

Phil 22 - Introduction to Ethical Theory

Summer 2026 Session A

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Lecture Time: Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays

Course Description

There are key questions in life. What does it mean to live a good life? How should we treat others? What makes an action right or wrong? How do we balance the demands of duty and the pursuit of happiness? What is virtue, and why be virtuous?

This course introduces the foundational theories of ethics through close engagement with classical texts by Aristotle, Kant, and Mill. We will explore how these philosophers approach these questions and consider the implications of their theories for contemporary issues.

Through readings, discussions, and written assignments, you will develop the analytical tools to critically evaluate ethical arguments and articulate your own moral perspectives. No prior background in philosophy is required, just a willingness to think deeply and engage with challenging ideas! I look forward to the journey with you.

Course Requirements

- **Midterm Exam:** 35%
4–6 pages, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12 pt. font.
- **Final Exam:** 45%
4–6 pages, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12 pt. font.
- **Section and Lecture Attendance/Participation:** 20%.
 - Attendance 12%:
 - Discussion posts (comprehension questions) 8%

You must submit at least 8 answers to comprehension questions over the quarter.

Answers must be submitted before the corresponding lecture.

Each week, up to 3 answers will count toward your grade.

Late Assignment Policy

Papers submitted late will be penalized by 3% per day. Extensions may be requested for legitimate reasons, but requests must be made no later than 48 hours before the due date (except in cases of unexpected emergencies).

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be dealt with in accordance with university policy. For information about academic integrity at UCLA, see the Dean of Students' Site on Academic Integrity:

<https://deanofstudents.ucla.edu/academic-integrity>.

<https://deanofstudents.ucla.edu/file/4b995724-f033-476a-bccc-f6103528d959>

If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, please ask me or the TA before submitting your work.

Academic Accommodations

Students who require disability-based academic accommodations should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) as soon as possible: by phone (310-825-1501), email (caeintake@saonet.ucla.edu), or in person (A255 Murphy Hall).

Campus Resources

- **UCLA Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):** Located at John Wooden Center West, 221 Westwood Plaza. Reachable by phone at 310-825-0768 or by email at info@caps.ucla.edu.
- **Undergraduate Writing Center:** Located at A61 Kaplan Hall. Reachable by phone at 310-206-1320 or by email at wcenter@g.ucla.edu.

Readings

All required readings will be available on Bruinlearn. You are expected to complete the assigned readings before each session.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Book I

Session 1: Introduction to the course and the study of ethics.

- **No reading required.**

Session 2: Teleological conception of the good, the hierarchy of ends, and the highest good.

- **Reading:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapters 1–6.

Session 3: Happiness, the highest good, and the function argument.

- **Reading:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapters 7–12.

Week 2: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Books I&II

Session 4: Specification of virtues and the importance of habituation.

- **Reading:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter 13 & Book II, Chapters 1–4.

Session 5: The definition of virtues (genus).

- **Reading:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapters 5.

Session 6: The definition of virtues (differentia) and the doctrine of the mean.

- **Reading:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapters 6.

Week 3: Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Section I

Session 7: The good will.

- **Reading:** Kant, *Groundwork*, Section I (4:393–397).

Session 8: Acting from duty and the concept of moral worth.

- **Reading:** Kant, *Groundwork*, Section I (4:397–400)

Session 9: Three propositions.

- **Reading:** Kant, *Groundwork*, Section I (4:400–405)

Week 4: Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Section II

Session 10: Rational imperatives and the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives.

- **Reading:** Kant, *Groundwork*, Section II (4:406–414).

Session 11: The categorical imperative and its application to moral duties.

- **Reading:** Kant, *Groundwork*, Section II (4:414–424).

Session 12: Humanity as an end in itself: Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative.

- **Reading:** Kant, *Groundwork*, Section II (4:425–431).

Week 5: Mill’s Utilitarianism, Chapter II

(09/01/2025) Labor Day: Holiday

Session 13: Mill on happiness, higher pleasures, and the principle of utility.

- **Reading:** Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 2 (pp. 9–20).

Session 14: Applying utilitarianism to real-world ethical dilemmas.

- **Reading:** Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 2 (pp. 20–27).

Week 6: Mill’s Utilitarianism, Chapter III

Session 15: Mill on the ultimate sanction of the principle of utility.

- **Reading:** Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 3 (pp. 27–35).

Session 16: Review session for final exam.

Session 17: Recap and discussion: comparing virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism.