

# PHILOSOPHY 150: INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

Instructor:  
Contact:  
Office Hours:

Dr. Tanner Hammond  
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Friday 11am-1pm

Course Dates:  
Classroom:  
Office Hours Location:

T-TH, 2-3:15  
TBD  
Digital Office Hours Tab



## **COURSE TOPIC:**

Ecological catastrophe, systemic racism, economic inequality —these have all been referred to as defining “moral crises” of our time. But what, exactly, is “morality”? What is the meaning of moral and normative terms like “good” and “bad,” “right” and “wrong”? Are there moral truths—that is, truths about what is good and bad or what actions we “ought” to do? If so, how do we discover moral truths and how do they relate to the empirically observable universe? If there are no moral truths, how do we explain the ubiquity of moral judgments in our everyday lives? And what are the challenges and possibilities for living in a world without moral truth?

The aim of this course is to engage in a historical dialogue on these foundational questions with key figures and traditions from the history of philosophical ethics, with special attention to the history of Modern philosophy. Our goal will be to balance close reading and historical sensitivity with a topical focus on issues that remain at the forefront of contemporary public debate.

**COURSE WEBSITE & MATERIALS:**

This class has a course website: [tannerhammond.com/ethics](http://tannerhammond.com/ethics). The class will be administered entirely through this website, and all materials for the course will be distributed through the class e-reader linked on the course website (There is no blackboard content for this class). In order to submit your weekly assignments, you will also need to sign up for an account on the Digital Forum, where you will share your weekly blog paper (details below).

**COURSE TEXTS:**

All Readings for this course will be distributed digitally on Perusall, the course E-Reader. You can access the E-Reader through the course website. All files can be downloaded as .PDFs to view or print on your preferred medium. Readings will be assigned through the Perusall app. The access code for Perusall can be found on the pop-up screen when you select the Readings tab on the course website.

**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE BREAKDOWN**

1. Participation	10%
2. Weekly Blog Papers and Annotations (Credit/No Credit)	10%
3. Module One Midterm Paper	25%
4. Module Two Midterm Paper	25%
5. Stages of Philosophical Writing Series	(Credit/No Credit)
6. Final Paper (Module III or Module IV) Module Two Midterm Paper	30%

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

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### **WEEKLY UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS**

There are two weekly ungraded assignments for this class:

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#### **I. Hive Reading - aka “Annotations” (Ungraded)**

Philosophy is difficult and takes time, but we’re all in it together. This class has a social E-Reader app, “Perusall,” where everyone can engage with the material in a collective forum. This gives you all the opportunity to share comments and questions and respond directly to one another. To make sure we’re keeping up with the reading, each week you will:

- i. **ANNOTATE:** Leave at least 1-2 quality annotative questions, comments, or objections on at least one of the readings that week. To keep it interesting: No duplicate questions! Early bird gets the worm. That being said, you can always take the same passage in a different direction. **Note:** You may leave 1-2 quality responses to your classmates’ annotations in fulfillment of your contribution.
- ii. **UPVOTE/CO-SIGN:** In addition to the above, upvote and/or co-sign any comments/questions that you find helpful or illuminating.

**DUE: Complete Hive Reading assignments before the end of the day each Tuesday, on any of the readings assigned for that week.**

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#### **2. Weekly Blog Papers (Ungraded)**

Every week each student will write and post a short “blog paper” to the *Digital Forum* on the course website, to be completed in response to one or more of the readings for that week. The blog paper should be no more than 500 words. The blog paper should either:

- (a) Articulate and develop objection(s), worries(s), or question(s) about the ideas or arguments exhibited in the reading,

And/or

- (b) Defend or amend the author’s view in response to anticipated criticisms.

NOTE: The blog paper should be something that you look forward to doing, and not a source of panic or stress. To emphasize this, these are ungraded (credit/no credit) assignments. That being said, they will be read and assessed for course participation. The idea is for you to have a piece of writing each week that will give you something to draw upon in class discussions and in office hours with me.

**DUE: Post your weekly blog paper to the Digital Forum before the end of the day each Thursday.**

## GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

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### I. Two Short Midterm Papers

**One on any topic or figure in Module I; One on any topic or figure in Module II**

The aim of this course not only to teach you *about* philosophy, but to cultivate your ability to *do* philosophy. In my experience, cram-session regurgitative blue book exams do little to prepare one to do meaningful philosophical work. The purpose of the Midterm Papers is to give you the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of the material while also giving you the opportunity to actually explore some of the basic conventions of philosophical discourse.

**The Paper Types:** In order to help you accomplish the foregoing, your Midterm Papers must satisfy **at least one** of the following paper types below:

- i. Critical Engagement:** Engage critically with a philosopher's work by generating original objections or challenges to their position
  
- ii. Reconstructive Effort:** Try to defend a philosopher's view from some classic objections or problems by reconstructing a fortified or amended version of their position
  
- iii. Applied Debate:** Show how a real-world issue in contemporary debate is illuminated or problematized by a philosophical idea from the readings. Alternatively, show how a philosophical idea is illuminated or problematized by a real-world issue.
  
- iv. Interpretive Dispute:** Engage in an existing scholarly debate between differing interpretations of a philosopher.

***Detailed instructions for the Midterm Papers will be provided in a separate handout.***

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### 2. The Final Paper: The Philosophical Essay

**Choose any topic engaging with any figure from Modules III and IV**

Your final paper assignment will give you free agency to pursue any topic of interest engaging with one or more of the readings from Modules III and IV. With structured input from the TF and myself, you will have full autonomy in conceiving the purpose of your paper.

**Stages of Philosophical Writing Sub-Assignment Series (Credit/No Credit)** Successful academic writing doesn't happen in a vacuum, but involves communicative encounters with other rational inquirers at critical stages in the process. In order to prepare for your final paper, you'll need to practice the conventions of philosophical writing with opportunities for feedback. To help you accomplish this, you will complete a series of mini-assignments designed to assist you along the way in composing your final paper.

***Detailed instructions for the Final Paper will be provided in a separate handout.***

## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

<b>Module I: Are There Moral Truths? A Primer in Metaethics</b>		
Week 1	Introduction	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> M. Chrisman, "What is this Thing Called Metaethics?"
Week 2	God and Morality: The Euthyphro Problem	James Rachels, "Does Morality Depend Upon Religion?" Fyodor Dostoevsky, short excerpt <i>Rebellion</i> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Parable of the Madman"
Week 3	Is It All Relative? Moral Relativism and its Discontents	Mary Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword" Plato, Ring of Gyges James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"
Week 4	Slave of the Passions? Reason, Emotion, and Morality	David Hume, Selections <i>Treatise</i> A.J. Ayer, <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i> Selections Annette Baier, "What are Emotions About?"
<b>Module II: Utilitarianism and Other Consequentialisms</b>		
Week 5	Hedonism and Utilitarianism	Jeremy Bentham, <i>Principles</i> J.S. Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine"
Week 6	The 99% and the 1%: Utilitarianism and Economic Inequality	Peter Singer, "The Singer Solution to World Poverty" Marina Hyde, "If Jeff Bezos wants to help low-income people why not just pay them better?" Jan Narveson, "Feeding the Hungry"
Week 7	Love and the Critique of Hedonism	Zadie Smith, "Joy" Cornel West, "Nihilism in Black America" Robert Nozick, "Love's Bond" Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism"
Week 8	Is Death Bad?	Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus Thomas Nagel, "Death"
<b>Module III: Kantian Rationalism and the Ethics of Agency</b>		
Week 9	Morality as Rationality: Kantian Ethics	Ursula Le Guin, "The ones who walk away from Omelas" Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> Chapters I & II Christine Korsgaard, "Kant's Formula of Universal Law"
Week 10	Autonomy and Consent: Kant and Applied Ethics	Berit Brogaard, "Sex by Deception" Michael Heumer, "Is There a Right to Own a Gun?"
Week 11	What is Evil? Reason and the Problem of Evil	Hannah Arendt, Selections from <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i> Kant, Selections from the <i>Second Critique</i>
<b>Module IV: Suffering and the Challenge of Nihilism</b>		
Week 12	Suffering and the Ethics of Compassion	Arthur Schopenhauer, "On the Sufferings of the World" Iris Murdoch, Selections from <i>The Sovereignty of Good</i> J. Donovan, "Attention to Suffering: A Feminist Care Ethic" Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, Journey to Mindfulness
Week 13	The Death of God and Nietzsche's Challenge	Nietzsche, "The Greatest Weight" Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy</i> , First & Second Essay
Week 14	Creating Values: Who are Nietzsche's Free Spirits?	Nadeem Hussain, "Honest Illusion" Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd"

## IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES AND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

**Late Assignment Policy:** If you find that you need a short extension, you may request one in advance of the paper deadline. Late assignments without notice may be penalized at the discretion of the TF.

**Academic Integrity:** Cases of plagiarism will be handled in accordance with the disciplinary procedures described in Boston University's Academic Conduct Code. All students are subject to the CAS code, which can be read online:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend lectures regularly. Absence in the case of an illness will be excused if a note from a physician substantiates that the absence was required for health reasons. Any student who has been absent, unexcused, from more than six classes before the last date on which withdrawals are permitted will be required to withdraw from the course. Any student who has been absent, unexcused, from more than six classes before the final examination and who has not formally withdrawn from the course will receive an F for the course.

**Office of Disability Services:** I assume that all of us learn in different ways. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please talk to me as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for accommodations that will satisfy both your learning needs and the requirements of the course. Whether or not you have a documented disability, BU provides many support services that are available to all students. Disability Services is the office responsible for assisting students with disabilities. If you have a disability that interferes with your learning (whether visible or invisible, physical or mental), you are encouraged to register with this office. If you have any questions about accommodation, or what constitutes a disability, I invite you to speak with me or to Disability Services.

**Chosen Name and Gender Pronouns:** This course aims to be an inclusive learning community that supports students of all gender identities (including non-gendered identifying persons). While class rosters are provided to instructors with students' legal names, please let me know if you would like to be addressed by a different name than that listed in the StudentLink. You are also invited to tell me early in the semester which set of pronouns best fits your identity (if any).

**Absence Due to Religious Observance** If you must miss class due to religious observance, you will not be penalized for that absence and you will receive a reasonable opportunity to make up any work or examinations that you may miss. Please notify the instructor of absences for religious observance as soon as possible, ideally before the absence. View the religious observance policy:

[www.bu.edu/academics/policies/absence-for-religious-reasons/](http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/absence-for-religious-reasons/)

**Bereavement** In the event of the death of an immediate family member, you should notify your advisor, who will help you coordinate your leave. You will be automatically granted five weekdays of leave, and if necessary, your advisor will help you to petition the Dean for additional leave time. You may also request a leave of absence due to bereavement. Please contact your advisor, who will help you with the process. View the bereavement policy: [www.bu.edu/academics/policies/student-bereavement/](http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/student-bereavement/)

**Course Recording Policy** All class sessions will be recorded for the benefit of registered students who are unable to attend live sessions (either in person or remotely) due to time zone differences, illness or other special circumstances. Recorded sessions will be made available only to students who have an obstacle to live attendance.

**Content and Trigger Warning Policy** In this class, we will be confronting challenging questions about the full spectrum of human experience. For that reason, it is of the utmost important that there are measures in place so that we may all do so safely.

1. Discussion of potentially problematic discussion in class comes with a standing open door policy so that students may leave the meeting at any time if they feel uncomfortable.
2. Videos displayed in class will include a preview still as well as a brief description of potentially upsetting content
3. There is a standing alternate reading assignment policy for any readings that a student finds to present an obstacle to learning
4. I'll be adding an anonymous feedback box to the course website, in which students can keep me apprised of any concerns they might have. Fill in the name field as "anonymous" to leave an anonymous comment.