

## PHIL 20401.05 – Ethics (Fall 2009)

Classroom: O’Shaughnessy 107  
Class Time: MW, 3:00–4:15 pm  
Instructor: Dr. Alan Rhoda  
Office: Malloy 109  
Office hours: MW, 1:15–2:30 pm and by appt.  
E-mail: [rhoda.1@nd.edu](mailto:rhoda.1@nd.edu)  
Website: <http://www.alanrhoda.net>

### Course Description

The focus of this course is ethical theory. Central questions to be considered are: (1) Whether there are general principles governing how we *ought* to live. (2) If so, what are they? Can we confidently *identify* any of those principles? (3) What, if anything, *grounds* these principles? Where do they come from? Why are they incumbent upon us?

While classical approaches to ethics give a confident “Yes” to (1), there is considerable disagreement over (2) and (3). We’ll begin by looking at challenges to classical ethical systems—moral nihilism, subjectivism, relativism, and egoism. Next, we’ll look at the major classical ethical systems, especially result-based (utilitarian), duty-based (deontological), and virtue-based (aretaic) systems, and evaluate their respective strengths and weaknesses. We’ll also consider where ethical principles come from and how we can know what they are. In particular, we’ll consider whether morality needs a theological foundation. Can there *be* morality without God? Or without an afterlife?

### Course Texts

Pojman and Fieser, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* (6<sup>th</sup> edition, Wadsworth)  
Pojman (ed.), *Moral Philosophy: A Reader* (3<sup>th</sup> edition, Hackett)

### Course Requirements

First short paper .....	15%
Second short paper.....	20%
Mid-term exams (2 @ 20% each) .....	40%
Final exam.....	25%

### Short Papers

You will also be asked to write two short papers on assigned topics. The first will be worth 15% of your final grade, and the second 20%. While I encourage you to discuss your essays with each other, I expect you to compose your answers by yourself. *Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the full extent the University allows* (an “F” for the paper, at least). You must not pass off someone else’s work as your own, and you must fully document all of your sources. Similar penalties apply to students who willingly allow their work to be copied. In short, you will be held to the standards of Notre Dame’s Academic Code of Honor.

### Exams

There will be three in-class exams: two midterms (worth 20% each) and a final (worth 25%). These will consist of both short-answer and essay questions, and will cover material from the readings and lectures.

### Participation

You are expected to come to class regularly and promptly. Role will be taken at the beginning of class. Every *unexcused* absence after the second will reduce your final grade by 2.5%. Repeated or excessive tardiness will also be penalized. To be excused, an absence must be officially approved by the university, specifically, by the assistant vice-president for residence life.

You should always come to class prepared, having read the assigned material and ready to participate in class discussion. Remember, your quality contributions to class discussion are essential for an optimum class experience this semester.

**Schedule:** This is a guideline subject to revision at my discretion. (**P&F** = Pojman & Fieser, **P** = Pojman).

Week	Monday	Wednesday
1		8/26: Course introduction <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 1, "What Is Ethics?"
2	8/31: Truth and moral truth	9/2: The case for moral relativism <b>P</b> , ch. 2, Herodotus, "Custom Is King" <b>P</b> , ch. 4, Benedict, "A Defense of Ethical Relativism"
3	9/7: The case against moral relativism <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 2, "Ethical Relativism"	9/9: Moral skepticism <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 12, "Moral Realism and the Challenge of Skepticism"
4	9/14: Moral objectivism <b>P</b> , ch. 11, Plato, "The Good and the Allegory of the Cave" <b>P</b> , ch. 3, Aquinas, "Natural Law"	9/16: Moral objectivism (cont.) <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 3, "Moral objectivism"
5	9/21: Value and goodness <b>P</b> , ch. 12, Bentham, "Classical Hedonism" <b>P</b> , ch. 14, Nozick, "The Experience Machine" <b>P</b> , ch. 15, Ross, "Value Pluralism"	9/23: Value and goodness (cont.) <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 4, "Value and the Quest for the Good"
6	9/28: <b>First exam (in class)</b>	9/30: Does might make right? <b>P</b> , ch. 1, Plato, "What Is Right Conduct?" <b>P</b> , ch. 13, Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil"
7	10/5: Why be moral? <b>P</b> , ch. 6, Plato, "Why Should I Be Moral?" <b>P</b> , ch. 7, Hobbes, "Egoism as the Beginning of Morality"	10/7: Why be moral? (cont.) <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 5, "Social Contract Theory and the Motive to Be Moral"
8	10/12: Ethical egoism <b>P</b> , ch. 8, Rand, "A Defense of Ethical Egoism"	10/14: Ethical egoism (cont.) <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 6, "Egoism, Self-Interest, and Altruism" <b>First paper due by 5pm Friday 10/16.</b>
9	Mid-term break (no class)	
10	10/26: Utilitarianism <b>P</b> , ch. 17, Mill, "Utilitarianism" <b>P</b> , ch. 18, Nielsen, "Against Moral Conservatism"	10/28: Utilitarianism (cont.) <b>P</b> , ch. 19, Hospers, "Rule Utilitarianism" <b>P</b> , ch. 20, Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism"
11	11/2: Utilitarianism (cont.) <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 7, "Utilitarianism"	11/4: Deontology <b>P</b> , ch. 22, Kant, "The Foundation of Ethics"
12	11/9: <b>Second exam (in class)</b>	11/13: Deontology (cont.) <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 8, "Kant and Deontological Theories"
13	11/16: Intuitionism and Reconciliationism <b>P</b> , ch. 24, Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right?" <b>P</b> , ch. 25, Frankena, "A Reconciliation of Ethical Theories"	11/18: Virtue ethics <b>P</b> , ch. 26, Aristotle, "Virtue Ethics" <b>P</b> , ch. 27, Mayo, "Virtue and the Moral Life"
14	11/23: Virtue ethics (cont.) <b>P</b> , ch. 31, Norton, "Moral Minimalism and the Development ..." <b>P</b> , ch. 28, Frankena, "A Critique of Virtue-Based Ethics"	11/25: No class. Thanksgiving holiday.
15	11/30: Virtue ethics (cont.) <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 9, "Virtue Theory"	12/2: God and morality <b>P</b> , ch. 33, Russell, "A Free Man's Worship" <b>P</b> , ch. 34, Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality"
16	12/7: God and morality (cont.) Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (Internet resource) Nowell-Smith, "Morality: Religious and Secular" (e-reserve)	12/9: God and morality (cont.). Wrap-up. <b>P&amp;F</b> , ch. 10, "Religion and Ethics" <b>Second paper due by 5pm Friday 12/11.</b>
17	<b>Final exam:</b> Wednesday, December 16 @ 4:15 pm	