



PHIL 2050 Ethics and Values

For additional course information, including prerequisites, corequisites, and course fees, please refer to the Catalog: <https://catalog.uvu.edu/>

Semester: Spring

Course Prefix: PHIL

Course Title: Ethics and Values

Year: 2025

Course and Section #: 2050-048

Credits: 3

Course Description

This course challenges students to explore and clarify their values by critically reading works of philosophy, literature, religion, and history toward understanding the basis of their ethical views; and read, study, research, discuss, and write about difficult ethical issues. Focuses on issues of good vs. evil, justice vs. injustice, equality vs. inequality, and the necessity of defining and examining happiness and values. Engages students in serious reflection on issues of ethics and values as they relate to the students' own lives.

Course Attributes

This course has the following attributes:

- General Education Requirements
- Global/Intercultural Graduation Requirements
- Writing Enriched Graduation Requirements
- Discipline Core Requirements in Program
- Elective Core Requirements in Program
- Open Elective

Other: *Click here to enter text.*

Instructor Information

Instructor Name: Kelly Nicholson

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Explain several different theories of ethics, and contemporary ethical issues.
 2. Describe the moral ethical dimensions of works of philosophy, literature, religion, and other disciplines within the humanities.
 3. Articulate their own ethical views and positions.
 4. Interrelate with a society of increasing intercultural connections.
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Course Materials and Texts

James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 10th and most recent edition). Available for sale or rent as eBook.

Steven M. Cahn, ed., *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

As noted, there will be brief added selections provided in addition.

Course Requirements

Course Assignments, Assessments, and Grading Policy

Course requirements and grading criteria:

Four things primarily determine your grade for this course. While I do not have an exact “letter of the law” policy regarding the final tally, here is roughly how it breaks down in terms of a “zero to 100” scale.

(1) Overall class performance, 30 %, which involves attendance, punctuality, attentiveness, and constructive participation. Come prepared each week to discuss the class reading, and to listen attentively to what is said by everyone here.

(2) Participation in a panel discussion (this can be done alone or in a small group, depending on your preference), 30 %, on a topic that is relevant to the course. While I won’t hold a stopwatch on people when they are presenting material, I think that 20 minutes per student, on average, is a reasonable estimate.

(3) An essay exam, 40 %, probably given during the Finals period, which will require all the allotted session time if you are well prepared. The key to success on the exam will be to give evidence of your careful reading of the assigned texts.

Again, these numbers are rough estimates – I will take into consideration certain details (such as exceptional class participation or a panel performance that exceeds expectation) that could affect the final tally. Also, I do not have any pre-established “curve” in mind – high grades (and low) to all who earn them.

Required or Recommended Reading Assignments

See Schedule

General Description of the Subject Matter of Each Lecture or Discussion

Week 1

(January 7th / 9th) Course overview and introductory reading

In this session we will take note of our overall course content, requirements, and policy. We will examine three real-life cases of moral controversy in Chapter 1 of Rachels’ book *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (EMP), one of two main texts we will use during the semester. The purpose of this exercise is not to achieve unanimous agreement about these cases, but to understand better the nature of moral reasoning.

Week 2

(Jan 14th / 16th) Radical Challenges to moral philosophy

For these sessions we will use a short piece of photocopy from Louis Pojman’s *Philosophical Traditions*, containing quotes from the Sophists, instructors of rhetoric in ancient Greek culture who ridiculed popular beliefs of their day. Such things as honesty and fair play, they maintained, were merely a strategy of the weak to guard themselves against stronger, less inhibited types who exceeded them in natural ability. We will read a short excerpt from Plato’s *Republic* and note a counter to the Sophists’ position, the deeply idealistic view proposed by Plato and his mentor Socrates. We will note in addition

a quotation from David Hume (EMP page 33), a skeptic in the modern tradition. We will look briefly at the alleged relationship between morality and religion as described in EMP Ch 4.

Week 3

(Jan 21st / 23rd) Radical Challenges, continued

This week we will look at a more recent version of moral skepticism, namely one that arises out of observed moral differences between cultures. The reading source will be Rachels, EMP Ch 2. This selection is available also in the accompanying course text, *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology*, Steven M. Cahn, editor. Time allowing, we will look ahead to another “positive” account of ethics, the utilitarian philosophy that is introduced in Ch 7 of the Rachels text.

Week 4

(Jan 28th / 30th) Modern ethics: The principle of utility

This week will be devoted to utility ethics, covering Ch 7 in Rachels and the John Stuart Mill selection in the Cahn anthology, pp. 98 – 105, excerpting Mill’s essay *Utilitarianism*. According to this view, which has been quite influential in the modern world, good and evil are real things, and the moral worth of an action is found in the happiness or unhappiness that it causes.

Week 5

(February 4th / 6th) Utility theory, continued, and Kant

During this week we will discuss Ch 8 in the Rachels text, which describes objections to utility ethics and replies that utilitarians sometimes offer in turn. We will then turn our attention to another modern view, that of Immanuel Kant, introduced by Rachels in EMP Ch 9. Unlike the utilitarians, Kant grounds ethics in the logical form of an action, proposing a guiding rule that he calls *The Categorical Imperative*.

Week 6

(Feb 11th / 13th) Kant, continued

We will continue our coverage of Kant with another section of the *Exploring Ethics* reader, pp. 83 – 93, excerpted from Kant’s *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. We will see how Kant distinguishes the worth of an action from its consequences, and how he applies his rule to various actions and lifestyles.

Week 7 Kant and retributivism in modern ethics

(Feb 18th / 20th) This week we will finish our Kant reading with Rachels’ EMP Ch 10. This chapter focuses on Kant’s difference with utilitarian thought, and his view of criminal punishment. We will discuss two recent articles on capital punishment from an outside source – the articles will be made available to you in advance. One, authored by Igor Primoratz, offers a view reminiscent of the one held by Kant, insisting that death is the only suitable punishment for wanton murder; the other, by Stephen Nathanson, argues that we would do well to abolish this form of punishment from our justice system. (Note: Let’s plan to start our panel discussions at around this time.)

Week 8 The termination of pregnancy

(Feb 25th / 27th) We will focus this week on two statements regarding abortion, one by Pope John Paul II, which calls abortion outright murder, and the other by Judith Jarvis Thomson, a highly imaginative account that runs in an opposing direction. The statement by Pope John Paul will be provided, and the one by Thomson is contained in the *Exploring Ethics* anthology, pp. 307 – 323. (Panel discussions, continued)

Week 9 Wealth, hunger, and obligation

(March 4th / 6th) This week we will examine two more selections from the *Exploring Ethics* anthology on world hunger and our obligations to remedy disaster on a global scale. The first is by Peter Singer, which argues that our current policies are woefully out of accord with what they should be, in this regard. The second, by Travis Timmerman, proposes a modified view. (Panel discussions, cont.)

Week 10 Spring Break

Week 11 Euthanasia

(Mar 18th / 20th) This week we will read James Rachels' article (contained in Exploring Ethics, pp. 361 – 67, not in Rachels' text) on euthanasia, which argues that "active" euthanasia, contrary to the outlook of medical tradition, is morally preferable to "passive" – in other words, that we it would be better, in some cases, to administer to a terminally ill patient a lethal drug rather than to merely withhold certain treatments in order to shorten the patient's remaining time. (Panel discussions, cont.)

Week 12 Capital punishment in cinema

(Mar 25th / 27th) Our main activity will be watching and discussing the film Dead Man Walking, (Sean Penn, Susan Sarandon, 1989), arguably the most powerful in film history regarding capital punishment. (Panel discussions, cont.)

Week 13 The moral status of animals

(April 1st / 3rd) We will consider the moral status of non-human animals, and take note of experiments in the field of animal intelligence. Our main reading will be the selection (Exploring Ethics, pp. 251 – 63) by Peter Singer. (Panel discussions, cont.)

Week 14 Meaning in human life

(Apr 8th / 10th)

We will read two selections on the ultimate meaning of life, considering what makes a life meaningful or not, and what relation this question has to moral activity. The selections are authored by Richard Taylor (hard copy), who emphasizes the importance of creativity to a life well-lived, and Christine Vitrano (Exploring Ethics, pp. 416 – 19), who emphasizes the importance of a life's moral content. (Panel discussions, cont.)

Week 15 Euthanasia and assisted suicide in cinema

(Apr 15th / 17th) This week will be devoted mainly to the film You Don't Know Jack (Al Pacino, Brenda Vaccaro, et al., 2010), portraying the real life crusade of Dr. Jack Kevorkian to achieve liberalization of laws in the United States concerning euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Week 16

(Apr 22nd / 24th) Left over material, if any, and exam review

Week 17 April 29th Final Exam as scheduled

Required Course Syllabus Statements

Generative AI

The Department of Philosophy and Humanities recognizes that Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing Tools are largely accessible to students and will be used by many in higher education for the foreseeable future. However, the skills taught in the humanities are unique. We aim to educate students in the careful reading of texts, the development of rigorous writing skills, the analysis and use of arguments, and to foster the thoughtful application of each of these skills in students' personal and social development. Research has not yet determined what bearing the use of AI tools in the classroom will have upon the successful acquisition of these skills.

Therefore, at this time, online learning support platforms (like ChatGPT or Google Bard) may not be used for course assignments in our department except as explicitly authorized by the instructor. Any assignment or content composed by any resource other than the student (whether human or digital) must be attributed to the source through proper citation.

Unacknowledged use of online learning support platforms is a form of scholastic dishonesty and will be treated as such.

Some of our language has been adapted from the University of Minnesota

Using Remote Testing Software

This course does not use remote testing software.

This course uses remote testing software. Remote test-takers may choose their remote testing locations. Please note, however, that the testing software used for this may conduct a brief scan of remote test-takers' immediate surroundings, may require use of a webcam while taking an exam, may require the microphone be on while taking an exam, or may require other practices to confirm academic honesty. Test-takers therefore shall have no expectation of privacy in their test-taking location during, or immediately preceding, remote testing. If a student strongly objects to using test-taking software, the student should contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to determine whether alternative testing arrangements are feasible. Alternatives are not guaranteed.

Required University Syllabus Statements

Accommodations/Students with Disabilities

Students needing accommodations due to a permanent or temporary disability, pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions may contact UVU [Accessibility Services](#) at accessibilityservices@uvu.edu or 801-863-8747.

Accessibility Services is located on the Orem Campus in BA 110.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing students requesting ASL interpreters or transcribers can contact Accessibility Services to set up accommodations. Deaf/Hard of Hearing services can be contacted at DHHservices@uvu.edu

DHH is located on the Orem Campus in BA 112.

Academic Integrity

At Utah Valley University, faculty and students operate in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Maintaining an atmosphere of academic integrity allows for free exchange of ideas and enables all members of the community to achieve their highest potential. Our goal is to foster an intellectual atmosphere that produces scholars of integrity and imaginative thought. In all academic work, the ideas and contributions of others must be appropriately acknowledged and UVU students are expected to produce their own original academic work.

Faculty and students share the responsibility of ensuring the honesty and fairness of the intellectual environment at UVU. Students have a responsibility to promote academic integrity at the university by not participating in or facilitating others' participation in any act of academic dishonesty. As members of the academic community, students must become familiar with their [rights and responsibilities](#). In each course, they are responsible for knowing the requirements and restrictions regarding research and writing, assessments, collaborative work, the use of study aids, the appropriateness of assistance, and other issues. Likewise, instructors are responsible to clearly state expectations and model best practices.

Further information on what constitutes academic dishonesty is detailed in [UVU Policy 541: Student Code of Conduct](#).

Equity and Title IX

Utah Valley University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age (40 and over), disability, veteran status, pregnancy, childbirth, or pregnancy-related conditions, citizenship, genetic information, or other basis protected by applicable law, including Title IX and 34 C.F.R. Part 106, in employment, treatment, admission, access to educational programs and activities, or other University benefits or services. Inquiries about nondiscrimination at UVU may be directed to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights or UVU's Title IX Coordinator at 801-863-7999 – TitleIX@uvu.edu – 800 W University Pkwy, Orem, 84058, Suite BA 203.

Religious Accommodation

UVU values and acknowledges the array of worldviews, faiths, and religions represented in our student body, and as such provides supportive accommodations for students. Religious belief or conscience broadly includes religious, non-religious, theistic, or non-theistic moral or ethical beliefs as well as participation in religious holidays, observances, or activities. Accommodations may include scheduling or due-date modifications or make-up assignments for missed class work.

To seek a religious accommodation, a student must provide written notice to the instructor and the Director of Accessibility Services at accessibilityservices@uvu.edu. If the accommodation relates to a scheduling conflict, the notice should include the date, time, and brief description of the difficulty posed by the conflict. Such requests should be made as soon as the student is aware of the prospective scheduling conflict.

While religious expression is welcome throughout campus, UVU also has a [specially dedicated space](#) for meditation, prayer, reflection, or other forms of religious expression.