

# Introduction to Ethics

Summer 2021  
Second Main Session (July 6 – August 7)  
M–Th 10:45am –12:45pm

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Office hours: TR 1:15pm-2:15pm or by appt

## Course Description

Apologies reflect that it is important that harms are addressed. You will inevitably harm others and experience harm yourself. But what exactly do apologies do? What does it mean to be responsible for harming another person? Some harms are not the result of personal wrongdoing. What do we do about harms that no individual person is responsible for? In this course we will grapple with these questions. In order to answer these practical questions, we must examine more abstract ones: What is morality? How do we have moral knowledge? Isn't it all just subjective anyway? We will focus on (1) reasoning critically about ethical situations and ethical disagreement and (2) making our reasoning actionable.

## Required Texts

All texts will be available online

## Requirements

1. 4 Short reflection papers (no more than 1000 words)
2. 1 Argument summary (no more than 1000 words)
3. 1 Written Exam

## *Grade Breakdown*

Weekly reflection papers 40 %  
Argument summary 10%  
Final exam (take home) 30 %  
Participation 20 %

## (Tentative) Reading Schedule

### What is morality? Why should I be moral?

*7/6 Tuesday*

Topic: Introduction to the course; What is morality?

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Reading: Shafer-Landau, chps. 1-2 of *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?*  
Select Bioethics and Ethics bowl cases

*7/7 Wednesday*

Topic: What is morality? (cont.); Meta-ethics

Reading: Hobbes, excerpts from *Leviathan*; Aristotle, book II of *The Republic*

*7/8 Thursday*

Topic: Why should I be moral?

Reading: Dodds, "Dependence, care and vulnerability"

Reflection Papers due Friday 7/9 by 11:59pm

### ***Agency, Wrongdoing, and Responsibility***

*7/12 Monday*

Topic: Agency

Reading: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, entry on Agency; Dennett, Conditions of Personhood

*7/13 Tuesday*

Topic: Free will

Readings: Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of the Person"; Nozick, "The Experience Machine"

*7/14 Wednesday*

Topic: Personal wrongdoing and responsibility

Reading: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, entry on Responsibility; Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"

*7/15 Thursday*

Topic: Holding ourselves and others to account

Reading: Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"

Reflection Paper due Friday 7/16 by 11:59pm

### ***Ethical Knowledge***

*7/19 Monday*

Topic: Uncertainty

Reading: Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?"; Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theory"

*7/20 Tuesday*

Topic: Testimonial Injustice

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Reading: Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing"

7/21 *Wednesday*

Topic: Epistemic humility

Reading: Ballantyne, "Debunking Biased Thinkers"

7/22 *Thursday*

Topic: Skepticism

Reading: Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values"

Argument Summary due Friday 7/23 by 11:59pm

### Political Philosophy

7/26 *Monday*

Topic: The state

Reading: Wolff, *In Defense Anarchism*

7/27 *Tuesday*

Topic: Ethics, the law, and rights

Reading: Arendt, excerpt from "Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man" from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and Hobbes, excerpts from *Leviathan*

7/28 *Wednesday*

Topic: Universalism

Reading: Khader, Introduction and chapter 1 of *Decolonizing Universalism*

7/29 *Thursday*

Topic: Systemic injustice

Reading: Young, "The Five Faces of Oppression"

Reflection Paper due Friday 7/30 by 11:59pm

### Apology and Reconciliation

8/2 *Monday*

Topic: Anger

Reading: hooks, "Killing Rage"; Srinivasan, "Aptness of Anger"

8/3 *Tuesday*

Topic: Apology

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Reading: MacLachlan, “Public Apology”, Watson, “Did You Apologize?”

*8/4 Wednesday*

Topic: Reparations

Reading: Taiwo, “Reconsidering Reparations”

*8/5 Thursday*

Topic: Is it ever too late?

Reading: Norlock, “Imaginary relations with the dead”

Reflection Paper due Friday 8/6 by 11:59pm

## OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THIS CLASS

### **Policies and accommodations:**

- I do not deduct marks for late work. If you need an extension, you need to ask me 48 hours in advance. I will be generous with pre-arranged extensions, but if you have not arranged an extension, you cannot hand in your work late, except in the case of a serious emergency.
- Students are responsible for knowing and following Georgetown policies regarding academic dishonesty and plagiarism. Suspected cases of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be rigorously investigated and penalized as severely as possible. I reserve the right to submit any assignment to any plagiarism detection service of my choosing.
- Students with disabilities or nonstandard learning needs are invited to talk to me as early as possible in the term so that we can design a study and assignment plan that works for you. Please feel free also to check in with me about whether that plan needs to be fine-tuned as the term progresses. Students are also strongly encouraged to discuss their needs and make arrangements with the Academic Resource Center on campus.
- Religiously observant students who require accommodations should speak to me by the second week of class so that we can plan a schedule.
- Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant and parenting students. Please speak to me about any accommodations you might need as a pregnant person or as a parent.

### **Support and self-care:**

- I am happy to talk to you at any point about getting any sort of support you need throughout the term, whether that be academic, emotional, legal, psychological, medical, or other. There are many campus and off-campus resources, and I am happy to help you find them.

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**Sexual misconduct:** I am committed to supporting victims of sexual misconduct in whatever way I can. Georgetown University prohibits sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, and stalking. Discrimination based on sex, including sexual misconduct and discrimination based on pregnancy or parenting status, subverts the University's mission and threatens permanent damage to the educational experience, careers, and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Please know that as a faculty member I am committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. However, University policy also requires faculty to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include:

- Jen Schweer, MA, LPC  
Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention  
(202) 687-0323 | jls242@georgetown.edu
- Erica Shirley  
Trauma Specialist  
Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS)  
(202) 687-6985 | els54@georgetown.edu

More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct are available [on an external website. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

### Appealing a grade:

- You can appeal any grade that you believe does not accurately represent your work. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your assignment is returned. They must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade, but an agreement to re-evaluate a paper is no guarantee of a better grade.

### Turnaround and feedback:

- If you have a concern and send me a message, you can expect a response within two business days. Please allow up to two weeks for assessment submission feedback.