



Intro to Moral Philosophy

PHL 210B

Core Curriculum for HUM

Fulfills department major/minor/elective

Semester/Year: Spring 2025

Meeting Days & Times: MW 11am – 12:18pm

Location: Murphy Center 001

Instructor's Name: Dr. Gregory Nirshberg

Email: gnirshberg@iona.edu

Office Hours: MW 3:30pm - 4:45pm (and by appointment)

Office Location: Spellman Hall, 2nd Floor (across from Hyne's Institute)

Course Description

This course examines central themes in moral philosophy through a consideration of fundamental questions about human nature, action, and character. In what sense is moral philosophy a normative discipline? Is morality relative (to culture, to individuals) or are there universal and objectively valid moral principles? Are there such things as moral facts and properties; can we ever really know such facts? What is valuable or good for us? What determines whether an action is right or wrong, obligatory or permissible? Are actions right or wrong in terms of their consequences? What do motives or intentions have to do with the morality of an action? Is morality fundamentally about performing certain kinds of actions or more about being a certain kind of person? What is the relationship between action and character? Such questions are considered in light of leading theories in moral philosophy, e.g., egoism, relativism, utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. We will also apply these theories to specific moral problems.

Contact Information

Please email me at the address listed above. I check my email regularly and will do my best to respond within 24 hours (often much quicker than that), but if you don't hear back from me within those 24 hours, email me again as a reminder. If you have a conflict with my office hours, email me and we can set up an appointment for an alternate meeting time. I'm happy to accommodate!

Course Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Upon successful completion of this course, students are expected to...

Course SLO Narrative	Supports Core SLO # and Narrative	Method(s) of Course SLO Assessment
Explain various theoretical approaches to the study of morality.	Through engagement with “big questions” grounded in the liberal arts, students will demonstrate knowledge of the meaning and complexities of the human experience and its relationship to the natural world.	Critical Assessment, Online Discussion, Prepared Questions
Possess the ability to think critically about ethical arguments, interpret complex texts accurately, analyze them logically and convey such knowledge to an audience.	Through immersion in a nurturing community dedicated to intellectual engagement, students will demonstrate the skills needed to thrive as citizens and prospective leaders in an ever-changing world. 2A: Critical Thinking 2B: Written Communication 2C: Oral Communication	Critical Assessment, Online Discussion, Prepared Questions, Class Discussion, In Class Writing
Understand how to identify the morally relevant properties of a situation in order apply to and address particular moral problems	Through a comprehensive curricular experience that emphasizes the values of peace, justice, and service, as well as appreciation for human diversity, sustainability, and civic engagement, students will demonstrate the ability to apply a global perspective and the principles of ethical reasoning. 3B: Ethical Reasoning	Critical Assessment, Online Discussion, Class Discussion, In Class Writing

Required Texts/Source Materials

There is no assigned textbook for this class. All class readings can be found on Blackboard.

Core Signature Assignment (CSA)

The Core Signature Assignment for this course is your semester long Critical Assessment. This assignment is assessed for Core SLO #3.3 (Ethical Reasoning). The assignment listed in this section must be uploaded to the Blackboard Organizations site for the specified SLO in order to receive a course grade.

NOTE: The Blackboard Organization site for your SLO is separate from the Blackboard Course site for your class. To find the Blackboard Organization site for your SLO, look for the box labeled “My Organizations” on the landing page when you log in to Blackboard. Your instructor will notify you when the Blackboard Organization site is available for uploading your CSA.

Grading Criteria & Assessment Information

Syllabus Quiz	6%
Online Discussion	24%
In Class Writing/Journal	20%
Paper Project (CSA)	50%

The following is a breakdown of the various requirements which determine your grade for the course. **All assignments will be posted to, and submitted via, Blackboard.**

Syllabus Quiz (SQ)

At the beginning of the semester, you will have a very short quiz (posted and due on blackboard) to make sure you have read this syllabus.

Online Discussion (OD)

You will have six Online Discussions throughout the semester. **For these assignments, I will post a short reading and/or prompt on Blackboard.** In one form or another, each of these assignments will ask you to think about a topic we will be discussing in class, *before* we do any formal readings on it. While one of these assignments will involve only individual writing, the rest will require interaction and follow up posts with your fellow classmates. Requirements for each discussion will be found on Canvas.

IMPORTANT: Check the assignment details early, as *the assignment will have more than one posting window, with multiple due dates.* However, the Blackboard due date will only indicate the FIRST posting window.

In Class Writing (ICW)

You will have 12-15 ICW assignments throughout the semester. These will not be announced in advance, and may occur at any time during lecture (beginning, middle, end). ICWs will be *very short* writing assignments asking you to engage with the day's material in some way. Some will be given at the beginning of lecture and may function as a content quiz or will give you the opportunity to formulate a question about the day's reading. Others will be given at the end of lecture and will ask you to reflect on some aspect of our lecture discussion. Others will involve you writing on an aspect of a group discussion that just took place. I will drop the lowest three grades. **All ICW assignments will be open note.**

Paper Project (CSA)

The major component of your semester grade will be a short, focused paper in which you will critically engage with an argument from one of a set of readings that you will choose from. ***Though short, a successful paper will require a much larger investment of time than the length might suggest to you.*** This project will be an opportunity for you to practice several skills we will focus on developing throughout this course, including careful and critical reading, argument reconstruction and argument evaluation. For this reason, you will be asked to hand in a series of benchmark assignments (basically, drafts of your paper) throughout the semester (three, in total). With each new benchmark submission (BM), you will be asked to incorporate a new skill or component of good philosophical writing. You will *not* receive grades on benchmark submissions. Instead, you will receive comprehensive feedback aiming to help you revise your work for the next submission. Only the final submission is given a grade.

Participation

There is no formal grade for participation. However, acquiring a new skill requires practice, and active participation during class will be an integral part of this process. As you'll quickly see, there's no

substitute for talking as much as you can about the difficult questions we'll be considering. **Think of lecture as a free space to try out ideas and clear up confusions. I will *never* penalize someone for making a mistake in discussion.** If you are on the cusp of a grade at the end of the semester, I will use participation to decide whether a bump is in order.

Paper Projects and Final Grades will be calculated using the following grading scale

I will not impose a curve on any individual assignment, or your final grades.

Letter Grade	Grade Point and Grade Scale	Description
A	4.00 93-100	<i>Outstanding.</i> Signifies the highest level of achievement in the subject and indicates an exceptional general competence, and exemplary comprehension and interpretation skills. Work is devoid of errors, and reflects a highly nuanced understanding of disciplinary concepts.
A-	3.67 90-92	<i>Excellent.</i> Signifies an advanced level of achievement approaching the highest category. Work contains a few minor errors, but reflects a mastery of disciplinary concepts.
B+	3.33 87-89	<i>Very Good.</i> Signifies a consistently high level of achievement and indicates that the course requirements have been fulfilled in an intelligent, superior manner. Work contains some minor errors, but reflects a near mastery of disciplinary concepts.
B	3.00 83-86	<i>Good.</i> Signifies a complex engagement with disciplinary content, and well-developed critical skills. Work contains several minor, but no significant errors.
B-	2.67 80-82	<i>Above Average.</i> Signifies a more than acceptable degree of disciplinary knowledge and skills. Work contains some significant and some minor errors.
C+	2.33 77-79	<i>Satisfactory.</i> Signifies consistent achievement of a quality that satisfies, and sometimes exceeds stated, basic requirements. Work contains significant errors and patterns of error, but reflects an acceptable degree of disciplinary knowledge and skills.
C	2.00 73-76	<i>Fair.</i> Signifies achievement of a quality that satisfies the stated, basic requirements of coursework, and a functional, though incomplete understanding of disciplinary concepts.
C-	1.67 70-72	<i>Poor.</i> Signifies a level of understanding below the basic level expected of students. Work contains many errors, including patterns of error, and reflects only partial understanding of disciplinary concepts.
D	1.00 60-69	<i>Minimal Passing.</i> Signifies a level of understanding well below the basic level expected of students. Work is consistently riddled with errors and patterns of error, and reflects only a minimal understanding of disciplinary concepts.
P		<i>Passing.</i> Signifies satisfactory completion of course requirements and the earning of credit without quality points.
U		<i>Unsatisfactory.</i> No quality points assigned.
F	0.00 0-59	<i>Failure.</i> Signifies failure to meet basic course requirements.
FA		<i>Failure - Excessive Absence.</i> Signifies dismissal from a course for unacceptable academic performance and absence from 20 percent or more of the scheduled class sessions. Requests for this grade are filed by the faculty member with the dean of the school in which the student is enrolled. This grade is computed as an "F" in the cumulative index.
I		If for serious reasons, students are unable to complete one or more requirements of a course, including the final examination, students may apply for an "Incomplete grade" by filling out the "Incomplete Request" form on Gaels 360. If the instructor grants the request, the instructor will file an "Incomplete grade student plan" with the student and the dean's office within 48 hours of an "incomplete grade" being submitted. The student will have up to 3 weeks from the date that grades

Letter Grade	Grade Point and Grade Scale	Description
		are due for a semester to complete all outstanding work unless the instructor specifies an earlier date. Please refer to the Academic Information page in the catalog for complete details.
W		<i>Withdrawal</i> . Signifies withdrawal from a course with permission of the Academic Advising Office or appropriate academic dean.
H		<i>Audit</i> . Signifies that a course was not taken for credit.
SP		<i>Satisfactory Progress</i> . Signifies that a course is not complete as of the end of the present semester, but is continuing.

Instructor's Course Policies & Procedures

Class Etiquette

The use of cell phones is prohibited in class. The use laptops is also prohibited (sorry!), unless you have an accommodation that allows you the use of a laptop (you should come speak to me about this if this is the case). Laptops *can* sometimes be used effectively. But they are also incredibly distracting. In my experience, most students use their laptops in class for everything *but* notetaking, leading to less engagement and poorer performance, and often distracting those sitting around them. However, even for those that use their laptops mostly to take notes, there is strong evidence that notetaking on laptops at best does not help student performance, and at worst actively harms it.

Late Work Policy

Your Online Discussions will receive a 50% penalty for each late submission (whether a few hours, a day late or a month late). In Class Writing assignments *cannot* be made up. I will do my best to grade Paper Project submissions that are submitted late, but if I run out of time before grades are due, you will simply earn a 50% on the CA. If you know in advance that you will not be able to submit an assignment on time, please reach out to asap (i.e., *before* you miss the deadline).

University Policy for all courses and students

[full explanations of policy may be found in the University Catalog]

Cheating and Plagiarism

Cheating and plagiarism subvert both the purpose of the University and the experience students derive from being at Iona. They are offenses which harm the offender and the students who do not cheat. The Iona community, therefore, pledges itself to do all in its power to prevent cheating and plagiarism, and to impose impartial sanctions upon those who harm themselves, their fellow students, and the entire community by academic dishonesty.

Faculty members will report all incidents of cheating and plagiarism to the dean. Every effort will be made to insure justice in any allegation of intellectual dishonesty. Educational assistance rather than adversarial proceedings may be sought. Sanctions may include failure for the assignment, failure for the course, and in the case of a second instance or an egregious violation of ethical and professional standards, dismissal from the University. Students who have been guilty of plagiarism or academic dishonesty at any point in their Iona academic career do not qualify for degrees with honors.

If, in conformity with this policy, a sanction is imposed, students may appeal first, to the professor who discovered the offense; second to the department chair; and third to the academic dean of the division involved. The decision of the academic dean is final. A student has the right to appeal the academic dean's decision to the provost if, and only if, the sanction involves a suspension from class or dismissal from the University. In such appeals, the decision of the provost is final.

[Iona University AI Use Policy \(March 2024\)](#)

Courses at Iona University may allow the use of generative artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT/GPT-4, Gemini etc) at the discretion of the professor. Professors who allow the use of generative AI tools in their courses must state it explicitly in their syllabus and indicate the following: which AI tools students may use; which assignments they may be used for; and how students may use them.

Students may not use generative AI tools towards the completion of any course assignment unless its use is permitted in the course syllabus. Unauthorized uses of generative AI tools will be treated as instances of academic dishonesty. Students who use generative AI in courses where it is permitted are responsible for their submission and should be aware of the following issues with generative AI tools:

- AI generated materials may infringe on materials that have copyright protection and/or are the intellectual property of others.
- Students may not enter any confidential, identifiable, or sensitive materials into an AI tool as this not only violates confidentiality rules but, in some cases, particularly in the Health Sciences, may also violate HIPAA rules.
- Students should be aware that generative AI often provides inaccurate information. Students are expected to check AI output for factual errors and incorrect information.

[Attendance](#)

All students are required to attend all classes. Iona has an attendance policy for which all students are accountable. While class absence may be explained it is never excused. Professors may weigh class absence in the class grade as they see fit. Failure to attend class may result in a failure of the class for attendance (FA), when the student has missed 20% or more of the total class meetings. The FA grade weighs as an F would in the final official transcript.

[e-mail Communication](#)

All students are required to use their assigned Iona email accounts for all University-related business including electronic correspondence between students and faculty. Students are advised to check their Iona email account on a regular basis.

[Appeal of Assigned Grade](#)

Students who believe that an error has been made in the assignment of a grade should discuss with the instructor the basis upon which the grade was determined. If, after this review of the grading criteria for the course and the student's performance in it, the student is not satisfied with the assigned grade, an appeal may be made to the department chair. Such appeal must be made in writing, stating the basis upon which the grade is questioned and requesting a departmental review. If, following the review, the student is not satisfied with the departmental decision; final appeal may be made to the academic dean of the department involved. FA excessive absence grades are awarded as a matter of policy and may not be appealed.

Course and Teacher Evaluation (CTE)

Iona University now uses an on-line CTE system. This system is administered by an outside company and all of the data is collected confidentially. No student name or information will be linked to any feedback received by the instructor. The information collected will be compiled in aggregate form by the agency and distributed back to the Iona administration and faculty, with select information made available to students who complete the CTE. Your feedback in this process is an essential part of improving course offerings and instructional effectiveness. We want and value your point of view. You will receive several emails at your Iona email account about how and when the CTE will be administered with instructions on how to proceed.

Iona University Accessibility Statement

Iona University is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment for all students. If you have been approved for accommodations by the Accessibility Services Office (ASO) and are experiencing any physical or academic barriers based on disability or the way the course is designed, please let me know immediately so that we can discuss appropriate adjustments and/or additional accommodations. If you received accommodations (e.g. extended time for tests) in high school, and would like to receive similar support at Iona, you must first meet with an ASO staff to discuss your needs. Once your accommodations are approved, the Office will provide me with a list of your accommodations. Information about your disability is never shared with your instructor, only your accommodations.

To schedule a meeting with the ASO staff, you can send an email to Access@Iona.edu or complete a request for accommodation online by logging on to the Single Sign-On page and going to the ACCOMMODATE app. Once complete, a staff member from the Accessibility Services Office will contact you to schedule a meeting.

Course Calendar and other miscellaneous remarks

You will find the course calendar below. The below schedule is tentative, and subject to change. I will inform the class of any changes in lecture and by posting an announcement on Blackboard.

Date	Content	DUE	Assigned Reading
January 15 th	<p>Introduction to Philosophy and Philosophical Methodology</p> <p><i>“What is philosophy? What kinds of questions do philosophers ask?”</i></p> <p><i>“How do I think clearly about difficult problems?”</i></p> <p><i>“What are some ‘hot takes’ philosophers have argued for?”</i></p>		NO READING: Philosophical Toolkit Discussion
January 20 th			MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY: NO CLASSES
January 22 nd		SQ	NO READING: Critical Assessment Topic Brainstorming
January 27 th			Danaher, “The Gamer’s Dilemma”
January 29 th			Savulescu, et al., “Why we should allow performance enhancing drugs in sport”
February 3 rd			NO READING: Continue discussing Savulescu
February 5 th			LaFollette, “Licensing Parents” (7 pages)
February 10 th			NO READING: Continue discussing LaFollette
February 12 th			NO READING: Expository Writing Workshop
February 17 th	<p>Metaethics</p> <p><i>“Is morality objective or just a matter of opinion?”</i></p> <p><i>“Who or what determines what is right and what is wrong?”</i></p>	BM1	PRESIDENT’S DAY: NO CLASSES
February 19 th			NO READING: Metaethics Discussion
February 24 th			Shafer-Landau, “Ethical Relativism” (7 pages)
February 26 th			Rachels, “Must God’s Commands Conform to Moral Standards?” (2.5 pages)
March 3 rd			NO READING: Objections workshop
March 5 th	<p>Normative Ethics</p> <p><i>“What matters, morally speaking?”</i></p> <p><i>What do my moral obligations consist of, and how do I know?”</i></p>		NO READING: Moral Theory Discussion
March 10 th			Shafer-Landau, “Hedonism” (6.5 pages)
March 12 th		BM2	Shafer-Landau, “Consequentialism...” (7.5 pages)
March 17 th			SPRING BREAK: NO CLASSES
March 19 th			

March 24 th	<i>"What kind of person should I strive to be?"</i>		Kant , "Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals" (4 pages)
March 26 th			NO READING : Continue Kant Discussion
March 31 st			Aristotle , "Nicomachean Ethics" (5 pages)
April 2 nd		BM3	Sartre , "Existentialism is a Humanism" (7 pages)
April 7 th	Moral Status: Duties to Unborn Humans <i>"Are fetuses persons?"</i> <i>"When is a killing unjust?"</i> <i>"When, if ever, is abortion morally permissible?"</i>		NO READING : Moral Status and Abortion Discussion
April 9 th			Warren , "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion" (4 pages); Brody , "Opposition to Abortion" (3 pages)
April 14 th			Thomson , "A Defense of Abortion" (7 pages)
April 16 th			Marquis , "Why Abortion is Immoral" (6 pages)
April 21 st			EASTER MONDAY: NO CLASSES
April 23 rd	Moral Status: Duties to Distant Humans <i>"Do I have any moral obligations to people I don't know?"</i>	FINAL	NO READING : Duties to Distant Strangers Discussion
April 28 th			Singer , "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (6 pages)
April 30 th			Arthur , "...The Case Against Singer" (5 pages)
May 5 th		OD6	TBD
THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM FOR THIS CLASS!			

Special Note: Iona is closed on Martin Luther King Day, Monday Jan 20, President's Day, Monday Feb 17, Holy Thursday, Thursday April 17, Good Friday, Friday April 18 and Easter Monday, Monday April 21. Spring Break is Monday, March 17 – Friday, March 21.
The last day for grade appeals from the fall and winter session is Friday, Jan 24.
The last day for students to submit work in satisfaction of "I" grades from the winter session is Tuesday Feb 4.
Progress reports are due at noon on Friday, Feb 21.
Last day to withdraw from a spring course with a "W" is Wednesday, April 9.
Final Exam Period is Wednesday May 7 to Tuesday May 13.