PHIL 204: Ethics
King 235, Tu/Th 11:10-12:25

Professor Amy Berg
Email: aberg@oberlin.edu
Office: King 120A
Office Hours: Mondays 3:00-5:00 on Zoom (or by appointment)
Course Prerequisite: One previous philosophy course (or instructor consent)
Mode of Instruction: Remote-accessible
Zoom for class: https://oberlin.zoom.us/j/97481442690 (passcode: ethics)
Zoom for office hours: https://oberlin.zoom.us/j/98405962243 (passcode: office)

What this course is about
Most of us have ideas about the answers to big moral questions—whether we should give money to charity, when it's okay to have children, why cheating is wrong. But how do we know whether our answers to those moral questions are right? To solve this problem, philosophers have defended different ethical theories, ways we can systematically get the right answer to not just one but all our questions about morality.

In this course, we'll discuss three very influential ethical theories: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. We'll talk about the arguments philosophers have made in favor of those theories, we'll apply those theories to real-life issues, and we'll assess criticisms of those theories. We'll put each theory to the test in our own lives, trying them out and seeing whether they give us the right answers. We'll conclude by asking whether those theories can really tell us what to do—what happens when being a good person conflicts with living a fulfilling life? Moral questions are complicated, and we won't solve them all—but by the end of the course, you'll be armed with the skills you need in order to decide how you ought to live your life.

By the end of this course, you will be able to
- Explain how each ethical theory we study determines the right thing to do
- Assess the arguments for and against each theory
- Compare the strengths and weaknesses of each theory
- Apply each theory to real-life situations
- Argue, in discussion and in writing, for the theory you think is the closest to getting the right answers
- Use that theory to make moral decisions in your own life

Course policies
What you'll need to have
- You'll need to have the readings. Complete each day's assigned reading before coming to class, and bring your copy of the reading with you to class (on your laptop or as a hard copy). We will be using one book and some other readings:
  - The book is *Introducing Ethics* (eds. Justin McBrayer and Peter Markie, Oxford University Press 2014, ISBN 978-0-19-979378-5). The book is available to rent or buy at the Bookstore and elsewhere. **There are many books with similar titles—please make sure you get the right one!**
  - The rest of the readings you will need are available on Blackboard, in the Readings tab.

- If you are having difficulty getting your own copy of the book (for any reason, including cost), please let me know as soon as possible, so I can make sure you have the resources you need to be successful in this class.
- Bring your laptop or tablet to class every day—you'll need it so that we can do socially distanced activities.
- You will also need access to Blackboard:
  - It's where I will post the most current version of the syllabus.
  - It's also where you can find links to the materials we will be using in class—handouts, assignment instructions, Box and/or Google Docs for collaborative work, Zoom for remote learning and office hours, and so on.
  - I encourage you to send me videos, articles, and anything else you come across that's relevant to our course, and I may post them to Blackboard so other students can see them too.
  - You'll use Blackboard too—it's where you'll turn in your written work for this course, and it's where I'll post feedback on that work.

What you'll need to do
Assignments and assessment
Throughout this course, you will be putting the moral theories we are studying into practice, by spending a week living by each theory. In doing so, you'll reach a better understanding of the reasons in favor of and against each theory. By the end of the course, you'll be able to explain which theory you've come to think gets closest to getting it right. The assignments you'll be completing this semester are designed to help you complete this project. There are seven assignments, and (except in very rare circumstances) you must complete all of them in order to pass the course.

- **Guidebooks:** The readings for this course examine many facets of each ethical theory: what the theory says about right and wrong, why it says this, how it applies to real-life situations, and what criticisms it faces. As you prepare to live by each theory, you will need to keep these lessons from the readings in mind. These assignments, which you will complete partly in class and partly out of class, will ask you to use the readings and your notes from our discussions to create the guidebook (2-3 pages long) you'll need as you live by each theory. These guidebooks are due on Blackboard by 5 pm on September 25, October 23, and November 20.
- **Reflections:** During and after the week you're living by each theory, you will record, in 3-4 pages per assignment, what happened: what decisions you made and how you made those decisions. You will also analyze your decision-making: do you think that these decisions were the right ones? Why or why not? These reflections are due on Blackboard by the start of class on October 6, November 3, and December 1.
- **Final project:** Drawing on the readings, our discussions, and your guidebooks and reflections, your final project asks you to render a verdict. Which moral theory do you think is the closest to being correct, and why? How do you expect that this theory will guide your future decision-making? You'll include excerpts of your previous work, compare and contrast the experiences you had, and analyze the arguments we've studied to support your conclusion. This project is due on Blackboard by 11 am on December 13.
- All assignments will be graded anonymously; you should put your T number, *not* your name, on them. Submit all assignments via Blackboard. Before you submit any assignments, you must sign the Honor Pledge and upload it to Blackboard.
- As you have seen, the assignments for this course build on each other: the reflections require you to use your guidebooks, and the final project requires you to include excerpts from your other written work. For that reason, **it is critically important that you keep all notes and assignments until you turn in your final project.**

- **Extension policy for written work:** It is also critically important that you turn in your assignments on time, since you will need to have completed some assignments in order to complete others. Assignments must be turned in at the time and date they are due. I am happy to consider requests for extensions if you ask me before the assignment is due. If you turn in an assignment late, and you have not made prior arrangements with me, I will deduct three percent of your grade on an assignment if that assignment is turned in late on the day it's due and three percent for each day after that (so, for example, an assignment that would have gotten 100% if it were turned in on time on Tuesday would get 91% if turned in on Thursday).
- In this course, **your writing is a public act.** I will occasionally use anonymized and (sometimes) edited versions of your work in class and in future courses in order to generate discussion, share viewpoints, ask questions, and so on.

Participation
Philosophy is a collaborative, discussion-based discipline. Your writing and thinking will benefit from considering others' views, reactions to readings, and experiences living by these theories. And your classmates and I will benefit from hearing your take.
- I want you to come to class and participate, but it's more important for you to stay safe and healthy. **Do not come to class if you feel even a little bit sick!** If you feel up to it, you may participate via Zoom. I will take attendance every day, for my records and to help me assess your learning in this course. Please communicate with me if you will need to miss class; if you miss several classes in a row, I may follow up with you.
- To show respect for your peers and for me, as well as to maintain social distance, avoid coming late to class, leaving the room during class, or leaving early.
- In order to receive the highest participation grade you can, come ready to make active, serious, charitable contributions to class discussion. To make sure our discussion is productive and includes a wide variety of voices, I may sometimes call on students at random. If you have to miss class and cannot join via Zoom, I will count active, serious, charitable visits to my office hours toward your participation grade. To help guide your participation, I will give you an assessment at midsemester (separate from your midterm grade) of how you've done so far. When I grade participation, here's what I'm looking for:
  - *A range:* Your comments demonstrate that you've done the reading, you actively and positively participate in all group activities, you ask questions or offer comments at least every other class session, you listen to and respond to others, and/or you come to office hours at least a couple of times. You are never a distraction.
  - *B range:* Your comments demonstrate that you've usually done the reading, you participate in most group activities, you ask questions or offer comments sporadically, and/or you generally listen and respond to others. You are never a distraction.
  - *C range:* Your comments demonstrate a lack of familiarity with the reading, you do not participate very actively in class (or else are a distraction), you talk over others, and/or you never come to office hours.
  - *D or F range:* You either do not participate or are an active distraction in class, and you never come to office hours or communicate with me via email.
- Because philosophy is done best when it's done collaboratively, my goal is to create a space where productive conversations can happen. Research on classrooms and workplaces consistently supports the conclusion that, for most people, technology is a barrier to these productive conversations. (Ask me if you're curious about this research!) For that reason, **laptops and tablets are allowed only for the purposes of referring to the reading and completing course activities,** such as group work and in-class assignments. Phones are never allowed in class. **If you need an electronic device at other times in order to be**

successful in this course (because of a disability, a life situation, or something else), please speak with me as soon as possible.

COVID-19 policies

- Stay healthy and keep others healthy! Follow the ObieSafe requirements at all times, inside and outside our classroom. **Do not come to class if you feel even a little bit sick**.
- Masks are required at all times in the classroom.
- This class is **remote-accessible,** which means that some people will be attending on Zoom. If you are coming to class via Zoom, you can find a link to the Zoom room at the top of this syllabus and on our Blackboard site. When we are doing group work, you'll be assigned to participate with other classmates (who may be on Zoom or who may be in the classroom) using Box and/or Google Docs. When we are engaged in discussion as a whole class, participate by raising your hand in Zoom. Please keep your camera turned on whenever possible.
- I will record our sessions on Zoom and make them available to members of this class on request; if you have concerns about this, please contact me as soon as possible.
- When you enter the room, please move to the seat farthest from the door. Before you do anything else, please sanitize your desk. At the beginning of each day, I will take a photo of the class for contact-tracing purposes; I will not post or share this photo. Please help me remember to take this photo!
- If you have to miss class for illness, I'll work with you to figure out what's best on a case-by-case basis. This may include joining our class meetings via Zoom, receiving extensions on your assignments, or even being excused from some assignments altogether.
- Philosophy is done best when it's done collaboratively; however, to keep each other safe, we will not be able to do normal group work this semester. We will sometimes do socially distanced group work using Blackboard, Box, and/or Google Docs. **Please bring a laptop or tablet with you to class each day**, so that you can participate in group activities and access the readings. It's your responsibility to only use your laptop for tasks directly related to our course.
- We will work as a class to figure out the best format (synchronous, asynchronous, etc.) for when we move to remote instruction (at Thanksgiving, unless conditions change).
- Some material and images in this course may be considered sensitive or interpreted as illegal outside of the United States (US). These materials are being presented and distributed for purposes of educational use in the US. They do not represent the views of Oberlin College and Conservatory. Materials in this course, including but not limited to PDFs and images of any kind, may not be downloaded, displayed, distributed, reproduced, published, transmitted, or broadcast (including and especially via any social media) outside of the educational framework of this course, without prior written permission of the faculty member. Class lectures and discussions may not be recorded or reproduced in any way (including screenshots), unless necessary to comply with approved accommodations.

Here's how the work in this course contributes to your final grade:

- **Guidebooks:** 5% per guidebook; 15% overall
- **Reflections:** 10% per reflection; 30% overall
- **Final project:** 40%
- **Participation:** 15%

The grade scale is:

	A: 93-100%	A-: 90-92%
B+: 87-89%	B: 83-86%	B-: 80-82%
C+: 77-79%	C: 73-76%	C-: 70-72%
D+: 67-69%	D: 60-63%	D-: 60-62%
F: below 60%		

What I'll need to do
My responsibilities in this course include:
- Making sure our discussions are productive. If at any point you're not feeling that our discussions are respectful and charitable, please come talk to me.
- Grading your work quickly and fairly. I will return all graded work no later than two weeks from the day you turn it in.
- Communicating with you over email.
    - My responsibility is to email you whenever there are time-sensitive announcements about this course; your responsibility is to check your Oberlin email (including your spam folder) every day.
    - I use Blackboard when I need to send announcements to the entire class. Replies to emails I send through Blackboard do not go to me, and I have no way to see them. **If you need to contact me over email, please make sure you're emailing my email address, aberg@oberlin.edu.**
    - Our emails to each other in this course are professional documents, and it is my and your responsibility to write them professionally. For tips on how to write a professional email, check the email rubric posted to Blackboard. I will respond to your email no later than 5 pm on the next business day; in the rare case I do not, please feel free to follow up with me after that.

Some ways to succeed in this course
- I am committed to making sure that you can succeed in this course, regardless of whether you have a disability (visible or invisible). If you have a disability that may impact your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see me and Disability Resources at the Center for Academic Success so that we may arrange appropriate accommodations. If you have questions, or if you need an accommodation of another type (athletic, religious, etc.), please let me know as soon as possible.
- **Every student is expected to adhere to the honor code.** This means in very general terms that you only submit work that is yours. More specifically, it means that you will not plagiarize; that is, you will not appropriate the work or ideas of someone else—whether written or not—without acknowledgement, using the conventionally agreed-on scholarly practices for quoting and citation, and that you will not cheat, fabricate, collaborate on a project that is meant to be done individually, or submit the same work for multiple classes or assignments without the prior approval of all instructors involved. While you are allowed and encouraged to ask advice and help from the instructor, librarians, or official writing tutors, you are, in the end, to submit work produced by you. Some assignments may be collaborative in nature; those will be clearly identified as such. Everyone in the campus community is required to report all suspected violations of the honor code to the student honors committee. Following college-wide policy, you will sign a statement at the beginning of the semester to certify that you will adhere to the honor code. For more information, see the Academic Integrity section of the Dean of Students website (https://www.oberlin.edu/dean-of-students/student-conduct/academic-integrity).

- I encourage you to use the Writing Center (https://www.oberlin.edu/arts-and-sciences/resources-and-support/wap; appointments available at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dGrwegnHC1Q0dkfxF228cdBB6zOviTLtjuOn91OlURA/edit) as you work on your assignments in this course.
- You are welcome and encouraged to come to my office hours or make an appointment with me whenever you want to talk about the course material, your assignments, or any other philosophy-related concerns you have.

Schedule of readings and assignments

Readings ***with asterisks around their names*** are on Blackboard; all other readings are in *Introducing Ethics.* This schedule is provisional, and you are responsible for learning about any changes we make to it; you can always find the most current syllabus on Blackboard.

REMOTE Tuesday, September 1: What are we doing in this course?
> **Reading:** None
REMOTE Thursday, September 3: What is consequentialism?
> **Reading:** McBrayer and Markie, "Introduction" (p. 192) AND Mill, "Utilitarianism"

Tuesday, September 8: What is consequentialism?
> **Reading:** Nielsen, "Against Moral Conservatism"
Thursday, September 10: How do consequentialists make moral decisions?
> **Reading:** Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Tuesday, September 15: How do consequentialists make moral decisions?
> **Reading: *****Rulli, "Preferring a Genetically-Related Child"***
Thursday, September 17 : How has consequentialism changed over time?
> **Reading:** ***Hooker, "Rule Consequentialism"***
> **Consequentialism guidebook and reflection assignments distributed in class**

Tuesday, September 22: What are some criticisms of consequentialism?
> **Reading:** ***Badhwar, "Why It Is Wrong to Be Always Guided by the Best: Consequentialism and Friendship"***
Thursday, September 24: What is it like to live as a consequentialist?
> **Reading:** None (bring the readings and your guidebook draft to class)
Friday, September 25: Consequentialism guidebook due by 5 pm

LIVE AS A CONSEQUENTIALIST WEEK
Tuesday, September 29: What is it like to live as a consequentialist?
> **Reading:** None (bring the readings and your guidebook to class)
Thursday, October 1: What is deontology?
> **Reading:** McBrayer and Markie, "Introduction" (p. 239) AND Kant, "The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals"

Tuesday, October 6: What is deontology?
> **Reading:** ***O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics"***
> **Consequentialism reflection due by the start of class**
Thursday, October 8: How do deontologists make moral decisions?
> **Reading:** ***Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil"***

Tuesday, October 13: How do deontologists make moral decisions?
> **Reading:** ***Mills, "Kant's Untermenschen"***

Thursday, October 15: How has deontology changed over time?
     Reading: Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right"
     Deontology guidebook and reflection assignments distributed in class

Tuesday, October 20: What are some criticisms of deontology?
     Reading: ***Langton, "Duty and Desolation"***
Thursday, October 22: What is it like to live as a deontologist?
     Reading: None (bring the readings and your guidebook draft to class)
Friday, October 23: Deontology guidebook due by 5 pm

LIVE AS A DEONTOLOGIST WEEK
Tuesday, October 27: What is it like to live as a deontologist?
     Reading: None (bring the readings and your guidebook to class)
Thursday, October 29: What is virtue ethics?
     Reading: McBrayer and Markie, "Introduction" (p. 306) AND Aristotle, "Virtue"

Tuesday, November 3: What is virtue ethics?
     Reading: Hursthouse, "Aristotle on Virtue"
     Deontology reflection due by the start of class
Thursday, November 5: How do virtue ethicists make moral decisions?
     Reading: ***Hursthouse, Virtue Theory and Abortion"***

Tuesday, November 10: How do virtue ethicists make moral decisions?
     Reading: ***Halwani, "Virtue Ethics and Adultery"***
Thursday, November 12: How has virtue ethics changed over time?
     Reading: Held, "The Ethics of Care as Moral Theory"
     Virtue ethics guidebook and reflection assignments distributed in class

Tuesday, November 17: What are some criticisms of virtue ethics?
     Reading: ***Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error"***
Thursday, November 19: What is it like to live as a virtue ethicist?
     Reading: None (bring the readings and your guidebook draft to class)
Friday, November 20: Virtue ethics guidebook due

LIVE AS A VIRTUE ETHICIST WEEK
Tuesday, November 24: What is it like to live as a virtue ethicist?
     Reading: None (bring the readings and your guidebook to class)
     Final project instructions distributed in class
Thursday, November 26: THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS

REMOTE Tuesday, December 1: Is it bad to be too moral?
     Reading: Wolf, "Moral Saints"
     Virtue ethics reflection due
REMOTE Thursday, December 3: Are we wrong about what morality is?
     Reading: Nietzsche, "Master and Slave Moralities"

Sunday, December 13: Final project due by 11 am