
PI 220-01 Ethical Theories
Course Syllabus and Calendar

Section Information

PI 220-01
In Person
T/TR 12:30 P.M.-1:50 P.M.
HSS Room 306

Instructor Information

Dr. Jonathan Wurtz
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HSS 318F
Office Hours: TBD
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COURSE CATALOG DESCRIPTION

This is a philosophy methods course on ethical reasoning and an essential course for anyone interested in personal, social, or professional ethics. It examines classical and contemporary theories on morality, from both western and non-western philosophical perspectives. The course helps the student to think through the different theories and concepts that we rely on to guide our actions.

COURSE CONTENT

Ethics the branch of philosophy that deal with correct moral principles and moral activity. It includes on the one hand a theoretical portion that deal with questions about the nature of good and evil, self and other, individual existence and social life. On the other hand, ethics is also concerned with the practical activities of individuals, groups, institutions, nations etc... and their moral status. It is a broad and wide branch of philosophical reflection that has more than 3000 years of scholarship. In this course, we will 1) engage with western and eastern ethical theories and 2) learn to apply them to real life cases. The first part of the course will have us dive into ethical theories like: virtue ethics, role ethics, utilitarianism, deontology, existential ethics, and care ethics. The second part of the course is concerned with applying those ethical theories through a philosophical court activity. The second part of the course will specifically have students either defend certain ethical positions for select real life cases in front of a philosophical judge and jury.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

No books are required for the course.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ALIGNMENT MATRIX

Institutional Learning Outcomes	Program Learning Outcomes	Student Learning Outcomes
Mastery of critical thinking and problem solving	(A) Justify positions with reasoned argument in a rigorous way	Justify positions in normative ethical theory with reasoned argument in a rigorous way
Mastery of quantitative analysis		
Effective oral and written communication	(B) Express themselves orally and in writing precisely and clearly	Express normative ethical views orally and in writing precisely and clearly
Understanding and appreciation of culturally diverse people, ideas, and values in a democratic context	(C) Understand and engage with perspectives different to their own	Understand and engage with normative ethical theories different to their own
Responsible use of knowledge, natural resources, and technology	(D) Analyse real-world problems using philosophical tools	Analyze real-world problems using normative ethical theory
An appreciation of the arts and sciences	(E) Reconstruct the positions of authors through the close reading of texts	Reconstruct ethical theories through the close reading of texts
An interest in personal development and lifelong learning	(F) Practice philosophical virtues in their interactions with others	Practice philosophical virtues while discussing ethical theories

GRADING INFORMATION + ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

COURSE FINAL GRADES

A	940-1000 points	NC	No Credit. <i>Note: This Course Grade must be stated in the approve Course Catalog Description.</i>
A-	900-939 points		
B+	870-899 points		
B	840-869 points		
B-	800-839 points	UW:	Unofficial withdrawal assigned by Registrar. Student stopped attending classes and did not submit required documents to the Admissions & Records office.
C+	770-799 points		
C	700-769 points		
D+	640-699 points		
D	600-639 points		
F	0-599 points	W:	Withdrawal assigned by Registrar. Student stopped attending classes and submitted required documents to the Admissions & Records office.

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

This class is not graded like your other classes. While most classes have the teacher decide on your grade, your final grade in this class will be decided by both you and the professor. None of the assignments are graded. Rather you will receive thorough feedback on everything you submit, only without a number/letter grade. At the end of the semester, every student will meet with the professor, and the student will have to make a case for what grade they deserve in the course.

There are four different categories of assignments that students will have to complete throughout the semester:

- 1) **Philosophical court**
- 2) **Topic based reflections**
- 3) **Discussion days**
- 4) **Final overall reflection.**

All assignments must be turned in a word document. For the sake of giving you the best feedback possible, I will not accept any pdf submission.

Philosophical Court

The final three weeks of class are designed to test your knowledge and understanding of the various ethical theories we covered during the semester. More information will be provided on Moodle.

Topic based reflections

Throughout the semester, you will be asked to write 3-4 paragraphs reflecting on the topics we covered that week. These reflections must be turned in on the due date by 11:59 PM. They should:

- a) Offer a brief summary of what you learned (concepts, ideas, arguments, etc...)
 - a. Your summary should include:
 - i. Page numbers from the text
 - ii. All of the main concepts and ideas
 - iii. A map of the argument
 - iv. Be at least 2 paragraphs long
 - b) Make a connection with previous class material
 - c) Mention at least one productive thought you had about the material
 - d) Mention at least one difficulty with the material
 - e) Ask at least one question concerning the philosophy

Every reflection needs to demonstrate both your mastery over the reading material and the philosophical ideas in the text. In other words, your reflections will be evaluated according to two metrics:

- 1) Philosophical Mastery: Demonstrates mastery over the concepts, ideas, and arguments of the texts and its positions.
- 2) Reading Mastery: Demonstrates an ability to read philosophical works and extrapolate relevant knowledge for one's assignments.

Discussion Days

Every 2-3 weeks we will hold an in-class discussion day meant to tease out the nuances of each theory we discuss this semester (see schedule). For class, students will have to prepare a written answer to the given question and be ready to present and discuss their ideas with the class. Your discussion days paper must:

- a) answer the entire question.
- b) draw from the pool of philosophers and philosophical arguments we covered so far in the class.
- c) provide an argument for your position (unless the prompt asks otherwise).
- d) be turned in on Moodle before the discussion.
- e) be at least two paragraphs long.

Final Overall Reflection

At the end of the semester, students will be asked to meet one-on-one with the professor to discuss their learning experience in the course. In preparation for this meeting, students will be asked to submit a final reflection paper addressing their overall learning experience in the class. The final reflection paper should be no longer than 3 pages and address the following prompts:

- a) Discuss your process as a learner: evaluate your engagement with course content by reflecting on how you handled all aspects of this course. What specific parts of your process worked and what parts would benefit from some adjustments? Why?
 - b) Discuss the products you generated as demonstrations of your learning: evaluate how your work has changed across the semester. Did certain elements improve more than others? Did certain elements become easier or more challenging? Describe.
 - c) What will you do with this knowledge in future semesters? Make a commitment to yourself.
 - d) What have you learned about yourself—as a learner and a member of a learning community—in this course?
 - e) Considering points a-d, what final grade do you believe you deserve and why? What is this grade a reflection of? How is it a fair representation of your learning this semester?
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COURSE, PROGRAM, AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Attendance Privilege Policy:

Attendance and participation affect your grade indirectly in this course. Rather than taking away points and coercing you to be in my class, this class's attendance policy works more like a credit score. The more you attend and participate (i.e., the more effort you show) the more exceptions you become privileged to. In other words, if you regularly show up and attend the full class time, participate, and come to my office hours, you will benefit from privileges such as late submission allowances, rounding up of points, excused/unexcused absences, late make ups etc.... However, if you only show up a few times, don't turn in assignments, and are generally absent throughout the semester, you will not be privy to these privileges. This is also how I decide to round up your grades at the end of the semester. Such that, if you tried your best but only made an 89% in the course, I will give you a final grade of an A-. But if you were mostly absent and silent throughout the class, then you will receive your original grade of B+.

Network Etiquette:

Remember your "netiquette," or network etiquette. Although you may traditionally interact informally with friends and family when you are online, it is important to note that this is a classroom environment and students must adhere to high standards of academic behavior. This classroom is a safe space for all ideas. Any comments, jokes, or remarks that denigrate the worth of an individual's physical/mental ability, body size, religion, race, creed, ethnic background, sexual preference, or gender are inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

- a. Do not say things in an email or forum post that you would not say face to face.
- b. Be polite, concise, and remember that all-caps signify yelling.
- c. Do not send forwards to the class list or to the professor.
- d. Proofread. Please avoid texting language, lack of punctuation, capitalization, or inappropriate signatures.
- e. Emojis should not be used in graded assignments. You are welcome to use them in informal writing.

Plagiarism Statement:

As per the Student Handbook, students are responsible for turning in their own original work for every class that they officially attend at the University of Guam. Due to this plagiarism is considered academic dishonesty (AKA cheating) and will be rewarded with a failing grade for the assignment (without possibility of making up lost points). The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited, to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials. **EVERY ASSIGNMENT THAT YOU TURN IN WILL BE FILTERED THROUGH Turnitin.com TO CHECK ITS ORIGINALITY.** All assignments have a

25% AI tolerance threshold. Any submission that is less than 75% human generated will be automatically categorized as “Redo Needed”

Artificial Intelligence Statement:

ChatGPT is an amazing tool that will continue to be perfected. That being said, it is by no means perfect, and cannot write the kinds of assignments I am asking you to write. Think of AI as an assistant. While an assistant is extremely helpful, it cannot do the work for you. Here are some guidelines for how to use AI in one of my classes:

Do use A.I. to:

- Proofread your essay.
- Help you put thoughts into words.
- Help you think of a word.
- Help you reword sentences.
- Help clarify your flow and syntax.
- Get an idea/Talk it out.
- Help you think of a clever title for your essay.
- Write an email to your professor

Don't use A.I. to:

- Write your essays/assignments.
- Provide an argument
- Think of a topic for your projects/assignments
- Qualitatively evaluate scholarly resources.
- Rigorously summarize a philosophical position.
- Provide an opinion.
- Think of a moral position.

Email Policy:

Triton email is the official means of communication at the university. Every communication with the professor should occur through UOG's official email. It should include a subject line and a body text. The email's body should include a proper salutation and clear explanation of its purpose. The professor will respond to email within 1-2 business days. The professor will respond to weekend or holiday emails at their own discretion. If you need to reach the professor urgently, hope for the best, but expect the worst (attendance policy qualifies how you can hope better).

EEO/ADA Statement:

ADA Policy and Commitment to Student Learning

The University is committed to maintaining the campus community as a place of work and study for faculty, staff and students, free of all forms of discrimination and harassment. If you experience harassment or discrimination, then you should report it immediately to the EEO/ADA & Title IX Office, Institutional Compliance Officer (671) 735-2244 located in Dorm 1. For immediate assistance in an emergency call 911.

ADA Accommodation Services

If you are a student with a disability who will require an accommodation(s) to participate in this course, please contact the Disability Support Services office to discuss your specific accommodation needs confidentially. You will need to provide me with a Faculty Notification letter from the DSS counselor. If you are not registered, you should do so immediately at the Student Center, Rotunda office #6, ph/TTY: 735-2460, or uogdss@triton.uog.edu to coordinate your accommodation request.

COURSE CALENDAR

Jan. 20	<u>MLK Jr. Day – NO CLASS</u>
Jan. 22	Introduction to the course
Jan. 27	What is Ethics?
Jan. 29	Attacking Faulty Reasoning - A Code of Intellectual Conduct
Feb. 3	Attacking Faulty Reasoning - What is a Good Argument?
Feb. 5	Discussion Day 1: The Ethical
Feb. 10	Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics Book 1 Sections 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7
Feb. 12	Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics Book 2 Sections 5, 6, 9
Feb. 17	Plato's The Meno pages 1-9
Feb. 19	Plato's The Meno pages 16-27
Feb. 24	Discussion Day 2: Virtue Ethics
Feb. 26	Kongzi's Analects Book I and II
Mar. 3	<u>Guam History and Chamoru Heritage Day – NO CLASS</u>
Mar. 5	Kongzi's Analects Book III, IV, V
Mar. 10	Mozi's Mohism Section 39 "Anti-confucianism"
Mar. 12	Mozi's Mohism Section 15 "Universal Love"
Mar. 17	<u>NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK</u>
Mar. 19	<u>NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK</u>
Mar. 24	Discussion Day 3: Hierarchical vs. Universal Ethics
Mar. 26	John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism
Mar. 31	Immanuel Kant's Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals "Preface"
Apr. 2	Immanuel Kant's Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals "Chapter 1"
Apr. 7	Discussion Day 4: Universal Ethics and difference
Apr. 9	Simone de Beauvoir's Ethics of ambiguity Chapter 1
Apr. 14	Simone de Beauvoir's Ethics of ambiguity Chapter 2
Apr. 16	Philosophical Court Workshop
Apr. 21	Emmanuel Levinas <i>Ethics and Infinity</i> Chapter 6
Apr. 23	Emmanuel Levinas <i>Ethics and Infinity</i> Chapter 7
Apr. 28	Emmanuel Levinas <i>Ethics and Infinity</i> Chapter 8
Apr. 30	Discussion Day 5: Self and Other
May 5	Philosophical Court Workshop
May 7	Philosophical Court Workshop
May 12	Philosophical Court: Case #1
May 14	Philosophical Court: Case #2
FINAL	Philosophical Court: Case #3

Discussion Day 1: Ethics, Philosophy and the Everyday

For class, students are asked to find at least one everyday example of an ethical issue, explain how this is considered an ethical issue, and address the moral problems at play by offering a solution (if your example already has an answer, then evaluate the answer and describe where it succeeds and where it fails). It is preferred, although not necessary, that students address an ethical dilemma in which the individuals involved do not live common or similar lives. In the example attached ([Example of an ethical situation](#)), an abled bodied surgeon who stems to professionally and economically benefit for the risky operation, is dealing with a disabled man who could potentially lose his life during the procedure.

Discussion Day 2: Virtue Ethics and Differences

According to Aristotle and Plato, Virtue is not something that everyone can understand and act on. As Plato tells us, virtue cannot be taught nor is it an innate knowledge that everyone knows. For Aristotle, Eudaimonia can only be achieved if a person is able to do the right action at the right time to the right person. In other words, one must be a perfect human being in order to be considered virtuous. Hence, we are left with the idea that only a select few individuals can be "good".

For class, students must offer either an argument for or against the idea that not everyone can be "good" or "virtuous": Are people born bad or good? If yes, then how do we explain people's ability to change and be better? If no, how do we explain people's inability to see the good? Your argument should 1) be supported by actual concrete evidence, 2) use details from either Aristotle or Plato, 3) offer concrete real examples of your position, and 4) explain what this entails for understanding the ethical relationship between self and others.

Discussion Day 3: Hierarchical vs. Universal Ethics

Confucius, Plato, and Aristotle all give us an ethical system rooted in natural inequality. Confucius ethics is rooted in the family hierarchy, and Plato and Aristotle's ethics are respectively rooted in a hierarchy of wisdom. All of them, in other words, posit the moral superiority of some individuals over others. Whether we are talking about the emperor, the father, the king, or the philosopher, virtue is always only accessible through a morally superior agents.

However, this inequality is rejected by both Mozi and more contemporary European ethical theories. As we saw, Mozi equalizes moral agents in his ethics. So, our question is whether there is some empirical evidence for the idea that some individuals are morally superior to others. If yes, is there a way for us to reconcile it with a more universal form of ethics that acknowledges the moral dignity of everyone? If no, then how do we explain the people's tendencies to misunderstand the good? How can people be equally good when not everyone acts on this goodness? If everyone has equal morally value, then why do people do bad actions – why do children rebel? Why do parents mistreat their child? Why do leaders seek their own self-interest at the expense of their kingdom and citizens? In other words, why do we need to recognize the moral worth and equality of bad people?

Discussion Day 4 – Universal Ethics and Singularity

Over the last few classes we universalized virtue ethics by asking what a perfectly moral and rational person would do. Rather than using the moral character of “good individuals” as a moral standard for our actions, Mill and Kant provide us with an ethic that uses the moral character of a “perfectly moral person”. For Mill, this is the will that uses the “greatest happiness principle” as its main principle of action. For Kant, this is the good will who aligns its actions with the “categorical imperative”. To be a good individual is to align one’s will as closely as possible with the moral standard of a perfectly good person.

However, such a moral perspective requires us to reject our individualities and singularities for the sake of the universally common. This entails a rejection of more than our own individual needs, wants, and desires, but a rejection of any “singularity” as morally valuable. My individual will, identity, race, history, family, genealogy, and environment are all irrelevant to moral consideration because they are not universal attributes.

For our discussion day, consider the value of human singularities in moral consideration? How important is history, culture, race, environment or other contingent attributes of a human when making moral decisions? Do you agree with the universalists that only those attributes that all humans share equally are morally relevant? Or are there morally relevant singularities that need to be considered when engaging with ethical questions?

If you agree with the universalist, explain how ethics can address the historically situated moral problems of our age (like the rise of AI, the currently on-going wars and genocides, or even global warming)? If you believe that some human singularities are morally relevant, explain which ones are and their moral nature? What does accepting the singular and contingent nature of human individuality into our moral consideration do to the concept of universal human dignity?

Discussion Day 5 – Self and Other: A Relation of Unity or Difference?

Consider the ontological roots of ethical responsibility as debated by Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Emmanuel Levinas. Sartre and Beauvoir argue that ethical responsibility arises from the self’s radical freedom. They emphasize that individuals construct meaning and accountability through their choices. Levinas, on the other hand, contends that ethical responsibility is not self-derived but emerges from my absolute subjugation to the Other. That is, whereas Sartre and Beauvoir find ethical responsibility in the radical freedom of the self, Levinas finds it in the face of the Other that imposes an infinite obligation and subjugates the self. Considering this difference, argue whether ethical responsibility is more convincingly grounded in the self’s freedom and capacity for choice, as Sartre and Beauvoir suggest, or in the self’s inherent subjugation to the ethical call of the Other, as Levinas claims? How do these perspectives address the tension between autonomy and relationality in ethical decision-making? Furthermore, is it possible to reconcile Sartre and Beauvoir’s ethics of the self with Levinas’ ethics of the Other, or are they fundamentally incompatible? Can ethical responsibility involve both radical freedom and infinite obligation, or does prioritizing one inherently diminish the other?