

PHIL 181: Ethics
John Felice Rome Center
Spring 2025
Tuesdays & Thursdays | 5:15-6:30pm
Dr. Moreno Rocchi
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Office Hours: Tue./Thu., 2:00-3:00pm (by appointment)

Course Description

The aim of this course is to lead students toward an autonomous judgment of fundamental issues related to the human society and ethical decision making, with special reference to happiness, justice, fairness, adherence to norms and civil disobedience, rules and duties, cultural and social influences. This will provide students with the basic critical skills for recognizing different ethical approaches and for judging their feasibility and correctness. By analyzing the philosophies that most consistently influenced the development of Western culture, students will be aided in their understanding of moral dilemmas, as well as their construction of philosophically informed decisions.

The course is divided into three parts.

We will first familiarize ourselves with the importance of ethics in everyday life by discussing a number of moral dilemmas. We will then clarify our field by analyzing moral relativism, the relation between ethics and religion, and the relation between ethics and legality.

In the second and largest part of the course we will compare two different theories on the universal criterion for moral judgment: Kant's theory and utilitarianism. Both of these theories will be applied to contemporary issues and subjected to criticism. Most notably, the criticism of such universalistic approaches raised by feminist ethics will allow us to analyze the so-called "virtue ethics", a recent renewal of ancient ethics.

In the third and last part of the course we will expand our vision by looking at the intersections between ethics and other fields such as epistemology and history. This will allow us to better understand the limitations of a moral discourse disentangled from concrete socio-historical conditions. We will conclude by discussing about how to best take action on today's most pressing moral issues.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the major philosophical questions in the area of ethics with attention to the historical and conceptual development of these questions, and be able to articulate some of the major problems and responses central to this area of philosophy.

This course should also enable students to:

- (a) appreciate the profound issues involved in social relations, such as dignity and diversity;
- (b) engage in dialogue with great philosophers, paying close attention to their meaning, their reasons, their concerns, their vision;
- (c) insert their own reflections into the dialogue;
- (d) examine the way different philosophically defended views challenge each other, and how they also challenge unexamined presuppositions in our own culture;
- (e) recognize the need for ethical judgment;
- (f) distinguish alternative courses of action;
- (g) articulate the relevant ethical values, principles, rights, and virtues from the point of view of each stakeholder;
- (h) formulate and support an ethical judgment;
- (i) recognize the premises for a given conclusion or viewpoint, identify unexamined presuppositions, appreciate astute insights, expose vulnerabilities in established positions;
- (j) compare and contrast ethical theories and evaluate them in terms of strengths and weaknesses;
- (k) differentiate among historical and contemporary perspectives about the world with a view to fashioning a humane and just world;

- (l) understand the relationships among cultural, economic, political, and social forces, and their impact on human behavior;
- (m) assess how moral principles are conditioned by one's involvement in (and responsibilities toward) the socially organized community in which one lives.

Required Texts/Materials

James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, McGraw-Hill, 10th edition (but 9th or 8th or 7th is fine too);
Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (available online);
John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (available online);
Assigned readings posted on Sakai.

Attendance Policy

In accordance with the JFRC mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, all courses adhere to the following absence policy. Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student.

For this course, a total of **two unexcused absences** will be permitted. **Unexcused absences beyond these will result in 1% lowering of the final course grade, for every absence after the “approved limit”**.

If, however, you are ill, do not attend class and send me a doctor’s note (your absence will be excused).

Campus Health

The JFRC will conduct all activity according to policies and best practices as prescribed by the Italian Ministries of Health and Education and in consultation with the Loyola University Chicago main campus. These policies will be subject to change as the situation warrants.

Assessment Components

• Midterm Exam (in-class test)	30%
• Final Exam (take-home paper)	31%
• Presentation*	7%
• In-class participation	18%
• Forum participation**	15%

*Each student will be required to give a presentation on a topic of their choosing from the presentation schedule.

** One or two discussion questions/prompts will be posted on Sakai every week.

You will need to write two posts every two weeks (ideally, at least one answer to my prompt and one reply to someone else’s answer).

7% will be for completion. The other 8% will be for the quality of your submissions. I will not grade each post individually, but I encourage you to put thought and effort into each of them so that you can demonstrate the skills and knowledge you are gaining throughout the course.

Basic requirements of each post:

- Posts should be between 150 and 250 words;
- Use language that is professional and respectful of both the text and your classmates;
- Posts that respond to classmates’ posts should begin with a brief statement about what you appreciate or agree with about the classmate’s post.

Grading

94-100: A
90-93: A-
87-89: B+
84-86: B

80-83: B-
77-79: C+
74-76: C
70-73: C-
67-69: D+
60-66: D
59 or lower: F

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a guiding principle for all academic activity at Loyola University Chicago, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle.

Failing to meet the following academic integrity standards is a serious violation of personal honesty and the academic ideals that bind the University into a learning community. These standards apply to both individual and group assignments. Individuals working in a group may be held responsible if one of the group members has violated one or more of these standards.

1. Students may not plagiarize; **the use of AI is considered plagiarism too and treated as such.**
2. Students may not submit the same work for credit for more than one assignment (known as self-plagiarism).
3. Students may not fabricate data.
4. Students may not collude.
5. Students may not cheat.
6. Student may not facilitate academic misconduct.

Follow this link for more details about these standards, sanctions, and academic misconduct procedures: (https://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml)

Late or Missed Assignments

Late or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading without the authorization of the instructor.

Accessibility Accommodations (with addendum on classroom recording policy)

Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center requiring academic accommodations should contact the Office of the Dean at the John Felice Rome Center, the first week of classes.

Loyola University provides reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with Student Accessibility Center (SAC), located in Sullivan Center, Suite 117. Professors receive the accommodation notification from SAC via Accommodate. Students are encouraged to meet with their professor individually in order to discuss their accommodations. All information will remain confidential.

Please note that in this class, software may be used to record class lectures exclusively in order to provide equal access to students with disabilities. Students approved for this accommodation use recordings for their personal study only and recordings may not be shared with other people or used in any way against the faculty member, other lecturers, or students whose classroom comments are recorded as part of the class activity. Recordings are deleted at the end of the semester.

For more information about registering with SAC or questions about accommodations, please contact SAC at 773-508-3700 or SAC@luc.edu.

Notice of Reporting Obligations for Responsible Campus Partners

As an instructor, I am a Responsible Campus Partner ("RCP") under Loyola's Comprehensive Policy and Procedures for Addressing Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, and Retaliation (available at www.luc.edu/equity). While my goal is for you to be able to engage fully and authentically with our course material through class discussions and written work, I also want to be transparent that as a RCP, I am must notify the Office for Equity & Compliance ("OEC")/Title IX Coordinator when I have any information about conduct that reasonably may constitute Title IX Sex-Based

Discrimination. Title IX Sex-Based Discrimination includes any of the following conduct, when the conduct was within the University's education program or activity:

- Discrimination or discriminatory harassment on the basis of sex (including sex stereotypes, sex characteristics, gender identity, sexual orientation, and Pregnancy or Related Conditions),
- Sexual harassment (including quid pro quo and hostile environment sexual harassment),
- Sexual assault,
- Dating and/or domestic violence, and/or
- Stalking

As the University's Title IX office, the OEC coordinates the University's response to reports and complaints of sexual misconduct (as well as discrimination of any kind) to ensure students' rights are protected.

The University maintains such reporting requirements to ensure that any student who experiences sexual/gender-based violence receives accurate information about available resources and support. Such reports will not generate a report to law enforcement (no student will ever be forced to file a report with the police). Additionally, the University's resources and supports are available to all students even if a student chooses that they do not want any other action taken. If you have any questions about this policy, you are encouraged to contact the OEC at equity@luc.edu or 773-508-7766.

If you ever wish to speak with a confidential resource regarding gender-based violence, I encourage you to call The Line at 773-494-3810. The Line is staffed by confidential advocates from 8:30am-5pm M-F and 24 hours on the weekend when school is in session. Advocates can provide support, talk through your options (medical, legal, LUC reporting, safety planning, etc.), and connect you with resources as needed -- without generating a report or record with the OEC. More information about The Line can be found at www.luc.edu/wellness.

Course Schedule

(N.B.: ALL READINGS MUST BE DONE BEFORE CLASS!)

Date	Topic	Assignment
Tue. 01/21	Introduction to the course	
Thu. 01/23	Some moral dilemmas	Rachels, Ch. 1
Tue. 01/27	The challenge of moral relativism	Rachels, Ch. 2
Thu. 01/29	Ethics and religion	Rachels, Ch. 4
Tue. 02/04	Ethics and civil law	Rachels, Ch. 6 (except for § 6.2) + M.L. King, <i>Letter from a Birmingham Jail</i> (excerpts)
Thu. 02/06	Kant	<i>Groundwork</i> , Ch. 1 Suggested reading: Rachels, §§ 9.2-9.5
Tue. 02/11	Kant	<i>Groundwork</i> , Ch. 2 Suggested reading: Rachels, § 10.1
Thu. 02/13	Kant (and the banality of evil)	McClinton, «Eichmann, Kant, and the Banality of Evil»
Tue. 02/18	Kantian applications: Consent	O'Neill, «Between Consenting Adults»

Date	Topic	Assignment
Tue. 02/25	On-site class (<i>to be confirmed</i>)	
Thu. 02/27	Kantian applications: Future Generations	Jonas, <i>The Imperative of Responsibility</i> (excerpts)
Tue. 03/04	Review	
Thu. 03/06	Midterm Exam	
[SPRING BREAK]		
Tue. 03/18	Introduction to Utilitarianism	Rachels, Ch. 7
Thu. 03/20	Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i>	<i>Utilitarianism</i> , Ch. 2
Tue. 03/25	Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> (and the limits of individual responsibility)	<i>Utilitarianism</i> , Ch. 3 + Hiller, «Climate Change and Individual Responsibility»
Thu. 03/27	Case study: Poverty	Rachels, § 8.4 + Singer, «Famine, Affluence and Morality»
Tue. 04/01	Case study: Politics	Walzer, «Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands» + Rachels, § 8.3 and § 9.1
Thu. 04/03	Movie day	
Tue. 04/08	Universalistic ethics vs. Ethics of Care	Rachels, Ch. 11 (except for the sections titled "Children with HIV" and "Animals") + Elshtain, «Antigone's Daughters»
Thu. 04/10	Virtue Ethics	Rachels, Ch. 12
Tue. 04/15	Topics in Feminist Ethics: Hermeneutical injustice and the possibility of reconciliation	Falbo, «Hermeneutical Injustice» + Stanlick, «Reconciling with Harm: An Alternative to Forgiveness and Revenge»
Thu. 04/17	Ethics and Historical Injustices: The Case for Reparations	Coates, «The Case for Reparations»
Tue. 04/22	Debate class on collective action	Hooker, «Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics» <u>OR</u> Malm, <i>Learning to Fight in a World on Fire</i> (excerpts)
Thu. 04/24	Study day	
Thu. 05/01 (TBC)	Final Exam (= take-home paper deadline)	