

# Introduction to Ethics

Summer 2025

## Instructor information

### Instructor

Ash Sorrels

### Email

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### Office location & hours

TBA

## General information

### Description

This course is an introduction to the study of moral concepts, problems, and behavior. Ethics, as a sub-field of philosophy, attends to the diverse moral questions that pervade our lives, including what is the right thing to do, what should we value, and what do we mean when we call something or someone good. Our goal in this class is not to resolve these questions with definite answers, but to explore them, understand their intricacies, and develop our moral compass. We will begin by focusing on the major challenges to ethics, including uncertainty, relativism, and the ever-changing nature of social norms. Then, we will consider questions pertaining to ourselves as moral agents, including how we should care for ourselves, how we should care for others, and who we should consider in our decision-making. Finally, we will use these tools to examine contemporary moral problems, including the opportunities and challenges that arise from technology, democracy, and the pursuit of perfection. Classroom time will primarily involve discussion, with lectures and activities used to frame and expand the discussion.

## Course materials

### Required Text

All required materials will be available on Canvas.

### Course schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
06/02	Introduction to Course	Required: Syllabus Optional: The Lottery, Shirley Jackson
06/03	What is Ethics?	Required: The Trolley Problem, Judith Jarvis Thomson: I-III Optional: <i>The Good Place</i> : Selection on Trolley Problems
06/04	The Challenge of Relativism	Required: Trying Out One's New Sword, Mary Midgley Optional: <i>Ethics: Inventing Right &amp; Wrong</i> , J.L. Mackie: I.7-8

Required: What Will Future Generations Condemn

06/05	The Challenge of Hindsight	Us For? Kwame Anthony Appiah Optional: When Nations Apologize, Edwin Battistella
06/09	Being Good to Yourself	Required: Spoon Theory, Christina Miserandino Optional: The Self as a Narrative Center of Gravity, Daniel Dennett
06/10	You & US	Required: The Ethics of Care, Dependence, & Disability, Eva Kittay Optional: When the World Isn't Designed for Our Bodies, Katy Waldman
06/11	Making It Through Hard Times	Required: Cultivating Moral Resilience, Cynda Rushton Optional: Enchiridion, Epictetus
06/12	Who Should We Care About?	Required: The Scope of the Moral Community, Russ Shafer-Landau Optional: TBD.
06/16	The Moral Community: Other People	Required: Famine, Affluence, & Morality, Peter Singer Optional: Kantian Approaches to Some Famine Problems, Onora O'Neill
06/17	The Moral Community: Ourselves	Required: A Defense of Abortion, Judith Jarvis Thomson Optional: A Case for Pro-Life Feminism, Callahan
06/18	The Moral Community: Other Species	Required: Rats Are Us, Kristin Andrews Optional: Facing the Animal You See In the Mirror, Christine Korsgaard
06/19	Writing Lab	Required: How to Write a Philosophy Paper, Jim Pryor Optional: Philosophy Games ( <i>Philosophers' Magazine</i> )
06/23	Problems: Moral Corruption	Required: <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i> , Hannah Arendt: Selections Optional: The Making of a YouTube Radical, Kevin Roose
06/24	Problems: Objectification	Required: Dating Through the Filters, Karim Nader Optional: The Right to Sex, Amia Srinivasan
06/25	Problems: Moral Isolation	Required: Escape the Echo Chamber, C. Thi Nguyen Optional: Echo Chambers & Epistemic Bubbles, C.

		Thi Nguyen
06/26	Problems: Algorithms	Required: When Human Beings Are Like Drunk Robots, Robert Sparrow & Mark Howard Optional: A Robot Wrote This Entire Article, GPT-3
06/30	Problems: Democracy	Required: What Deliberative Democracy Means, Amy Gutmann & Dennis Thompson Optional: United States Constitution
07/01	Problems: Trust	Required: Democracy Needs Discomfort & Distrust is a Political Virtue, Meena Krishnamurthy Optional: Democracy Entails Conflict, Rochelle DuFord
07/02	Problems: Human Rights	Required: The Case for Reparations, Ta-Nehsi Coates Optional: Universal Declaration of Human Rights
07/03	Problems: Perfection	Required: The Experience Machine, Robert Nozick Optional: The Case Against Perfection, Michael Sandel

### Exam schedule

	Subject	Percentage	Description	Due Date
One	Participation & Attendance	20%	Students are required to attend all class sessions and participate in discussions and activities. For more information, see the attendance and participation policies below.	N/A
Two	Discussion Board	20%	Students are required to make one post and one response to another student per week. A student may skip up to one post and one response, equivalent to one week of work.	N/A
Three	Values Paper	10%	Students will write a 2-3 page paper analyzing their own core values and considering how these values affect their moral decision-making.	06/12
Four	Dialogue Paper	20%	Students will be placed into groups of 2 and discuss a major moral problem and potential solutions to this problem. Each student will then write a 3-4 page	06/26

			paper detailing their own perspective and reflecting on their conversation with the other student, focusing on areas of agreement and disagreement and how their perspectives may be bridged in resolving the problem.
<b>Five</b>	Final Project	30%	<p>Students are required to produce a final project where they analyze and respond to a moral problem. This may be done in one of three ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) An argumentative essay that defends a position on the problem. This essay should be 6-8 pages double-spaced and involve engagement with at least two scholarly texts.</li> <li>(b) A creative writing project that explores a moral problem through a narrative format. The story should be 5-6 pages long, with an additional 2-3 page analysis of how the story relates to the problem.</li> <li>(c) An art project that explores a moral problem through a medium other than writing, including film, music, and visual art. The specific requirements of this option will depend on the chosen medium, though in each case students will be required to include an additional 2-3 page analysis of how the project relates to the problem.</li> </ul>

## Additional information and resources

### Attendance Policy

Ethical decision-making requires discussion and collaboration. For this reason, you are required to attend every class period having engaged with the assigned texts and being prepared to listen, take notes, and discuss. You may miss up to two class periods without an excuse without penalty. Any unexcused absences after two will result in a two-point deduction per absence from your participation

and attendance grade. So, if you have 20/20 at the end of the semester, but have had four unexcused absences, this will result in your grade being reduced to 16/20 and so on. If you have an excused reason why you must miss class, including personal illness, the death or major illness of a close family member, partner, or friend, religious observation, military service, university-sponsored events where your attendance is required because of leadership or participation responsibilities, or jury duty, then please email me about the missed class period. If there is a reason you believe you may miss class but do not know if it will count as excused, please email me so we can discuss.

### **Grading Policy**

All assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale, with letter grades distributed as follows, with pluses and minuses representing the bottom and top thirds of each grade:

- A+: 96.7-100
- A: 93.4-96.6
- A-: 90-93.3
- B+: 86.7-89.9
- B: 83.4-86.6
- B-: 80-83.3
- C+: 76.7-79.9
- C: 73.4-76.6
- C-: 70-73.3
- D+: 66.7-69.9
- D: 63.4-66.6
- D-: 60-63.3
- F: 59 and below

### **Late Policy**

If there is any reason that you need an extension on an assignment, please email me and let me know as far in advance as possible. I cannot guarantee that I can or will make an extension, but if there is a reasonable excuse, I will consider it and discuss it with you. If an assignment is turned in late, I will take off 10% from the final grade for that assignment for every day it is late. Therefore, if you turn in a paper two days late without an excused reason and you earn 92%, it will be reduced to 72%. Because of the nature of the assignment, I will not allow for late discussion posts and responses on Canvas except in extreme circumstances. The posts and responses for each week must be submitted by 11:59 PM on the Thursday of that week.

### **Discussion, Participation, & Etiquette Policy**

Ethics is a collaborative discipline that depends upon active participation and discussion. Because of this, all students are required to come to class having read the texts and ready to discuss. For ease of discussion, please raise your hand so I can call on you before speaking. Please do not interject if I or another classmate is speaking. I highly recommend asking questions, including clarificatory questions, during both lecture and discussion. Sometimes it may take extra explanation to grasp an idea or question, and this is okay, it is part of the regular practice of moral philosophy. Though part of philosophy is learning to ask better and more probing questions, this does not mean that there are any bad questions.

One of the virtues of philosophy is being able to discuss concepts and problems with other people from different backgrounds, identities, and perspectives in a respectful atmosphere. Sometimes arguments or ideas might be shocking, offensive, or unexpected. It is acceptable, and encouraged, to critique such ideas and point out flaws in such arguments. However, this should be done with respect for the personhood of others. I will not accept any form of harassment or discrimination in this classroom, including any attack on another's personhood, identity, or background. Though philosophy is a space

for open and free debate, it is only possible to do so when there is a recognition of the value and humanity of each person. Without this, there is no pathway for communication or discussion. Because of this, I expect that even contentious debates, which are common in philosophy, will be done with respect for the humanity of each person in the discussion.

I intend to hold myself to the same standards listed above for students. As I am limited and still bound by my identities, perspectives, and social position, there are times that I may fail in that goal. In those cases, I encourage feedback on how I can make the classroom experience more inclusive and accessible. In this spirit, if there is a name or pronouns that you wish me to use that differ from those found on your official records, please let me know and I will change how I refer to you. I encourage people at the beginning of class to let me and other students know if this is the case; however, I recognize that this is not always a comfortable or safe process and do not want to create a situation where students feel pressured to self-identify. Because of this, if you prefer to let me know privately, whether in person or through email, this is acceptable and encouraged.

I also recognize that, though I encourage everyone to engage with controversial and difficult topics when at all possible, there are cases where doing so could be harmful to one's mental health. If at any time you need to step out of the classroom temporarily for your mental well-being, please feel free to do so. I will not count you absent if this occurs, and it will not affect your grade. Likewise, if there is a reading or topic that you cannot engage with without significant damage to your mental health and therefore need to skip a particular class meeting, please let me know through email before the class period. You are not required to give me any details, just tell me that you need to take an absence for your mental health, and this will be counted as excused. As much as I believe in the importance of engaging with these topics, it is not worth severe damage to your mental health to do so and I support you taking care of yourself and your well-being first.

### **Technology Policy**

It is recommended that students have access to a computer that can display readings, play videos, and perform word processing. Laptops and tablets are allowed in the classroom, though they should only be used to take notes and access the readings. I reserve the right to change this policy if this limitation is not followed. Phones should be off or silent for the duration of the class and kept out of sight. If there is a pressing reason that one needs to be able to see their phone, such as a possible family emergency, please let me know before class. You are not required to give details, just let me know that you have an important reason to do so. Paper assignments should be submitted on Canvas in either a .doc (Word) or .pdf format. If there is a reason that these technology requirements will be inaccessible for you, please contact me so we can discuss.

### **Recording Policy**

I do not allow recordings of my lectures except where (a) the student has accommodations from the Academic Resource Center, or (b) I have given express permission to the student. If there is a reason that you need to record a lecture and you do not have an ARC accommodation that has been sent to me, please contact me so that we can discuss it.

### **Email Policy**

Please feel free to email me at any time at [abs181@georgetown.edu](mailto:abs181@georgetown.edu). I will try and respond within 24 hours, except in extenuating circumstances. If an email is urgent, please put this in the title of the email. I cannot promise that I will respond more quickly, but I will try and respond in as timely a manner as possible.

### **Cancellation Policy**

If class is cancelled, I will email the class as far in advance as I can. If the university campus is closed for any reason, then class will also be cancelled. In the case where I need to cancel class for any reason, I will send a follow-up email as soon as I am able, discussing any potential change to the

reading schedule. The due dates for assignments will not be changed except in extreme circumstances and, even in those cases, will never be moved earlier in the semester, only later.

### **Accommodation Policy**

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center either on campus or on their website at <https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/disability/>. If for any reason your disability or accommodation needs are not covered by the Academic Resource Center please contact me by email so that we can discuss. I will do my best to guarantee that my classroom is accessible to every student of regardless of disability. Please note that disabilities vary widely and include not only physical disabilities but also forms of mental illness and neurodivergence, such as autism and ADHD. If you are unsure if you require accommodations, please either contact the Academic Resource Center to discuss your options or email me so I can advise to the best of my ability.

### **Non-Discrimination Policy**

From the Faculty Handbook: “Georgetown University provides educational opportunities without regard to, and does not discriminate on the basis of, age, color, disability, family responsibilities, familial status, gender identity or expression, marital status, national origin, personal appearance, political affiliation, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, source of income or any other factor prohibited by law in its educational programs and activities. Inquiries regarding Georgetown University’s non-discrimination policy may be addressed to Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action, 37th and O Sts., N.W., Suite M36, Darnall Hall, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057.”

### **Plagiarism & Academic Misconduct Policy**

Students are required to abide by the Georgetown University Honor System, which regulates cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic misconduct. Among other requirements, this means that the student must cite all utilized resources, refrain from unauthorized collaboration on assignments, submitting work that has already been submitted for another class, or paying for or selling notes or assignments. For more information on the Georgetown Honor System please refer to <https://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/system/policies/>. If you are unsure if something will count as academic misconduct, please contact me and we can discuss.

### **Citation Policy**

Any resources that you utilize or refer to in an assignment (including text, audio, and video) must be cited. I do not require any specific citation style; however, I do suggest getting acquainted with one of the major citation styles depending on your education and career goals. These include MLA, APA, and Chicago. There is no universally recognized citation style for philosophy. If you need information or guidance on any of these styles, please contact me or the Writing Center. My general requirement for citation is that all assignments should include either in-text citations, footnotes, or endnotes, and every assignment should include a bibliography. Both forms of citation should include at minimum the name of the author, the title of the work, the year in which the work was published, and (if available) the publisher and city/state of publication. In-text citations, footnotes, or endnotes should also include the page number(s) that you are citing from. If you reference a journal article or book chapter in your bibliography, please include the page numbers for that article or chapter as well.

### **Sexual Misconduct Policy**

SCS Statement: “Georgetown University and its faculty and staff are committed to supporting survivors and those impacted by sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and stalking. Georgetown requires faculty members, unless otherwise designated as confidential, to report all disclosures of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator or a Deputy Title IX Coordinator. If you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a

professor or staff member in or outside of the classroom (with the exception of disclosures in papers), that faculty or staff member must report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. The coordinator will, in turn, reach out to the student to provide support, resources, and the option to meet. Please note that the student is not required to meet with the Title IX coordinator and no action will be taken without the student's awareness. More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website:

<https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/resourcecenter>.

If you would prefer to speak to someone confidentially, Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources that can provide support and assistance. These resources include:

- Health Education Services: Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: [sarp@georgetown.edu](mailto:sarp@georgetown.edu)
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 202.687.6985

Additional resources are included below:

- Georgetown Self-Care Resource Guide: <https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/health-promotion/self-care/>
- Georgetown Wellness Wheel: <https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/hoya-wellness-wheel/>
- Georgetown Guide to Recognizing Students in Distress: <https://studentaffairs.georgetown.edu/studentoutreach/facultystaffresources/>

### **Pregnancy Modifications & Adjustments**

SCS Statement: “Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant students. At any point throughout their pregnancy students may request adjustments/modifications based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication or medical need. Students may also request accommodations following labor and delivery based on a complication or medical need.”

To request pregnancy modifications, please complete the [SCS Pregnancy Modification Request Form](https://forms.gle/ZBfASxui7u13A8TU6): <https://forms.gle/ZBfASxui7u13A8TU6>

More information about pregnancy modifications can be found on the Title IX Georgetown University Website: <https://titleix.georgetown.edu/title-ix-pregnancy/student-pregnancy/>

### **Campus Resources**

- Academic Resource Center: <https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/>
- Addiction Resources: <https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/health-promotion/services-3/alcohol-drugs/>
- Bridge Housing: <https://studentaffairs.georgetown.edu/bridge-housing/>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: <https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/mental-health/>
- Georgetown Emergency Medical Response Services (GERMS): <https://georgetownems.georgetown.edu/>
- Hoya Hub Food Pantry: <https://studentaffairs.georgetown.edu/foodpantry/>
- Institutional Diversity, Equity, & Affirmative Action Office: <https://ideaa.georgetown.edu/>
- How to File a Discrimination Complaint with IDEAA: <https://ideaa.georgetown.edu/ada/file-complaint/>
- How to Report a Bias-Related Incident: <https://biasreporting.georgetown.edu/>
- Library Resources: <https://library.georgetown.edu/undergrads>
- Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Resource Center: <https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/get-help/resourcecenter/>
  - Confidential Email for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: [sarp@georgetown.edu](mailto:sarp@georgetown.edu)



- SARP Resources on Getting Help: <https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/get-help/>
- Sexual Health and Pregnancy Resources: <https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/sexual-health-pregnancy/>
- Student Health Services: <https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/medical-care/>
- University Information Services: <https://uis.georgetown.edu/>
- Writing Center: <https://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>