

PHI 102 Sec. 02  
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## **Ethics**

MWF 10:00-10:50, MAK B-1-114  
Office Hours: MW: 11-12  
F: 11-12, 2-3, and by appointment  
(616) 331-3158

### **Course Texts:**

Plato, *Gorgias* (Hackett)  
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Hackett)  
Confucius, *Analects* (Hackett)  
Kant *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Hackett)

### **Course Description:**

No questions are more important than these: How should we live our lives? and What kind of person should we be? These are the central questions of ethics. We will look at a variety of ways philosophers have sought a general answer to these questions. What makes their answers philosophical rather than personal is their appeal to reasons as evidence for their conclusions. In this class we are interested both in their conclusions and their reasoning. We will read two ancient Greek philosophers—Plato and Aristotle—one ancient Chinese philosopher—Confucius—and one modern European philosopher—Immanuel Kant. The material covered the final week will be chosen by a class vote held on March 16th.

### **Course Method:**

Philosophy is best done in conversation. The greater variety of ideas we can draw on the better we will be able as a class to come to some reliable insights on philosophical questions. Therefore although there will be some lectures to set the stage for the discussion, the majority of the class time should be spent in discussion. This means that students must come to class ready to discuss—having read carefully the material, at least once, and being prepared to raise and address issues found in the text. Since discussions cannot be made up, attendance and participation are important parts of the grade. The daily attendance/participation grade is: F-not in class; D-in class unprepared; C-in class, prepared, not participating in discussion; B-in class, prepared, participating in discussion; A-in class, prepared, significantly contributing to the discussion. It is assumed all absences are excused absences; over six absences will result in the final grade divided in half (so the highest final grade would be a C). Computers are not allowed in the classroom as they tend to take attention away from the focus of the discussion.

### **Course Assignments:**

In addition to the reading and participation requirements, there will be four tests and a comprehensive final exam. The tests will be in-class essay tests, with one longer essay (one page) and three quotation comprehension questions. Three possible questions for the longer essay will be given out the class period before the test and students will be allowed not only to work on the questions before class, but to bring a typed copy of a written answer to class to be handed in at the time of the test. Students are free to work together in preparing for the test, though all writing handed in must be the student's own work and all references used must be cited. Failure to cite references is plagiarism—a sign that the student has lost his or her sense for the point of going to college. A plagiarizing student is expected to drop the class and the Dean of Student's Office will be notified.

**Ethics Case Debates:**

Eight times during the term we will debate an ethics case. These cases will be handed out beforehand and a range of positions that might be taken established. Students need to write a one-page position paper providing reasons for one of the positions and reasons against one of the rival positions. The positions papers will be handed in and graded A, B, C, F based solely on the strength of the arguments.

**Grade Breakdown:**

Attendance and Participation:	25%
Tests/Final Exam:	50% (10% each)
Ethics Case Position Papers:	25%

If you have disabilities that require special accommodation you should speak to Prof. Vessey as soon as possible at the start of the term.

**Foundation: Philosophy and Literature**

This course fulfills a foundation general education requirement for the philosophy and literature. Here is what the catalogue says about such classes:

Literary and philosophical works represent an ongoing conversation about the fundamental ideas and values that shape cultures and civilization. To participate fully in this conversation requires knowledge both of those works that are recognized as defining the history of the conversation, and of works that offer original or critical additions to it in the present. Through the study of great works of Philosophy and Literature, students will come to understand more clearly their own response to the world and to the ideas that give it form and comprehensibility.

Courses in this category will introduce students to the interpretation of a significant body of literary or philosophical work, and assist them in the careful reading, discussion, and analysis of primary texts.

*Content Goals*

All courses in the Philosophy and Literature category include the following content:

1. The introduction of philosophy or literature as a "way of knowing"; an examination of principles and questions that define the field and its contributions to human knowledge and civilization;
2. A consideration of the relationship between the works discussed, the cultures in which they were created, and the human concerns they illuminate;
3. The critical analysis and interpretation of one or more primary texts as a major portion of course content.

*Skills Goals*

All courses in a Foundation use teaching methods that help students become more proficient in the following skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective speaking or writing;
2. To think critically and creatively;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

1. Mon. Jan. 9            Introductions
2. Wed. Jan. 11        Background to Socrates and Plato  
Reading: Plato's *Apology*, 17a-26b (on Blackboard)
3. Fri. Jan. 13         The Unexamined Life  
Reading: Plato's *Apology*, 26b-42a (on Blackboard)
4. Mon. Jan. 16        Divine Command Theory  
Reading: Plato's *Euthyphro* (on Blackboard)
5. Wed. Jan. 18        Teaching Moral Skills  
Reading: Plato's *Gorgias* 447a-461b
6. Fri. Jan. 20         Ethics Case #1
7. Mon. Jan. 23        The Unhappiness of Immorality  
Reading: Plato's *Gorgias* 461b-481b
8. Wed. Jan. 15        Philosophically Honest Self-examination  
Reading: Plato's *Gorgias* 481b-527e
9. Fri. Jan. 27         Ethics Case #2
10. Mon. Jan. 30        Review Test #1
11. Wed. Feb. 1         Test #1
12. Fri. Feb. 3         Introduction to Aristotle  
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*,
13. Mon. Feb. 6        The Life of *Eudaimonia*  
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a1-1097b21
14. Wed. Feb. 8        Do Humans have a natural purpose?  
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b22-1102a4
15. Fri. Feb. 10        Ethics Case #3

16. Mon. Feb. 13      The nature of the virtues  
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1102a5-1109b27
17. Wed. Feb. 15      Friendship as Part of the Best Life  
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a1-1159b24 and 1166a1-1170b18
18. Fri. Feb. 17      No Class  
Listening/Viewing assignment:
19. Mon. Feb. 20      Review Test #2
20. Wed. Feb. 22      Test #2
21. Fri. Feb. 24      Ethics Case #4
22. Mon. Feb. 27      Intro to Ancient Chinese Philosophy  
Reading: *Confucius Analects*, I-IV
23. Wed. Feb. 29      Cultivating Humanity  
Reading: *Confucius Analects*, V-IX
24. Fri. March 2      Ethics Case #5
- March 4<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>      Spring Break
25. Mon. March 12      Ethics as a Rejection of Pettiness  
Reading: *Confucius Analects*, X-XIV
26. Wed. March 14      Confucius as Role Model  
Reading: *Confucius Analects*, XV-XX
27. Fri. March 16      Review Test #3/ Vote for final week topic
28. Mon. March 19      Test #3
29. Wed. March 21      Introduction to Kant's Ethics  
Reading: Kant's *Grounding*, pp. 7-9 (AT393-AT396)

30. Fri. March 23      Ethics Case #6
31. Mon. March 26      A Moral Duty  
Reading: Kant's *Grounding*, pp. 9-14 (AT397-AT401)
32. Wed. March 28      The Categorical Imperative,  
Reading: Kant's *Grounding*, pp. 14-21 (AT402-AT410)
33. Fri. March 30      Ethics Case #7
34. Mon. April 2      Acting on principle  
Reading: Kant's *Grounding*, pp. 21-29 (AT410-AT420)
35. Wed. April 4      The Categorical Imperative  
Reading: Kant's *Grounding*, pp. 30-30 (AT421-434)
36. Fri. April 6      Review Test #4
37. Mon. April 9      Test #4
38. Wed. April 11      TBD
39. Fri. April 13      Ethics Case #8
40. Mon. April 16      TBD
41. Wed. April 18      TBD
42. Fri. April 20      Review and Course Evaluations
- Tue. April 24<sup>th</sup>, 12:00 FINAL EXAM