the quiz each week prior to coming to class on Tuesday. Quizzes will be graded Pass/Fail. Quiz grades will be computed on the following scale:

If you pass **10** quizzes, then you receive a **100**.
If you pass **9** quizzes, then you receive a **96**.
If you pass **8** quizzes, then you receive a **91**.
If you pass **7** quizzes, then you receive an **86**.
If you pass **6** quizzes, then you receive an **81**.
And so on...

Attendance & Participation

Attendance is required and will be taken daily. You are allowed to miss up to two class meetings without penalty. Each additional absence will be penalized 10 points off your Attendance and Participation grade.

Participation is graded globally in consultation with the Graduate Assistant. If you participate regularly in a way that benefits the class, you start at 100% (before any penalties for attendance); if you participate somewhat regularly, you start at 95%; if you participate sporadically, you start at 90%; if you participate a few times, you start at 85%; if you don't participate, you start at 80%. Participation does not consist only in speaking in class. You can also participate by speaking to me before or after class or during office hours, emailing me with questions or thoughts, or sharing interesting and relevant articles, essays, videos, or podcasts with the class.

Course Policies:

Reading and Preparedness: You're required to come to class having read the assignment for the day *in its entirety*, preferably twice. This is a discussion based seminar and you will be expected to carry your weight.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments: Reading assignments will be posted on Blackboard. Please check the online reading list on a regular basis to be sure that you're reading at the right pace. The assignment schedule is subject to amendment to reflect the natural pace of the course.

Discussion: Do your best to **be part of the discussion**. I know it's not always easy and it's not everyone's forte. Sometimes you might not have much to say and sometimes you might feel that the discussion has moved on before you've had time to fully formulate your thought. These are some hurdles we need to try to overcome this semester. Not every thought expressed is going to be groundbreaking, well-formed, and timely. That's OK; the important thing is that you say something in an effort to contribute to the discussion. **My job** is to draw out the relevancy of what you've said and connect it to the thoughts we're discussing. I'm here to help the discussion, not judge your contributions.

That being said, be prepared to **defend what you say**. Philosophy is sometimes thought of as combative. I think that's a bit strong, but it certainly requires debate and thoughtful discussion. Toward this end, I (and your colleagues) will often ask you to explain what you've said in greater detail, to clarify your position or your understanding of the position expressed in the reading, or to offer reasons in defense of a claim you've made. You should not take offense to being asked to defend your views. *I only ask you to do so because I think you're capable of doing so; it's a sign of respect and the heart of all reasonable discussion and debate.*

Finally, **be kind and courteous** to your colleagues. We're striving to create a *community of inquiry* in our classroom, in which everyone feels comfortable expressing his or her views and questioning those of others. We'll be discussing some sensitive topics on which some folks will have very strong opinions. A successful discussion will often require that we flirt

with the borders of propriety in our discussions. The only way we can have discussions of this nature in a productive way is if we always strive to be courteous to each other. We will not cut each other off. Everyone will be heard, and we will *listen carefully* to the views of others and interpret them charitably.

Academic Integrity: All examinations, papers, and other graded work products and assignments are to be completed in conformance with The George Washington University *Code of Academic Integrity*. It states, in part, “Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” For the remainder of the code, see: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>

Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, ideas, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

Late Work Policy: Quizzes **will not** be accepted after the beginning of class on the day they are due. There will be no make-up Quizzes.

Make-up Exams will be offered only in extraordinary circumstances. If something happens that will prevent you from taking the exam at the specified time, you *must* contact me immediately to let me know and make necessary arrangements.

Additional (but IMPOPTANT) Course Policies:

- Please consider **turning off your phone, laptop, and tablet** in class for the benefit of your own learning and that of your classmates.
- If you feel the need to **appeal the grade** you have earned on an assignment, you must submit your appeal to me *in writing* within two days of the grade being posted. The written appeal must explain in detail why you believe the grade on your assignment is in error and must present evidence to support your argument.

Support for Students Outside the Classroom

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the DSS office at 202-994-8250 in Rome Hall, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/>

University Counseling Center (UCC) 202-994-5300

The UCC offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students’ personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include:

- crisis and emergency mental health consultations
- confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals

<http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices>

Security

In the cases of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building in which the class is held is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.

- ***This syllabus can be amended at any time by the instructor.*** Amendments will be posted to the course website.