



Philosophy 310
Ethics

Spring 2025
Amherst College

Professor: Rafeeq Hasan
Email: rhasan@amherst.edu

Office: 209 Cooper House
Office Hours: Tu 3:00-4:00 pm; W 10:00-11:00am;
or by appointment
Class Room: Chapin 203

Meetings: Tu/Th 11:30am-12:50pm

Course Description

Why should we be morally good? Is there anything to be said in a principled way about the nature of right and wrong? This course will examine three central traditions in Western ethical philosophy, typified by John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant, and Aristotle. We will also look at criticisms of morality by Nietzsche and several contemporary philosophers. Throughout, our discussions will investigate the nature of value, happiness, friendship, and the good life.

Required Texts [Provided by the College for all enrolled Amherst Students]

1. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Hackett, 2002)
2. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Hackett, 1993)
3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Hackett, 1998)
4. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge, 2014)

Copies of each book are also on reserve at Frost Library. Additional readings are collected in a course reader, available at Alumni House. Please bring hard copies of all relevant readings to class.

Assignments/Grading:

Essay 1 1500 words (~5 pages)	Due: 2/23	20%
Midterm exam (take-home)	Due: 3/11	15%
Essay 2 1500 words (~5 pages)	Due: 4/20	30%
Final exam (take-home)	Due: 5/13	15%
Class participation		20%

Policies/Requirements

1. Academic Honesty

According to the Honor Code's Statement of Intellectual Responsibility, "the College considers it a violation of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one's own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others."¹

¹ https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/provost_dean_faculty/fph/policies/sir

I expect you will adhere to the Code. Therefore, everything you turn in should be *your own work* and *in your own words*. If your discussions of class topics with your friends, parents, etc., are helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even (especially) Wikipedia, AI, Google, etc. **Use of generative text programs (such as ChatGPT) to write your papers constitutes plagiarism. I reserve the right to submit any written work to random testing for plagiarism.**

Please also consult the information contained in ‘Intellectual Responsibility and Plagiarism’ on the Dean of Students website: <https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/community-standards/intellectual-responsibility-and-plagiarism>. Particularly helpful is: <https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/community-standards/intellectual-responsibility-and-plagiarism/using-sources>

If questions remain about what constitutes academic honesty or dishonesty, please ask me.

The penalty for plagiarism in my course is failure, absolutely no exceptions. Don’t risk it.

2. Deadlines

Late policy: If you find that you are unable to complete an assignment by the deadline because of a crisis or emergency, **you must contact me no later than 2 days before the due date**. I MAY be able to grant a slight extension. **Work that is submitted late and without an extension will be marked down .3 down** (see #8 for grading scale) for every day of lateness. One day of lateness turns a B+ into a B. Assignments received late may not receive full comments.

3. Communication

Important announcements and assignments will sometimes be communicated to you via email, usually through Moodle. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news.

4. Attendance

Attending class, on time, and well-rested is a crucial aspect of engagement with this course. I take attendance at the *beginning* of every class.

However, it is important for your well-being, and the well-being of your classmates, that you stay home if you are not feeling well or need to isolate. If you need to miss class because of illness, family emergency, or some other pressing matter, please let me know by email before class begins. Excused absences will not negatively affect your participation grade, but you do need to get caught up with the material.

I couldn’t attend class. Did I miss anything important? Of course you did! To learn what you missed, contact your classmates, check Moodle for handouts, and make sure you get caught up. *After* you’ve done all that, feel free to come see me in office hours with questions and comments on the readings.

Things happen. **But you are expected to attend every class.**

5. Participation

In order to get full credit for participation, you must also regularly *participate* in class.

Your participation grade turns on the quality, not the quantity, of your contributions, and the extent to which you exhibit the respect and care necessary to promote good discussion. Contributions do not have to be in the form of “answers” or completed “theories” about a text or position—thoughtful questions are highly encouraged, and you will certainly not be penalized for a spirit of humility. While good contributions obviously vary immensely, I especially value comments and questions that pay close attention to the relevant text and those that build on, and reflect attention to, others’ contributions.

I will send out reading questions for almost every session. Use these to help focus your attention on what is most important. But don’t wait until the questions arrive to start the reading! I will often cold-call regarding the reading questions. The point is not about getting the ‘right’ answer. But I do

expect you to have *something* to say.

6. Office Hours

Office hours: I will hold office hours from **3:00-4:00pm on Tuesdays** and **10:00-11:00am on Wednesdays**. To meet with me, please schedule a 20-minute appointment at:

<https://calendly.com/rafeeqhasan>

You can schedule up to 10 days in advance. **Please do not schedule more than one meeting with per week.** My office hours fill up, so try to book at least one week in advance.

Office Hours will be in person UNLESS the global health situation changes. If necessary, they will be moved to Zoom.

Can we meet outside office hours? If you can't make my office hours because of a class or work conflict, or if all the spots are full, then email early in the week with a list of times when you are free to meet and I will try to find an alternative.

7. Essays & Exams

When will my work be graded? I aim to return essays and exams within two weeks of the date they were submitted.

Can I send you a draft of my essay to read? I'm happy to help you with your essay, but I don't read complete drafts. Feel free to schedule office hours with questions, an outline, a paragraph you've written, an argument you're considering, etc. Don't forget that you can also visit the Writing Center with drafts. This is a great resource. To schedule an appointment, visit

<https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter/makeappointment>

What sources should I use for writing my paper? You *do not* need to read any additional material beyond the assigned reading—and I don't encourage it. However, if you do consult outside sources, you must remember to *always* cite your sources (including AI).

Exams: There will be two take-home exams in this course, designed to assess your comprehension of the readings. The exam questions will be loosely based on the reading questions provided for almost every session.

8. Grading

You will be given both a number grade and a letter grade for each assignment. Only the numerical grade is taken into account in determining your final grade. Numerical grades correspond to letter grades as follows: A 10-9.5; A- 9.4-9.0; B+ 8.9-8.7; B 8.6-8.3; B- 8.2-8.0; C 7.9 or below.

9. Electronic Devices in the Class

All devices with an ON/OFF switch—laptops, phones, etc.—must be switched off during class, unless they are serving a medical purpose. The empirical evidence is pretty clear that people don't learn as well with laptops, phones, and other gadgets in the classroom. Plus, you won't need it. You'll be expected to join in the discussion, not keep a written record of everything that is said. I'll often provide handouts that summarize the main points, and you will have brought the relevant readings. If for some reason you really do need to bring some technology to class, come see me.

10. Accommodations

This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should make an appointment to speak with an Accessibility Services Staff Member. In order to receive reasonable accommodations for a disability, you

must register with the *Office of Accessibility Services* at Amherst College (even if you are a 5-College student). (<https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/accessibility-services>). This office will provide a letter describing the appropriate accommodations.

11. Summary of Requirements

1. Don't plagiarize (plagiarism includes using AI to write your papers).
2. Do all required readings. Bring readings to class in hard copy.
3. Participate in class discussion.
4. Complete two essays and two take-home exams.

Reading Schedule

Note: This schedule is not a contract. It is entirely provisional. We may speed up, slow down, skip readings, or add readings, depending on where our discussion leads and the interests of members of the class.

I. Consequentialism (act so as to maximize the best outcomes)

Week 1:

Tu 1/28: Introduction; Plato, *Republic*, Book II (excerpt); Bernard Williams, "The Amoralist"
Th 1/30: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chs. 1-2 [class on Zoom today]

Week 2:

Tu 2/4: Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chs. 3-4
Th 2/6: Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 5

Week 3:

Tu 2/11: Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," secs. 3-5
Th 2/13: Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality"
Essay 1 Assigned

II. Deontology (act so as to obey one's duties)

Week 4:

Tu 2/18: Kant, *Groundwork*, Preface (4:387-4:392) and §1 (4:393-397) (pp. 1-5, 7-9)
Suggested: Christine Korsgaard, "Introduction to the *Groundwork*"
Th 2/20: Kant, *Groundwork* §1 (4:397-4:405) (pp. 9-17)
S 2/23: **Essay 1 Due by 9pm**

Week 5:

Tu 2/25: Kant, *Groundwork* §2 (4:406-4:424) (pp. 19-33)
Th 2/27: Kant, *Groundwork* §2 (4:425-4:445) (pp. 33-48)

Week 6:

Tu 3/4: Barbara Herman, "Mutual Aid and Respect for Persons"
Th 3/6: Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil"
Midterm Assigned

III. Morality Critics

Week 7:

Tu 3/11: No class: **Midterm Exam Due by 9pm**
Th 3/13: Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck"

3/17-3/21 Spring break

Week 8:

Tu 3/25: No class: instructor is away presenting a paper

Th 3/27: Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints"

Week 9:

Tu 4/1: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Preface and First Treatise (pp. 1-35)
Suggested: Maudemarie Clark, "Introduction to the *Genealogy*"

Th 4/3: Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, First Treatise (continued)

Week 10:

Tu 4/8: Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Second Treatise, §§1-11 (pp. 35-50)

Th 4/10: Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Second Treatise, §§12-25 (pp. 50-66)

Essay 2 Assigned

IV. Virtue Ethics: Ethics without Morality?

Week 11:

Tu 4/15: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 1

Suggested: Roger Crisp, "Introduction to the *Nicomachean Ethics*"

Th 4/17: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 2

S 4/20: **Essay 2 Due by 9pm**

Week 12:

Tu 4/22: No class (April break)

Th 4/24: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bks. 3-4

Week 13:

Tu 4/29: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 6

Th 5/1: Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices"; Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics"

Week 14:

Tu 5/6: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bks. 8-9

Finals Week:

F 5/9: **Take Home Final Distributed**

Tu 5/13: **Final Exam Due by 9pm (absolutely no exceptions)**