# Ethical Theory (PHIL 3102) Syllabus
## Spring 2024
## Dr. Carissa Phillips-Garrett

*"The purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us." - Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 1103b26-29*

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**Class Schedule**: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:55-11:30am

**Class Location**: VDA 040

**Office Hours**: Tuesdays, 1:30-3:30pm; Thursdays, 12-2pm; or by appointment

## Course Description

*Core Area:* Ethics and Justice

*Recommended Background:* This section is specifically designed for Philosophy majors and minors, so declaration of major or minor in philosophy is required, or special permission from the instructor. PHIL 1800: Philosophical Inquiry or the equivalent is recommended.

In this course, we will ask what it means to live a full and good life, one that is lived in the pursuit of what is truly right, good, and valuable. We'll use some of the classic texts as a jumping-off point to explore the answers to these questions, but the ultimate aim is that each of us will develop our own answers that can shape our goals and pursuits beyond the classroom. Among the specific questions we will explore include:

- Can judgments of value transcend taste and cultural preference?
- Are there any universal moral truths, and if so, what is the basis of morality?
- What am I morally required to do for others?
- What does a good life for a human being consist in, and what is the highest human good?
- How should I resolve conflicts between different ethical principles or choices between different goods?
- What provides justification for following the demands of morality?
- What does a valuable and meaningful life look like?

## Course Learning Objectives

The most important learning goals for this course is moral development. By this, I don't just mean being able to explain moral theories (i.e., intellectual understanding of theoretical concepts about morality), but instead the development of ethical reasoning skills, the use of those skills to reflect on

your practices and goals, and the incorporation of ethical habits into your own life. In other words, the goal for the course is not just to *understand* ethical ideas better but to actually *live* better. Given this overarching aim, there are a number of more specific abilities and skills that all who successfully complete the course should develop and improve. These skills include:

(1) Reading texts and listening to one another in a carefully, charitable, and critical way that leads to understanding.
(2) Engaging both the texts and one another in conversations that seek to understand and analyze the philosophical claims and conclusions.
(3) Understanding how to develop philosophical questions and arguments.
(4) Examining how ethical assumptions, reasons, and theories relate to your own ethical reasons, views, and decisions.
(5) Thinking carefully about and then practicing the habits that help you develop ethically.

## Required Materials

Purchase the following textbook in paperback/hardbound format:
*Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, 2nd Edition, edited by Russ Shafer-Landau (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), ISBN 9780470671603

Please be sure to purchase the 2nd edition only (the 2nd edition adds an entire section that we will be reading that isn't in the 1st edition), and in print format only (not ebook format).

Reading philosophy carefully and thoroughly requires careful notetaking and reflection, so purchase your text rather than renting it (so you can write in your text, which is an important way of engaging it in conversation). Additionally, **buy a printed copy** for the same reason: reading electronic texts is less conducive to the kind of careful and thorough reading that is expected in this course. There are a variety of reasons why this is the case, including the following:

- Fatigue from being on a computer screen all the time is real, and so having work that you can do away from a computer screen is important.
- We are all more likely to skim when we are reading in an electronic format vs. reading a printed work, and reading for academic and careful engagement requires careful and thorough reading (see [this article]() in *Scientific American* on the difference between reading in digital format vs. print format; a literature review of the relevant studies is found [here]()).
- When discussing texts during class, it is easier to flip between pages if you have a physical copy vs. a digital copy (especially since the digital version has no page numbers).
- Since the digital version of the text lacks page numbers, it is also impossible to cite properly.

You will get the most out of the texts if you make sure to set aside enough time to read through the text prior to class several times (we will discuss specific techniques) and annotate the texts as you read. We will use the texts in class, so come prepared to refer to the text in class.

## Communication

- I encourage you to come see me in my office during my open office hours. These are hours set aside each week for me to meet with students. No appointment is necessary during these hours, so feel free to just drop by; unless previously announced, I will be waiting in my office during those hours each week. For the specific times and location of my office, please see my contact information.
- I will respond to emails within 24 hours, excluding weekends and holidays. I aim to respond within 12 hours during normal business hours, but do not depend on this; I encourage you to begin assignments early and contact me/post on Brightspace as soon as you recognize you have a question.
- Brightspace and your official LMU email will be used for all communication, so it is your responsibility to check both on a daily basis. You can also set your Brightspace settings so that you receive notification when something new is posted, but I also encourage a habit of logging in each day as well.

## Participation & Attendance

The default assumption is that you will be present and engaged at all class sessions. As conversational partners together, each of us has a responsibility to participate in pushing the discussion forward in the classroom. This only happens if we are all engaged, however, and a necessary (but not sufficient!) condition of this is being present for the discussion. Missing our class time together should be rare and only for a very good reason, not a regular occurrence, and it will be reflected in your attendance record and participation grade (while I do not "call" attendance at each class session, I keep track of both attendance and contributions for every class.

You are, nevertheless, free to miss up to three class periods with no questions asked (there is no need to inform me or explain why). After the three absences have been exceeded, each further absence will lower your class contribution grade, and students who miss more than six class sessions may not earn a passing grade in the course. To avoid this situation, it would be wise to reserve absences for unexpected problems that may unexpectedly happen (e.g., falling ill or getting a flat tire on the way to class). Since three absences are permitted for any reason, I rarely excuse further absences. However, in rare cases, I may make further exceptions. Except in the case of a medical emergency affecting you or your family, you must receive approval from me before the missed class, so please speak with me as soon as possible. While no supporting documentation is required for the three freebie absences, I may ask for it in the case of any additional excused absences.

Keep the following class participation expectations in mind:
- This is a discussion-heavy class, so come to our class discussions prepared to talk about the readings assigned for that day. Preparing for discussion means that you should have read and annotated the text carefully and thought about what questions you have and in what ways you can contribute to the discussion.

- Arrive prepared to focus for the duration of the class period. Sometimes unexpected things come up that may require you to leave (e.g., an emergency phone call that could not be rescheduled or a sudden and acute illness), but prepare for the things that you can (e.g., plan to use the restroom prior to class, not during our time together).
- Use language that is respectful and inclusive. It is perfectly fine to disagree with views expressed but target the argument you disagree with, not the person.

## Electronics Policy

I allow laptops or tablets if (and only if) you will be using this for class purposes exclusively. As a result, if you choose to bring a laptop or tablet to class, the following conditions will apply:

- The only files and applications that should be open will be (1) your reading notes for class, and, if you wish, and (2) a word document in which you may take notes (although your long-term memory will be much improved if you take notes by hand). This means *all other windows on your computer should be closed.*
- All message and email notifications should be turned off during class. The easiest way to do so this reliably may be to simply turn off the wifi connectivity on your computer or tablet.
- If you need to use a computer or tablet in class to take notes, you will be expected to share copies of your class notes immediately following the class session with the entire class, if I request that you do so. If you are not willing to do this, do not use a laptop or tablet in class.

Any other use, such as email, social media, or anything at all that is not directly related to the conversation we are having will not be tolerated. Using electronics in this way during a seminar is rude and disrespectful to your classmates.

Due to the distractions caused by electronic devices, all small electronic devices should be **<u>silenced and put away</u>** for the duration of the class. I reserve the right to temporarily confiscate any electronics during the class that are not put away, and your contribution mark for that class will be negatively impacted since the use is not only distracting for yourself but distracting for others around you.

In short: only bring a laptop/tablet in class if you need it. I will believe you if you tell me you need it, but I will also hold you accountable for ensuring that it does not interfere with anyone else's learning.

I have several reasons for this policy. Here are the primary reasons:

1) Using electronic devices in the classroom is distracting to other students, and <u>lowers grades for everyone</u> (to read about two other studies that show this, see <u>here</u> and <u>here</u>).
2) Almost no one can multi-task well (e.g., according to <u>this study</u>, approximately 2% of the population is decent at it, and it is significantly lowers performance for everyone else), and <u>multi-tasking impairs long-term retention of material</u>.
3) For the kind of reading we'll be doing in this class, electronic texts are much less effective than paper texts (as <u>this article</u> in *Scientific American* reports; a literature review of the relevant studies is found <u>here</u>).

4) There is a lot of evidence (e.g., <u>here</u>, <u>here</u>, <u>here</u>, and <u>here</u>) that taking notes by hand is much more effective than typing for retention of material. If you want a digital version of your notes, scan them or, better, type them out after class since interacting with the material once again will help with long-term retention and engagement.

## Workload Expectations

The credit standard for this 4-unit course is met by an expectation of a total of 180 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which includes class meeting times and other direct faculty instructions. Additional expectations include reading, writing, and other student work as described in the syllabus. This works out to roughly 8-12 hours per week for 4 credit courses. The majority of this work will consist of reading (which also includes thinking about the ideas raised by the reading) and writing.

## Assignments

Grade Distribution:

- Class Contribution: 15%
- Short Writing Exercises: 20%
- Oral Final Exam: 10%
- Specific Track Assignments: 55%

All students in the course will contribute regularly and thoughtfully to class discussions, complete a series of short writing exercises, and take an oral final exam. In addition, each student will choose one of two assignment tracks, with different sets of assignments that utilize different skills and aim at different goals (I will give you more details about these assignments in handouts later in the semester).

### Track #1: Mastery Track

The goal of this track is to demonstrate mastery of the central questions and theories covered in the course. To do this requires both explaining the debates clearly and then showing your own critical evaluation of the value of these arguments. This track is especially useful for students new to Philosophy, or to those who are studying Philosophy as a supplement to another field. If you have never written a philosophy paper where you developed your own thesis, this is probably the best track to select, since this track will help you develop the basic philosophical writing skills essential for doing philosophy well:

- 3 Short (1,000 word) Papers: 15% each
- Ethical Application Presentation: 10%

### Track 2: Specialist Research Track

This track is for students who want to write their own independent research paper on a topic related to ethical theory. This track is especially geared toward students who have already taken 3 or more courses in philosophy, and may be especially beneficial if you are considering a graduate degree (e.g., law school or graduate degree in Philosophy). This track involves an independent research project

culminating in a writing-sample caliber final paper (3,500 words), so the focus will be on developing a sustained and original argumentative paper that engages with existing scholarly discussion.

The assignments will focus on individual components of this project, from conception to research to writing to revisions:
- Research Pre-Proposal *&* Meeting: ungraded, but no other part will be graded until this is completed
- Annotated Bibliography: 10%
- Argument Outline: 10%
- Paper Précis with Q*&*A: 5%
- Research Paper (3,500 word): 30%

## Grading Scale
A+ = 97-100, A = 93-96, A- = 90-92, B+ = 87-89, B = 83-86, B- = 80-82, C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, C- = 70-72, D = 60-69, F = 0-59

## Late Assignment Policy
I know that life happens, so you have one free, no-questions-asked, no-excuse-needed late submission allowed per semester that extends your assignment due date for 48 hours (though you do need to communicate via email that you are doing that prior to the submission deadline and when you submit your assignment, remind me that you are using your late pass; this late assignment policy also does not apply to the discussion questions or quizzes, since those are both designed to prepare you for a specific class). If you have specific extenuating circumstances that might justify an extension of longer than 48 hours, please let me know that you will be requesting an extension of more than 48 hours. For any other late assignments, please see the rubric for that assignment.

To be counted as being submitted on time, the file must be received in the appropriate, working format; it is the student's responsibility to verify this. If there are technical issues**,** it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor immediately in an email with the file/content that they are attempting to submit and a screenshot of the problem. This allows us a chance to resolve the issue prior to the deadline. If this is done before the deadline, a one-time exception may be made to the late policy, but no other exceptions will be made.

## Academic Honesty
All students will be expected to follow LMU's Academic Honesty Policy, found at https://academics.lmu.edu/honesty/. This document outlines the university's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Violations of this code include plagiarism, cheating, misrepresenting another's work as one's own, and the intentional falsification of data. I recommend reviewing this policy in its entirety each semester and

asking any questions you have before you submit assignments, since ignorance will not be accepted as an excuse for violation of the academic honesty policy.

While it is expected that you will discuss the issues in the course with other students both in and out of class, all written work you turn in must be *your own*, and you must indicate whenever you are relying on the intellectual work of others, which includes our authors, your fellow students, and of course, any use of artificial intelligence like ChatGPT. Please come talk to me if you have questions about what this means! You are encouraged to work together in the pre-writing and development stages of papers and by soliciting peer feedback on drafts. However, only the author may write and revise each assignment for submission. When soliciting feedback from others on a written draft, please ask your readers to add comments by hand to a paper copy or as comments/track changes to an electronic version. This ensures that you, as the author, can critically decide whether or not to include feedback from reviewers.

Passages taken from another source must be explicitly quoted and cited, and ideas or ways of framing and organizing an issue that rely on the work of others must be cited as well. Any questions about what constitutes plagiarism should be addressed prior to handing in your written assignments. Ignorance of what is required will not be accepted as an excuse. Also, even if it your own work, work submitted for credit in this course cannot have been submitted for another course. Finally, unless it is explicitly allowed, work written up for an earlier assignment in this course also cannot be used wholesale for a later assignment and all work must be submitted according to the assignment directions in a working file. Again, please ask prior to submission if you have any questions.

While it is expected that you will discuss the issues in the course with others both in and out of class, all written work you turn in must be *your own*. Please come talk to me if you have questions about what this means! You are encouraged to work together in the pre-writing and development stages of papers and by soliciting peer feedback on drafts. However, only the author may write and revise each assignment for submission.

Passages taken from another source must be explicitly quoted and cited, and ideas or ways of framing and organizing an issue that rely on the work of others must be cited as well. Additionally, work that you submitted for credit in this course cannot have been submitted for credit in another course. Unless it is explicitly allowed, work written up for an earlier assignment in this course also cannot be used for a later assignment. Ignorance of what is required will not be accepted as an excuse, so any questions about what constitutes plagiarism should be addressed prior to handing in your written assignments.

One tool I may use this semester is Turnitin. LMU has partnered with the third-party application Turnitin to help maintain our standards of excellence in academic integrity. Turnitin is a suite of tools that provide instructors with information about the authenticity of submitted work and facilitates the process of grading for instructors. Submitted files are compared against an extensive database of content comprising of over 165 million journal articles, 1 billion student papers, and 62 billion current

and archived websites. Turnitin produces a similarity report and a similarity score. A similarity score is the percentage of a document that is similar to content held within the database. A similarity report gives the instructor more information about any potential matches and their sources. Turnitin does not determine if an instance of plagiarism has occurred. Instead, it gives instructors the information they need to determine the authenticity of work as a part of a larger process. All submissions to this course may be checked using Turnitin.

## Technical Challenges

- If you have any technical challenges with Brightspace, please email me immediately, along with a screenshot of the problem. Please also contact the ITS Service Desk (310-338-7777 or 213-736-1097; helpdesk@lmu.edu) immediately to get your issue resolved.
- If you are worried that the problem will keep you from submitting an assignment in a timely fashion, email me immediately with the problem you are experiencing, along with a screenshot.
- ITS recommends using the Chrome browser on a computer (rather than a phone) for the optimal experience with Brightspace.

## Special Accommodations

Students with an identified disability who require accommodations in this course should promptly direct their request to the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office. Any student who currently has a documented disability (ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Learning, Physical, or Psychiatric) needing academic accommodations should contact the DSS Office (Daum Hall 2nd floor, 310-338-4216) as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please visit www.lmu.edu/dss for additional information.

If necessary, this syllabus and its contents are subject to revision; students are responsible for any changes or modifications announced in class or posted on Brightspace.

# Reading Schedule

*Note: For more detailed explanations and any updates or changes to due dates or readings, please see Brightspace.*

| Week | Date | Reading |
|------|------|---------|
| **1** | Jan 9 | Introduction to Ethical Theory |
| | Jan 11 | David W. Concepción, "How to Read Philosophy" (Brightspace); J. L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values" (*ET*, pp. 22-30) |
| **2** | Jan 16 | Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended" (*ET*, pp. 35-43); Harry Gensler, "Cultural Relativism" (*ET*, pp. 44-47) |
| | Jan 18 | Renford Bambrough, "Proof" (*ET*, pp. 94-100); Robert Audi, "Moral Knowledge and Ethical Pluralism" (*ET*, pp. 101-111) |
| **3** | Jan 23 | Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Coherentism and the Justification of Moral Beliefs" (*ET*, pp. 112-126) |
| | Jan 25 | Margaret Urban Walker, "Feminist Skepticism, Authority, and Transparency" (*ET*, pp. 735-750) |
| **4** | Jan 30 | Plato, "The Immoralist's Challenge" (*ET*, pp. 132-137) |
| | Feb 1 | David O. Brink, "A Puzzle About the Rational Authority of Morality" (*ET*, pp. 144-158) |
| **5** | Feb 6 | John Stuart Mill, "Hedonism" (*ET*, pp. 258-263); Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine" (*ET*, pp. 264-265) |
| | Feb 8 | W. D. Ross, "What Things are Good?" (*ET*, pp. 299-302); Richard Kraut, "Desire and the Human Good" (*ET*, pp. 286-293) |
| **6** | Feb 13 | Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I (*ET*, pp. 615-622) |
| | Feb 15 | Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II *&* X (*ET*, pp. 622-629) |
| **7** | Feb 20 | Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book III.6-9 *&* IV.5 (Brightspace); Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach" (*ET*, pp. 630-644) |
| | Feb 22 | Lisa Tessman, "Eudaimonistic Virtue Ethics under Adversity" (Brightspace) |
| **8** | Feb 27 | NO CLASS (Spring Break) |
| | Feb 29 | NO CLASS (Spring Break) |
| **9** | Mar 5 | Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork* (*ET*, pp. 485-490) |
| | Mar 7 | Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork* (*ET*, pp. 490-494) |
| **10** | Mar 12 | Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork* (*ET*, pp. 494-498) |
| | Mar 14 | Carol Hay, "A Feminist Kant" (Brightspace) |
| **11** | Mar 19 | Rae Langton, "Duty and Desolation" (Brightspace) |
| | Mar 21 | NO CLASS (professor at conference) |
| **12** | Mar 26 | John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism" (*ET*, pp. 417-422) |

|    | Mar 28 | NO CLASS (Easter) |
|----|--------|-------------------|
| **13** | Apr 2 | Brad Hooker, "Rule-Consequentialism" (*ET*, pp. 428-440) |
|    | Apr 4 | Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem" (*ET*, pp. 543-551) |
| **14** | Apr 9 | Nel Noddings, "An Ethic of Caring" (*ET*, pp. 699-712) |
|    | Apr 11 | Cheshire Calhoun, "Justice, Care, and Gender Bias" (*ET*, pp. 713-720) |
| **15** | Apr 16 | W. D. Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right?" (*ET*, pp. 756-765) |
|    | Apr 18 | Presentations |
| **16** | Apr 23 | Margaret Olivia Little, "On Knowing the 'Why': Particularism and Moral Theory" (*ET*, pp. 776-784) |
|    | Apr 25 | Discussion Questions Wrap-Up |