

PHIL 3311W: Intro to Ethical Theory

Fall 2023 | M/W 9:20 – 11:00am | Humphrey 184



18th-century Tibetan depiction of Nagarjuna with the Thirty Great Adepts (Mahasiddhas)

Instructor: Dr. Philip Bold | bold0169@umn.edu | Heller 717
Office hours: M 11-12pm & by appointment

Course Description: This course will survey some of the most influential moral-ethical theories in Eastern and Western traditions. Topics include why or whether it is reasonable to be selfless, the most fundamental virtues of human character, the role of family and relationships in ethical life, the basic rules of moral conduct, and the bearing of our actions' consequences on their moral value. The course will conclude with philosophical challenges to the legitimacy of moral-ethical theory itself. These general topics will be examined through careful study of the following historical figures: Plato, The Buddha, Aristotle, Confucius, Kant, Mozi, John Stuart Mill, Zhuangzi, and Nietzsche.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students in the course will **understand diverse philosophies and culture within and across societies.**

Addressing the outcome

In this course students will carefully study some of the most influential ethical perspectives in Eastern and Western society. Throughout our discussions, comparisons will be made with

perspectives outside those represented in the assigned readings, including the social and cultural realities of the students themselves. The aim will be to enrich our own ethical perspectives by careful attention to the diverse moral philosophies throughout the world.

Assessment of learning related to the outcome

The learning related to this outcome will be evaluated through regular participation in class discussion, and a series of critical papers in which students will be required to clearly explain a variety of ethical perspectives as well as to compare and critically evaluate them.

Required Texts: There are no required textbooks for this course. All readings will be provided on Canvas.

Required Assignments:

1. Weekly Discussion Posts (12 total) 10%
2. Two papers
 - a. Paper 1 25%
 - b. Paper 2 35%
3. Participation 30%
 - a. Attendance
 - b. Quality of Discussion Posts
 - c. Class Discussion

Due Dates:

Discussion Posts	Wednesdays before class
Paper 1	Sat Oct 28 by midnight
Paper 2	Wed Dec 20 by midnight

Course Schedule

- * Schedule is subject to change. * Complete readings prior to class.
- * Required (and optional) audio/video content will be posted on Canvas.

Introduction

Wed Sep 6 – Syllabus & Introduction to class

Why be moral?

Mon Sep 11 – Thrasymachus Praises Injustice
Republic Book 1 (Examination of Thrasymachus)

Wed Sep 13 – Thrasymachus Praises Injustice
Republic Book 1 (Examination of Thrasymachus)

Interrogating the ‘Self’: Plato and The Buddha

Mon Sep 18 – Plato’s Tripartite Theory of the Soul
Republic Book 4 (Justice in the Soul)

Wed Sep 20 – Plato on the Misery of Psychic Injustice
Republic Book 9 (The Tyrant)

Mon Sep 25 – Intro to Buddhism
‘Buddhism: The Basic Teachings’ (John M. Koller)

Wed Sep 27 – Ending Suffering, Universal Love & No Self (*Anatman*)
‘Basic Teachings According to the Early Texts’

Mon Oct 2 – Emptiness
The Heart Sutra
‘Emptiness as Fullness’ (Thich Nhat Hanh)
Optional: ‘Eastern Philosophy says there is no self – Science agrees’ (Big Think)
<https://tinyurl.com/54rxch47>

Wed Oct 4 – Right Action & Right Mindfulness
The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching (Thich Nhat Hanh)

Moral Virtues: Aristotle and Confucius

Mon Oct 9 – Intro to Virtue Ethics
‘Virtue Ethics’ (Russ Shafer-Landau)

Wed Oct 11 – Aristotle on Virtues of Character
Nicomachean Ethics Book 2 (Virtue of Character)

Mon Oct 16 – Intro to Confucianism
‘Confucianism: The Thought of Confucius’ (John M. Koller)

Wed Oct 18 – Confucius on Communal Virtues
The Analects

Rules, Fairness, and Humanity: Kant

Mon Oct 23 – Immanuel Kant on Fairness and Justice
‘The Kantian Perspective: Fairness and Justice’ (Russ Shafer-Landau)

Wed Oct 25 – Kant on Fairness and Justice
Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (Selection 1)

Sat Oct 28 – First Paper Due

Mon Oct 30 – Kant on Autonomy and Respect
‘The Kantian Perspective: Autonomy and Respect’ (Russ Shafer-Landau)

Wed Nov 1 – Kant on the Principle of Humanity
Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (Selection 2)

Consequences and Impartiality: Mozi and Mill

Mon Nov 6 – Mozi’s Consequentialism
‘Introduction’ (Chris Frazer)

Wed Nov 8 – Mozi on Impartiality
‘Chapter 16: Impartial Caring’

Mon Nov 13 – Mill on Utilitarianism
‘Utilitarianism’ (Mill)

Wed Nov 15 – Mill on Hedonism
‘Hedonism’ (Mill)

Beyond Morality

Mon Nov 20 – Intro to Daoism
Koller, ‘Daoism: The *Daodejing*’

Wed Nov 22 – The *Daodejing*
Daodejing (Selections)

Thurs Nov 23 – Thanksgiving Break

Mon Nov 27 – Zhuangzi Against Universal Morality
‘Zhuangzi’s Daoism’ (Stephen M. Koller)
‘*Wuwei* or Non-doing: Against the Tradition of Morality’ (Ge Ling Shang)

Wed Nov 29 – Zhuangzi Against Universal Morality
Zhuangzi Ch. 2: ‘Equalizing Assessments of Things’

Mon Dec 4 – Nietzsche’s Critical Genealogy of Morality
On The Genealogy of Morality (Preface)

Wed Dec 6 – Nietzsche Critical Genealogy of Morality
On The Genealogy of Morality (First Treatise: ‘Good and Evil,’ ‘Good and Bad’)

Mon Dec 11 – Nietzsche’s Guide to Value: *Amor Fati*
The Gay Science Book 4

Wed Dec 13 – Nietzsche’s Guide to Value: *Amor Fati*
The Gay Science Book 4

Wed Dec 20 – Final Paper Due

Description of Assignments

Discussion posts: Students will be required to write a weekly discussion post (a minimum of 3-5 sentences) that responds to a question posed by the instructor. The purpose of the discussion posts is for students to state as clearly as possible *their own answer* to a question posed by the instructor. The question posed will be relevant to the readings assigned during that week of class, but students *are not required* to discuss the assigned readings in their discussion post (though they can if they so desire). To be clear: the purpose of the discussion posts is for students to state *their own opinion* – as clearly, thoughtfully, and respectfully as possible – in response to a question related to class.

Students can optionally *write a response* – clearly, thoughtfully, and *respectfully* – to a discussion post written by one of their peers. It is not sufficient to write something like, “I agree with so-and-so, thanks for writing a great post!”; rather, a response must make a *substantive* contribution to the discussion. Options include: offering an example that illustrates the idea expressed in the original post, an objection (either one’s own or “playing devil’s advocate”) to the original post, a comparison of the original post with the ideas of some author studied in the course, a further question that the original post brought to mind for you.

Students are allowed to skip 3 of the assigned discussion posts except for the final post assigned during the last week of class, which everyone will be required to complete. Since 15 discussion posts are assigned, students are thus required to complete 12 discussion posts (including the final week of class) throughout the semester.

Discussion posts are simply graded for completion, but their general quality will be factored into one’s *Participation grade*.

Paper Assignments (double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman, 1-inch Margins):

Two total writing assignments are required for this class (to be submitted via Canvas). Instructions will be posted online.

Participation (in Class Discussion): Discussion is the core of this class. That is why participation counts for 30% of your course grade. You should come to *every class* prepared to talk about the assigned readings and the course topics. The participation component of your grade will also factor in your attendance record as well as the regular completion and quality of your forum posts. Please feel free to check in with me at any point in the semester if you are ever concerned about your participation.

The instructor will frequently send out 4-5 questions about assigned readings 1-2 days before the relevant class. **Students are expected to either write down *rough* answers to these questions before coming to the relevant class OR if some question seemed impossible to answer, the student should write down why the question was challenging for them (or if applicable state their own opinion regarding the question).**

Course Policies

- 1. Use of technology in the classroom:** Since this is a discussion-based course, students are highly encouraged not to use laptops or e-readers in the classroom. Laptops tend to distract students from the events of class (both those using them and those in their vicinity), detracting from the quality of our discussion and thus of students' learning. Phones are prohibited from use in class unless special permission has been granted. **Remember that participation is worth 30% of your final grade for the course.**
- 2. Late Work:** Unless special permission is obtained in advance, late papers will not be accepted without grade penalty. The penalty for late papers is 5% for every day the paper is submitted past the official deadline. Discussion posts cannot be made up and must be completed on time for credit. Extensions *on paper assignments* are granted liberally, but you *must* receive permission from the instructor. Extensions on discussion posts will require a formal excuse with evidence, such as a medical note or a note from a parent in the case of a family emergency.
- 3. Grading:** Final grades will be calculated using the following scale.

F	D-	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A
0	62	65	68	72	75	78	82	85	88	92	95

Below is a list of criteria that will be used to evaluate your papers. Note that the %'s only give a *rough* indication of how important these aspects are, and that not all of the criteria will apply equally to each of the different assignments; this is not a mathematical scale. There will be slightly different standards for each of the individual assignments, which I will state when those assignments are announced.

- Quality of ideas (50%)
 - *Range and depth of argument; fair representation of philosopher's position; logic of argument; quality and/or originality of thought; appropriate sense of the complexity of the topic; appropriate awareness of opposing views.*
- Organization and Argumentation (40%)
 - *Clarity of thesis statement in the introduction; logical and clear arrangement of ideas; effective use of transitions; unity and coherence of paragraphs; good development of arguments through supporting details and evidence.*
- Clarity, style, and grammar (10%)

- *Ease of readability; appropriate voice, tone, and style for the assignment; clarity of sentence structure; grammatically correct sentences; accurate spelling; careful proofreading.*

4. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will result in a final grade of F for the course. If you have any questions about plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, do not hesitate to ask me. According to the UMN Student Conduct Code: “Plagiarism shall mean representing the words, creative work, or ideas of another person as one’s own without providing proper documentation of source”.

5. **ChatGPT:** The Board of Regents Student Conduct Code states the following in Section IV, Subd.1: Scholastic Dishonesty:

"Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarism; cheating on assignments or examinations, including the unauthorized use of online learning support and testing platforms; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work, including the posting of student-generated coursework on **online learning support and testing platforms** not approved for the specific course in question; taking, acquiring, or using course materials without faculty permission, including the posting of faculty-provided course materials on online learning and testing platforms; ..."

Artificial intelligence (AI) language models, such as ChatGPT, and online assignment help tools, such as Chegg®, are examples of **online learning support platforms**: they can not be used for course assignments except as explicitly authorized by the instructor. The following actions are prohibited in this course:

- Submitting all or any part of an assignment statement to an online learning support platform;
- Incorporating any part of an AI generated response in an assignment;
- Using AI to summarize or contextualize source materials.

If you are in doubt as to whether you are using an online learning support platform appropriately in this course, I encourage you to discuss your situation with me.

6. **Disability Accommodations:** If you have, or think you have, a disability in any area such as mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) <https://ars.unc.edu/> to arrange confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations. If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact Dr. Bold early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in this course.

7. **Sexual Misconduct.** Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence) includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior is prohibited in the University setting.

Per the [U of M policy on sexual harassment](#), I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct with the campus Title IX office. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive as possible to your requests for confidentiality and support. You can also, or alternately, choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include:

- The Aurora Center 24hr Helpline (612-626-9111)
- Boynton Mental Health (612-624-1444)
- Student Counseling Services (612-624-3323)

8. Other Useful Resources:

- Technology resources for remote learning: <https://it.umn.edu/working-learning-campus/get-internet-access-campus>
- University Policies: <https://policy.umn.edu/>
- Student Writing Support: <http://writing.umn.edu/sws/>
- Disability Resource Center: <https://disability.umn.edu/>
- Student Counseling Center: <https://counseling.umn.edu/>
- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu>