

PHIL 2306 Introduction to Ethics

Spring 2025 | MW 8:35 – 9:50 | Synchronous Online



Instructor Information

Name: Dr. Kenneth Noe

Email: kenneth.noe@sulross.edu (contact me here, not Blackboard)

Office Hours: via Zoom appointment (email me to schedule)

Required Course Textbook

Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 8th edition (McGraw Hill, 2014)

All other readings will be uploaded as PDF files under the “Readings” link in each week’s module.

Course Description

This course is a systematic analysis and evaluation of classical and/or contemporary ethical theories concerning the good life, social conduct, morals, and standards of value. Students will engage seminal theories of morality and human nature, such as virtue ethics, the ethics of duty (“deontological ethics”), utilitarianism, care ethics, relativism, egoism, and social contract theory. We will also analyze particular case studies as exemplars of moral deliberation and the urgency of ethical clarity. Throughout the course, we will examine beliefs about human nature, common assumptions about moral values, and the relevance of historical context as they pertain to moral and ethical reasoning.

Course Learning Objectives

The aim of this course is for the student to cultivate mental habits of philosophical attention and critical reflection on everyday life. We will develop the following skills in service of that end.

Critical Reading. We will not just be reading but reading *well*. Reading well requires that one dig deeper than the surface-level meaning of a text or philosophical argument and achieve an understanding of its significance. Reading well does NOT entail looking at sentences and sounding them off verbally or in your head. Reading well means *interrogating* what you are reading. Go back, re-read it (twice, three times), and piece together the text’s larger meaning. Once you have gathered an understanding of it, ask questions about it. Reading well involves a dialogue between the reader and the author.

Clear Writing. We will not just be writing but writing *well*. Writing well means clearly articulating what one thinks. Chances are good that if what you write isn’t clear, then your thoughts aren’t clear either. Clear writing displays clear thinking. This means that your writing should be, at minimum, grammatically correct, and, most importantly, be logically valid and persuasive. The goal isn’t to persuade me, but to write in a way that demonstrates that you’ve read and digested the readings thoroughly enough to say something intelligent about the topic.

Thoughtful and Informed Discussion. Students will engage in informed in-class discussion, evincing they have read and thought deeply about the assigned readings. Professional objectivity is the standard for good discussion. It is ideas, never persons, that are under philosophical interrogation.

Personal Enrichment and Inspiration through Philosophical Inquiry. Students will have the opportunity to participate in the uniquely human activity of developing a sense of philosophical attention to the world. Philosophy is not merely confined to the walls of the academy but can be practiced by all.

Attendance and Participation Policy

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken every day the course meets. Students must bring their assigned text to every class! Unexcused absences include only the following: (1) sickness with a doctors' note, (2) death in the family, or (3) an extraordinary event to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Grading

Final grades will be numerically calculated in the following way. Reading Quizzes and Reflection Questions will open the week of their due dates. I will drop the one lowest Reflection Question grade and the one lowest Quiz grade from the final grade. **Therefore, no late work of any kind will be accepted. No excuses. Don't ask.**

Online Reflection Questions (6 total, lowest 1 dropped)	40%
Online Reading Quizzes (6 total, lowest 1 dropped)	40%
Class attendance / participation / discussion	20%
TOTAL	100%

Reading Quizzes

Students will be assigned short reading quizzes consisting of multiple choice and short answer questions. To maximize success on these quizzes, students are encouraged to study the readings ahead of time and review the materials regularly. Material not covered in class will not appear on the quizzes. Rules against plagiarism apply equally to quizzes. As with the reflection questions, **the lowest quiz grade will be dropped.**

Reflection Questions Assignments

Periodically, students will be assigned short sets of Reflection Questions. These are questions designed to provoke your own philosophical thinking. Reflection Questions provide the opportunity for the student to demonstrate mastery of the ideas beyond the surface meaning of the readings. Similar to the quizzes, these assignments are online, but Reflection Question assignments dig deeper than quizzes, inviting the student to bring ideas together, reflect critically, and consider implications of the ideas. **I will drop the lowest reflection question grade.** So, if you miss a Reflection Question assignment DO NOT contact me trying to make it up. This policy is intended to create a buffer zone, so to speak, or a grade budget. Stay within this buffer zone/budget; I will not allow make-up work, nor will I allow late work to be turned in.

Note: Grammar, sentence structure, clarity, and other writing essentials count in your answers to the Reflection Questions. Do not take this lightly. Philosophical expression requires clear writing and you will be graded on how well you can *clearly* express these ideas in writing. If you struggle with your writing, I advise that you seek extra help with it immediately. It is an essential life skill and it is never too late to start getting it in shape. Take your writing seriously. Good writing skills will reward you for the rest of your life.

Academic Integrity

Students in this class are expected to demonstrate scholarly behavior and academic honesty in the use of intellectual property. Students should submit work that is their own and avoid the temptation to engage in behaviors that violate academic integrity, such as turning in work as original that was used in whole or part for another course and/or professor; turning in another person's work as one's own; copying from professional works or internet sites without citation; collaborating on a course assignment, examination, or quiz when collaboration is forbidden. Students should also avoid using open AI sources unless permission is expressly given for an assignment or course. Violations of academic integrity can result in failing assignments, failing a class, and/or more serious university consequences. These behaviors erode the value of college degrees and higher education overall.

Classroom Climate of Respect

Importantly, this class will foster free expression, critical investigation, and the open discussion of ideas. This means that all of us must help create and sustain an atmosphere of tolerance, civility, and respect for the viewpoints of others. Similarly, we must all learn how to probe, oppose and disagree without resorting of intimidation, harassment, or personal attack. No one is entitled to harass, belittle, or discriminate against another on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, national origin, or sexual preference. Still, we will not be silenced by the difficulty of fruitfully discussing politically sensitive issues.

ADA Statement

Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. Students seeking accessibility/accommodations services must contact Mrs. Mary Schwartz Grisham, LPC, SRSU's Accessibility Services Director at 432-837-8203 or email mschwartz@sulross.edu.

Counseling

Sul Ross has partnered with Timely Care where all SR students will have access to nine free counseling sessions. You can learn more about this 24/7/365 support by visiting [Timely care/SRSU](https://www.timelycare.com/). The SR Counseling and Accessibility Services office will continue to offer in-person counseling in Ferguson Hall room 112 (Alpine campus), and telehealth Zoom sessions for remote students and RG students.

Statement of Support

As your instructor, I will create a learning environment that supports various perspectives and experiences. I understand that the recent pandemic, economic disparity, health concerns, and unexpected life events may impact the conditions necessary for you to succeed. My commitment is to work with you and help you meet the learning objectives of this course. I do this to demonstrate my commitment to students and to the mission of Sul Ross State University to create a supportive environment and care for the whole student. Do all you can, and call on me when you need me.

Tentative Course Reading Schedule

Week 1 – Wednesday 1/15 – Topic: What Is Ethics?

Syllabus, course policy, assignments, etc.
Gammel, “Ethics and Morality” (PDF)

Week 2 – Monday 1/20 (MLK Holiday, No class) and Wednesday 1/22 – Topic: What Is Ethics?

Rachels, “What is Morality?” pp. 1-13

Week 3 – Monday 1/27 and Wednesday 1/29 – Topic: Cultural Relativism

Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism” pp. 15-32

Week 4 – Monday 2/3 and Wednesday 2/5 – Topic: Is Ethics “Subjective”?

Rachels, “Subjectivism in Ethics” pp. 33-48

Week 5 – Monday 2/10 and Wednesday 2/12 – Topic: Ethics and Religion

Plato, “Euthyphro” (PDF) and Rachels, “Does Morality Depend on Religion?” pp. 49-63

Week 6 – Monday 2/17 and Wednesday 2/19 – Topic: Egoism

Plato, “The Ring of Gyges” (PDF) and Rachels, “Egoism and Moral Skepticism” (PDF)

Week 7 – Monday 2/24 and Wednesday 2/26 – Topic: Morality as a Social Contract

Rachels, “Social Contract Theory” pp. 82-98

Week 8 – Monday 3/3 and Wednesday 3/5 – Topic: Utilitarianism (part 1)

Rachels, “The Utilitarian Approach” p. 99-110

Week 9 – Monday 3/10 and Wednesday 3/12 – Topic: Utilitarianism (part 2)

Rachels, “The Debate Over Utilitarianism” pp. 111-125

Week 10 – Monday 3/17 and Wednesday 3/19 – SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS

Week 11 – Monday 3/24 and Wednesday 3/26 – Topic: Duty-Based Ethics (part 1)

Rachels, “Are There Absolute Moral Rules?” pp. 127-136

Week 12 – Monday 3/31 and Wednesday 4/2 – Topic: Duty-Based Ethics (part 2)

Rachels, “Kant and Respect for Persons” pp. 137-146

Week 13 – Monday 4/7 and Wednesday 4/9 – Topic: Virtue Ethics

Rachels, “Virtue Ethics” pp. 159-174

Week 14 – Monday 4/13 and Wednesday 4/15 – Topic: Care Ethics and Feminist Philosophy

Rachels, “Feminism and the Ethics of Care” pp.157-158

Week 15 – Monday 4/21 and Wednesday 4/23 – Topic: Care Ethics and Feminist Philosophy

Gilligan, “Moral Orientation and Moral Development” (PDF) and Noddings, “An Ethic of Caring”

Week 16 – Monday 4/28 and Wednesday 4/30 – Topic: TBA

Finals: 5/2, 5/5-7