

PHI 192: INTRO TO MORAL THEORY

SPRING 2026

INSTRUCTOR:	Minseok Kim (“M”)	TIME & PLACE:	TuTh 09:30–10:50 Lyman Hall 115A
EMAIL:	mkim66@syr.edu	OFFICE HOURS:	W 16:30–18:30 (Bird 443)

COURSE DESCRIPTION.

This course offers an introduction to prominent theories about moral rightness and wrongness—that is, theories that address what makes an action morally right or wrong—as well as related concepts such as virtue and vice. We will examine major approaches that remain influential today, including utilitarianism and Kantian ethics, and consider how these theories apply to specific moral issues such as free speech, abortion, risk & AI. Readings will be drawn from both historical and contemporary sources.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES.

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- (a) Use a basic philosophical toolkit for engaging in philosophical inquiry.
- (b) Explain, in their own words, the central theses of major moral theories.
- (c) Read, interpret, and critically engage with philosophical texts.
- (d) Apply critical thinking skills to current ethical issues.
- (e) Analyze and evaluate ongoing ethical debates, arguments, and ideas, including those frequently encountered in the media.
- (f) Debate as a respectful and open-minded interlocutor; clearly express their own opinions; raise constructive objections to opposing positions; and respond thoughtfully to objections.

COURSE MATERIALS.

- All the required readings are available through Blackboard under the heading ‘Content’.
- Lecture Slides & Handouts will be posted on Blackboard under the same heading.¹

¹You may download these materials for your use in this class. However, you may not provide these materials to other parties (e.g., websites, social media, other students) without permission. Doing so is a violation of intellectual property law and of the student code of conduct.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS.

- (a) Complete all assigned readings before each session.
 - Lectures proceed on the assumption that everyone has completed the assigned readings. Failing to do so will likely result in an incomplete understanding of the material discussed in class.
 - Evaluations will be based, in part, on your in-class and out-of-class participation. Not completing assigned readings will hinder your ability to participate and may result in a lower grade. See ASSESSMENT below.
- (b) Actively participate in class discussions and activities.
 - Ask and answer questions, express your own views, offer comments, and engage constructively in discussion, etc.

COURSE ASSESSMENT.

- (1) Attendance: 5%²
- (2) In-class Participation: 15%
 - A student earns one participation point for each meaningful contribution during class.
 - * Examples include asking or answering a question, offering a comment, expressing your own views, and so on.
 - * Any remark that fosters meaningful discussion is eligible for a point.
 - Earning a total of **30 participation points** by the end of the semester grants full credit.³
 - Students may earn up to 3 points per class.
- (3) Out-of-class Participation (Reading Responses): 10%
 - For each week with assigned readings, you will submit a reading response.⁴
 - A reading response can be a question, an objection, or a comment about the content of the assigned reading.
 - * About 100 words.
 - * Submit your reading response on Blackboard by **Saturday night** prior to the class session in which the assigned reading is discussed.
 - * Grading Rubric
 - (a) 1 point (full credit): the reading response shows careful engagement with the assigned reading and is not slipshod.
 - (b) 0.5 points: the reading response is slipshod or does not show careful engagement with the assigned reading.
 - (c) 2 points: the reading response is exceptional.

²Absences due to religious observance or health-related issues will be excused upon receipt of [an email from the Barnes Center](#).

³If you exceed 30 points, you may earn extra credit toward your overall grade.

⁴When more than one readings are assigned for a week, one reading response for one reading is enough.

- (4) In-class Quizzes: 15%
- Quizzes will be given most weeks, covering material discussed in the previous week.
 - Mostly multiple-choice questions with at most one short-answer question.
 - Bring a **laptop**—quizzes will be taken online in Blackboard during class.⁵
- (5) Two Exams: 40%
- First Exam: 20% (Mar.5, Week 8; covering material before Week 8)
 - Second Exam: 20% (Apr.23, Week 15; covering material from Week 8 to Week 15)
 - Mostly short-answer questions, with some multiple-choice questions.
 - Bring a **laptop**—exams will be taken online in Blackboard during class.⁶
- (6) Group Presentation (10-15 mins): 15%
- Each student will be randomly assigned to a group of 3-4 members.
 - Tasks are as follows:
 - (a) Watch a movie summary video (designated by the instructor; it will be shown in class on Mar.17)⁷
 - (b) Each group should select a single question from the set of moral questions provided by the instructor.
 - (c) (i) Explain how Utilitarians and Deontologists would answer the question and briefly evaluate their answers. (ii) Provide your group's own answer and a brief justification.
 - (d) Submit presentation slides before the week of your presentation (Week 14).
 - The video will be shown in class on Mar.17. After viewing, groups will have time to prepare for the assignment.
 - Week 14 (Apr.14 & Apr.16) will be devoted to presentations. Each presentation should be within 10-15 minutes, followed by a Q&A session.
 - The presentation will be graded based on how well the task (c) is carried out.

COURSE POLICIES.

- (a) Deadlines/Absences Policy: Absences for quizzes and exams are justified only if they meet the criteria described in [footnote 2](#) of this document. In the case of justified absences, make-up quizzes and exams will be offered on a different date. If you miss a quiz or an exam without prior notice and later request a make-up, your score cannot be higher than the lowest score earned by any student who took the regular quiz or exam. For example, if the lowest score on a regular exam is 10/20, then even if you answer every question correctly, your score will be recorded as 9.99/20.
- (b) Office Hours: Wednesday 16:30–18:30 in Bird Library Room 443. You must book office hours in advance by email.

⁵Laptop rental is available at Carnegie Library. See [here](#). If you anticipate any difficulty using a laptop during quizzes, please let me know in advance so that we can arrange an alternative format.

⁶See footnote 5 for laptop rental.

⁷[Movie 1](#) & [Movie 2](#).

- (c) Email Policy: I will reply to your emails within 24 hours on weekdays.
- (d) Academic Integrity: Cheating is prohibited. It's unfair to your instructors and fellow students. Any established academic integrity violation may result in course failure, regardless of the severity of the violation. For details on SU's academic integrity expectations and policies, visit: [Academic Integrity Policy](#). All work submitted for reading responses, quizzes, and exams must be your own. Communicating with anyone about quiz or exam questions during the quiz or exam period violates academic integrity expectations. Discussion with your peers to improve your reading responses is allowed; however, if two reading responses from different students are substantially similar, this may be considered a violation of academic integrity.
- (e) AI Policy: All generative-AI tools are prohibited in this course because their use inhibits achievement of the course learning objectives. This policy applies to all stages of project and writing processes including researching, brainstorming, outlining, organizing, and polishing. Do not use Generative-AI tools to create any content (i.e., images and video, audio, text, code, etc.). If you have any questions about a feature and whether it is considered Generative-AI, ask your instructor.
- (f) Religious Observances: If you need to miss a class or deadline for a religious observance, you will be entitled to make-up opportunities, provided you give notice no later than the end of the second week of class. Notice must be submitted through MySlice. You can find the relevant information [here](#).
- (g) Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion and is committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or full participation. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process. If you would like to discuss disability accommodations or register with CDR, please visit the Center for Disability Resources, call (315) 443-4498, or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.
- (h) Health: Mental health and overall well-being have a significant impact on academic success. It is important to develop skills and access resources to effectively navigate stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. I encourage you to explore the range of services offered by the [Barnes Center](#) and to seek support as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7 year-round at 315.443.8000. Additional resources, including wellness education workshops, are available through the [Wellness Leadership Institute](#).

LETTER GRADE.

A	93–100	C ⁺	77–79.99
A [–]	90–92.99	C	73–76.99
B ⁺	87–89.99	C [–]	70–72.99
B	83–86.99	D ⁺	67–69.99
B [–]	80–82.99	D	63–66.99
		D [–]	60–62.99
		F	0–59.99

SCHEDULE

Unit I «Philosophical Toolkit» (no reading)

WEEK 1: Philosophy and Definition

- Jan.13 Class Introduction & Philosophy
- Jan.15 Definitions

WEEK 2: Philosophy, Argument, and Thought Experiments

- Jan.20 *Quiz #1* Argument and Validity
- Jan.22 Argument and Soundness & Thought Experiments

Unit II «Objectivism vs. Subjectivism»

WEEK 3: Ethical Relativism

- Jan.27 Russ Shafer-Landau, “Ethical Relativism”
- Jan.29 Cont’ Russ Shafer-Landau, “Ethical Relativism”

WEEK 4: Subjectivism vs Objectivism

- Feb.3 Subjectivism vs. Objectivism & Russ Shafer-Landau “Eleven Arguments Against Moral Objectivity” (part 1).
- Feb.5 Cont’ on Russ Shafer-Landau “Eleven Arguments Against Moral Objectivity” (part 2).

WEEK 5: Objectivism

- Feb.10 *Quiz #3* & Objectivism & David Enoch “Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are,Too)”.
- Feb.12 Cont’ on David Enoch “Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics”.

Unit III «Utilitarianism»

WEEK 6: Utilitarianism

- Feb.17 *Quiz #4* John Stuart Mill, “What Utilitarianism Is” (around 6 pages).
- Feb.19 Russ Shafer-Landau, “Consequentialism and its Attractions” (pp. 30).

WEEK 7: Utilitarianism

- Feb.24 **Quiz #5** & Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (15 pp.).
- Feb.26 (i) Robert Nozick, “Experience Machine” (pp. 6), & (ii) Ursula K LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” (pp. 5).

Unit IV «Deontology»

WEEK 8: Deontology & First Exam

- Mar.3 **Quiz #6** & Russ Shafer-Landau, “The Kantian Perspective” (Ch.11) & a Review Session (Bring Some Questions!)
- Mar.5 First Exam

WEEK 9: Spring Break: No Class

- Mar.10 No Class
- Mar.12 No Class

WEEK 10: Deontology & Group Assignment Preparation

- Mar.17 **Watching movies for Group Presentation & Group Presentation Prep**
- Mar.19 Russ Shafer-Landau, “The Kantian Perspective” (Ch.12).

Unit IV «Applications»

WEEK 11: Free Speech

- Mar.24 **Quiz #7** & Michael Huemer, “The Scope of the Freedom of Speech” (pp. 18)
- Mar.26 Cont. Michael Huemer, “The Scope of the Freedom of Speech” (pp. 18).

WEEK 12: Abortion

- Mar.31 **Quiz #8** & David Boonin, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 from “Why Abortion Should be Legal—Even if the Fetus is a Person” (pp. 17).
- Apr.2 Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral” (pp. 11).

WEEK 13: Risk & AI

- Apr.7 **Quiz #9** & Hilary Greaves, William MacAskill, and Elliott Thornley, “The Moral Case for Long-Term Thinking” (pp. 9).
- Apr.9 Bales, D’Alessandro, & Kirk-Giannini, “Artificial Intelligence: Arguments for Catastrophic Risk” (pp. 13).

WEEK 14: Group Presentation

- Apr.14 Groups 1,2,3,4
- Apr.16 Groups 5,6,7,8

WEEK 15: Second Exam

- Apr.21 A Review Session (Bring Some Questions!)
- Apr.23 Second Exam