

Ethical Practice

PHL 2120 (A) | Elon University | Spring 2022



Instructor: [Alex Richardson, Ph.D. \(he/him/his\)](#)

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Class Meetings: MW, 4-5:40pm @ 210 Lindner Hall

Course Materials: moodle.elon.edu

Drop-In Hours: W, 1:30-3:30pm @ [The Oak House](#) and by appointment

Video Conference: [elon.zoom.us/arichardson](https://elon.zoom.us/jarichardson)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course invites us to think carefully together about those practices which contribute to a good human life—a life well-lived. This conception, and its philosophical substance, raises many questions and confronts us with frequent decisions to make which may not only affect our lives and interests, but those of others in our surrounding families, communities, and society. In this course, we will delve into those core moral and political questions which arise around the project of living well—not merely in the abstract, but as they arise in our daily practices.

We'll begin by engaging with thinkers both classical and contemporary to build a conceptual toolkit to help us confront tough normative questions. In addition to some fundamental methodologies, we'll briefly study three traditions in the history of moral philosophy—consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Once we've established a strong groundwork, we'll shift our focus toward some important and timely applied issues. First, we'll take up questions about membership in our moral community. Here, we'll consider the ethics of abortion, our treatment of children and animals, and the moral costs of climate change and environmental degradation. Finally, we'll take up some larger conceptual questions about the nature of justice at a broader social scale, and whether the values and practices of our own society live up to its stated ideals of liberty, equality, and democracy.

If you participate actively in class and approach readings, discussions, and assignments with attention and care, I suspect that you will grow as a thinker. If you take the knowledge you acquire in this course with you and apply it to your own life and projects, I hope you will flourish as a citizen and as a human being.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Over the course of the semester, you will develop and be evaluated on a specific set of skills. As a result of taking this course, you should better be able to:

- formulate and ask philosophical questions of moral and political interest.
- analyze and evaluate moral and political arguments concerning important and sometimes contentious issues.
- read and understand dense and sometimes difficult texts, both historical and contemporary.
- critically reflect upon and contextualize your own ideas, beliefs, value judgments, and actions.
- clarify, communicate, and defend your ideas effectively, in writing, in collaboration with others, and orally for a general audience.

MATERIALS

There is no textbook required for purchase. All reading assignments for class will be made available in accessible formats (typically PDF). These and any supplementary materials (news clips, videos, podcasts, etc.) will be accessible via Moodle.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In order to be successful in this course, you should plan to do all of the following:

1. **Read this syllabus in its entirety.** All students are responsible for a working knowledge of all information and policies contained in this document. The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus as necessary, with advance notice.
2. **Read/watch/listen to all assigned materials in accordance with the course schedule (see below).** You should complete your reading before class on the day materials are assigned, and bring texts or other materials with you to discussion each week. Assigned readings will seldom exceed ~30 pages per week, but do note that philosophy can often be dense, and reading it, difficult—so be sure to leave yourself some time to read carefully and critically (and perhaps, sometimes, to read twice for understanding).
3. **Attend class regularly and participate in class meetings.** You should do your best to attend every class, and to come prepared to contribute to daily discussions (by having read and thought about the assigned material, completed relevant homework assignments, etc.)
4. **Complete all class assignments by their designated due dates (see below).** All deadlines for this course have a 24-hour grace period, with no penalty and no questions asked. Assignments (with the exception of “Truth or Dare” Homework) will be accepted for up to three days after the grace period ends, with a late penalty of one full letter-grade per day. After this time, the assignment will receive a grade of zero, except in the most serious of circumstances. Late assignment submissions and extensions ought to be arranged in advance where possible.
5. **Check Elon email and Moodle regularly for course announcements.** Communications will often be made this way in order to keep you informed about class happenings during the semester. Enabling push notifications or using the [Open LMS](#) app is a good idea, to this end.

ASSIGNMENTS

“Truth or Dare” Homework (20%): Throughout the term, you will have many opportunities to complete various tasks for homework. By the last day of class, you should have submitted 10 homework assignments (there are 17 opportunities total). For each homework assignment, you should complete a task of your choice, unless otherwise specified (some assignments will have more limited options than others). Homework tasks will be divided into two categories: (1) Philosophical “Truths,” which will involve “unlocking” some or another philosophical conclusion about a reading assignment, for instance, by annotating the primary philosophical content of a text, by evaluating a central argument, by making a personal connection between key ideas and your own life, or by applying an argument or line of reasoning to a new issue or area of inquiry; and (2) Philosophical “Dares,” which will involve applying key ideas from course material in your own lives in novel ways, and submitting evidence of and reflection on such applications (typically in writing). All homework assignments should be submitted by the beginning of class (4:00pm) on the day they are assigned. Please note that at least 3 of your homework submissions *must* be written argument evaluations, and you *must* undertake at least one dare during the course of the semester. A special award will go to the class’s “Most Daring Philosopher(s),” who complete 5 or more philosophical dares during the semester. All those who receive this award are entitled to +3 extra credit points.

Argument Analysis Papers (x3; 40 total%): Philosophers deal primarily in arguments, and being able to work with them is one of the most important skills you will acquire in this course. During the semester, you’ll be required to submit three

short writing assignments (ranging from 500-1,000 words each) which will focus on developing your argumentative skills. These assignments will require you to (1) reconstruct, (2) apply to a case, and (3) “repair” philosophical arguments, respectively. More details and information about each assignment will be distributed in advance of its due date:

- **AA1: Argument Reconstruction (10%):** Your first Argument Analysis of the semester should provide a brief recap of an author’s position and their reasoning for advancing it. The purpose of this assignment is to familiarize you with the process of discerning, clarifying, and working with arguments found within philosophical writing. This paper will focus on Plato’s Apology. It should be ~500 words, and is due on February 28.
- **AA2: Case Study Brief (15%):** Your second Argument Analysis should select a relevant case study (using provided resources) and provide analysis on the case using one or more of the various moral theories, “toolkit” concepts, or distinctions from our course material. This paper should be ~800 words, and is due on April 4.
- **AA3: Argument Repair (15%):** Your third Argument Analysis should summarize an argument from the course material, raise an objection to that argument, and then “repair” the argument by responding to the objection on the author’s behalf. This paper should be ~1,000 words, and is due on April 27.

Participation/In-Class Activities (20%+): Philosophical learning occurs best in collaboration and connection with others. For this reason, you must attend class regularly, having sufficiently prepared for discussion of any assigned readings or supplementary materials, and ready to participate in collaboration with your classmates. Regular physical attendance, while usually necessary for a good participation grade, is not sufficient on its own. Thus, your participation will be evaluated based on the quality of your overall contribution to class discussions, small group activities, and the course as a whole. This being said, different students participate in different ways (e.g., speaking in class, responding to others’ thoughts, small group work, visiting office hours, asking questions one on one, etc.), and all of these methods will be taken into account. Additionally, I reserve the right to raise grades in borderline cases where a student has an exemplary participation record, though this is by no means a guarantee that grades will be rounded up as a matter of policy.

Take-Home Final Exam (20%): Near the end of the semester, you’ll write a take-home final exam. This will be a comprehensive exam consisting of short and long essay questions drawn from course materials, in-class work, and in-class discussion during the semester. The exam will be made available two weeks in advance of its due date (the scheduled final exam period for the course), May 13. It should be submitted by 11:59pm on the due date.

WORK SUBMISSIONS AND GRADING

All of your assignments should be turned in via Moodle by their designated due dates, and will be checked for originality upon their submission (see below for policy on academic integrity). Microsoft Word (.docx) or PDF format is preferred for ease of grading and feedback. Citations, if needed, can be in any recognized format, so long as they are legible. All submission deadlines for this course have a 24-hour grace period, with no penalty and no questions asked. Assignments (with the exception of “Truth or Dare” Homework, which must be completed before class begins on the day assigned) will be accepted for up to three days after the grace period ends, with a late penalty of one full letter-grade per day. After this time, the assignment will receive a grade of zero, except in the most serious of circumstances. Late assignment submissions and extensions ought to be arranged in advance where possible.

Assignments will typically be graded based on a combination of their accuracy and charity with respect to the view they are engaging with, their argumentative rigor (if applicable), and the quality of your writing or presentation (composition, organization, etc.). Grading rubrics and detailed feedback will be provided for each assignment. I will make every effort to return graded assignments to you within two weeks of their submission date. Often, grade turnaround will be quicker, but sometimes it may take a few days longer—if this is the case, you’ll be notified in class.

Follow-up communications about your grades are encouraged! To understand your grades, consult any relevant assignment details, rubrics, etc. from Moodle, as well as my comments on your graded paper. If questions arise, send me an email, drop in during office hours, or set up an appointment, and we can discuss your grade.

I am also happy to speak with you about any grade complaints or appeals you might have. If you have such a complaint, you should follow a two-step process. First, you must wait at least 24 hours from the time the assignment is returned to you. While you wait, look over your work and the comments I have provided and identify any discrepancies you wish to discuss. Second, you should send me a short, written statement, detailing the discrepancies between the work you have submitted and the grade you have received. These should be submitted and discussed with me within 7 days of getting your initial grade. Grade changes will not be considered without a written appeal, and grades are incontestable after 7 days (save extraordinary or extenuating circumstances).

This course will be graded on a 100-point scale, using the weights indicated above. For final grades, I will use a university standard +/- letter grading scale and standard conventions with respect to their meaning. Point gradations will be defined as follows:

A 100-93	B+ 89-87	C+ 79-77	D+ 69-67	F < 60
A- 92-90	B 83-86	C 76-73	D 66-60	
	B- 82-80	C- 72-70		

CLASSROOM AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Class Attendance: Student attendance is crucial to success in any course, but it is of particular importance in a class which depends heavily on the participation of its members. Participation grades can and will be adversely affected by poor attendance. Of course, important reasons to miss class do arise (particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic), so excused absences will be granted in serious circumstances (university business, religious holidays, significant illnesses, family emergencies, etc.). These ought to be discussed with me in advance when possible.

Academic Integrity: The university's honor pledge calls for a commitment to Elon's shared values of Honesty, Integrity, Respect and Responsibility. To be clear about what constitutes violations of these values; students should be familiar with code of conduct policies in the student handbook, including violations outlined in [Elon's Student Handbook](#). Students with questions about the specific interpretation of these values and violations as they relate to this course should contact their instructor immediately. Violations in academic-related areas will be documented in an incident report which will be maintained in the Office of Student Conduct, and may result in a lowering of the course grade and/or failure of the course with an Honor Code F. Violations specifically covered by academic honor code policies include: plagiarism, cheating, lying, stealing and the facilitation of another's dishonesty. Multiple violations will normally result in a student's temporary suspension from the University.

Accessibility: We all learn and work in different ways, and accordingly, I strive to make my courses as widely accessible as possible. Any student who may need special classroom or assignment accommodations based on the impact of a disability, chronic illness, mental health concern, etc. is encouraged to meet with me to discuss their specific needs. Additionally, students seeking disability accommodations may contact [Disabilities Resources](#) at (336) 278-6568 or disabilities@elon.edu, or by visiting the Duke Building, Room 108 to document their eligibility for institutional accommodation services.

Classroom Discussion and Climate: Reasonable disagreement and critical discussion on a variety of issues is a key hallmark of modern democratic society. Thus, a free exchange of ideas and perspectives is absolutely crucial in the

university classroom as well. I fully expect and welcome vigorous disagreements in this class, especially given the somewhat sensitive subject matter we will often engage with. With that being said, please be mindful of some important constraints on our discussions: Be thoughtful and courteous. Respect your classmates by listening to what they have to say, and make an effort to respond to issues raised by those who spoke before you rather than simply waiting your turn to give your opinion and consider your obligations for the day fulfilled. Please also be conscious of the relative balance of contributions in class—if you've spoken a lot, make an effort to cede the floor to less vocal classmates who might be waiting to enter the conversation. I will make every possible effort to maintain a collaborative atmosphere for inquiry and learning—I only ask that you do the same with respect to your classmates. To this end, I consider my classroom and office inclusive spaces for all students. No one should feel unwelcome, undervalued, or unsafe on the bases of their race, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, religious belief, age, wealth, or physical/mental ability. I take this policy very seriously, and strive to provide a class environment that is based on full recognition and mutual respect for all who enter. Student compliance with this policy is expected, and harassing speech or action will not be tolerated.

Classroom Technology: The responsible use of laptops, tablets, and in some cases, smartphones for note-taking, class assignments, and research tasks is welcome in class. However, I do reserve the right to ask students to see their notes or work, and to discontinue their usage should it not be consistent with classroom purposes. Participation grades can and will be affected by violations of this policy, and repeated violations may result in being asked to leave class. Relatedly, student photography, as well as audio and video recording of lectures and class discussions is prohibited without prior and explicit permission of all parties involved (this includes Snapchat and Instagram stories, and TikTok posts).

Healthy Elon (COVID-19 Response): To promote a healthy and safe campus environment, Elon has adopted [special policies](#) for the 2021-2022 academic year—including those on [COVID-19 vaccination](#), face masks, [COVID-19 testing](#), travel, and more. All students should be familiar with and adhere to these policies.

Religious Holidays: In supporting religious diversity, Elon has a policy and procedures for students who wish to observe religious holidays that are in conflict with the academic calendar, allowing students an excused absence. Students who wish to observe a holiday during the semester must complete the online Religious Observance Notification Form (RONF), available [here](#) within the first two weeks of the semester. This policy does not apply during the final examination period. Students are required to make prior arrangements with the instructor for completion of any work missed during the absence. Once the completed RONF is received, the Truitt Center will confirm the excused absence with notification to the instructor and the appropriate academic dean, along with a copy to the student. Students may contact the Truitt Center with any questions at (336) 278-7729.

Enrollment: Students should confirm their enrollment in this course through their On-Track account. Students who do not appear on the course roll or do not show the correct course/section listed on On-Track should consult with their instructor immediately.

Course Withdrawal: Students may drop a course during the designated drop/add period through On-Track. A course that is dropped during the designated drop/add period will not appear on the student's transcript or grade report. After the designated drop/add period, students may [withdraw from a course](#) without penalty before the course withdrawal deadline published in the [academic calendar](#). Withdrawing from a course during this period will result in a mark of "W" that will appear on the student's academic transcript. Students may withdraw online via OnTrack. Students should refer to the [academic calendar](#) for important semester dates. Students should not assume that they will be officially withdrawn from a course based on failure to attend class or notifying a faculty member of their intent to withdraw. The student is responsible for following the official process of withdrawing from a class. Students who do not properly withdraw from a course will receive a grade of F. Students may not withdraw from a course after the published withdrawal deadline. Any exception to this policy is the responsibility of the appropriate academic dean's office. When granted, withdrawal from a course after this time will result in a grade of "W" or "F" depending on the student's grade at the time of withdrawal. For additional information on university course policies, students should consult the Academic Catalog.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Communications and Office Hours: The best way to get ahold of me in a pinch is via email, and many brief questions or concerns are ideally addressed this way. I'll typically respond to student emails within 24 hours (holidays excepted). For any and all more substantive concerns and questions pertaining to the course (or just to chat!) students are encouraged to schedule an appointment to meet with me. To request an appointment, send me an email, and we will find a time that accommodates all parties involved. I am happy to provide whatever assistance I can to make sure you are successful in class, be it discussing your assignments and grades with you in detail, working through assignments and arguments with you one-on-one, etc. I am here to help! That said, please remember that I am indeed a human with as many competing priorities as any other, and that I require some advance notice for appointment requests.

Elon Campus Resources:

- **Belk Library:** The librarians in Belk Library can help you find appropriate resources for your assignments. You can [schedule an appointment](#) to meet with a librarian or chat with a librarian on the library's [website](#).
- **The Writing Center:** Elon's [Writing Center](#) in the Center for Writing Excellence is staffed by trained peer-consultants who can help you with all of your writing projects (for any class or major and for any extracurricular, personal, or professional purposes), so take advantage of this excellent academic resource and include a visit to the Writing Center as part of your own writing process.
- **Koenigsberger Learning Center:** [Learning Assistance at the Koenigsberger Center](#) offers Elon students drop-in and by-appointment tutoring, student success workshops, and individual student success consultations.
- **Academic Advising:** The Elon [Office of Academic Advising](#) partners with all students to offer holistic, student-centered academic advising which focuses on self-advocacy, degree attainment, and life as a global citizen.

Supporting Fellow Students in Distress: As members of the Elon community, we each share a personal responsibility to express concern for one another and to ensure that our classrooms and the campus as a whole remains a healthy environment for learning. Occasionally, you may become worried or concerned about a fellow classmate's well-being. If and when this is the case, I would encourage you to share these concerns with me or to Elon's [Student Care and Outreach](#) program. Although you can report anonymously, it is preferred that you share your contact information so they can follow up with you personally.

Elon SAFELine: Students who are seeking confidential support for acts of bias and violence (including sexual violence) may call SAFELine at (336) 278-3333. SAFELine is Elon's confidential support hotline for members of the Elon community who may be experiencing or who have experienced identity-based bias, discrimination or harassment, sexual violence, domestic/relationship violence or stalking. Contacting SAFELine will not access emergency responders; anyone needing emergency police or medical attention should call 911.

COURSE SCHEDULE	
PART 1 THINKING LIKE A (MORAL) PHILOSOPHER	
M, 1/31: First Class Meeting Read: Course Syllabus Submit Introduction Questionnaire	W, 2/2: Philosophy and Argumentation Read: Alex Richardson, "Learning to Argue Well"
M, 2/7: Active Reading in Philosophy Read: Alex Richardson, "A Brief Guide to Active Reading in Philosophy" Read: Peter Singer, "The Obligation to Assist" [1p]	W, 2/9: A Crash Course on Moral Reasoning Listen: "Driverless Dilemma" from <i>RadioLab</i> [43m]
PART 2 PHILOSOPHERS ON THE GOOD LIFE	
M, 2/14: Plato on the Reflective Life (1) Read: Plato, <i>Apology</i> (pp. 17-26) [9p]	W, 2/16: Plato on the Reflective Life (2) Read: Plato, <i>Apology</i> (pp. 27-36) [9p]
M, 2/21: Virtues and Vices (1) Read: Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I [19p] Watch: "Kobayashi Maru" from <i>Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan</i> [9m]	W, 2/23: Virtues and Vices (2) Read: Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II [13p]
M, 2/28: Happiness and Pleasure (1) Read: John Stuart Mill, "What Utilitarianism Is," from <i>Utilitarianism</i> [10p] Submit AA1: Argument Reconstruction (by 11:59pm)	W, 3/2: Happiness and Pleasure (2) Watch: TED-Ed: "Would you opt for a life with no pain?" [4m]
M, 3/7: Rules, Rights, and Respect (1) Watch: Ava DuVernay, <i>13th</i> [1h40m]	W, 3/9: Rules, Rights and Respect (2) Read: Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (excerpts) [9p]
M, 3/14: Spring Break (No Class)	W, 3/16: Spring Break (No Class)
PART 3 ETHICS IN PRACTICE: OUR MORAL COMMUNITY	
M, 3/21: The Ethics of (Very) Early Life Read: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" [19p]	W, 3/23: The Ethics of Early Life Read: Michael Burroughs, "Navigating the Penumbra: Children and Moral Responsibility" [20p]
M, 3/28: Humans and Animals (1) Read: Jeff Sebo, "Moral Circle Explosion" [25p]	W, 3/30: Humans and Animals (2) Listen: Materials TBA Guest Visit: <i>Christine Ball-Blakely (ALDF)</i>

<p>M, 4/4: Is Nature Valuable?</p> <p>Read: Thomas Hill, Jr. "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments" [10p]</p> <p>Submit AA2: Case Study Brief (by 11:59pm)</p>	<p>W, 4/6: Should We Care About the Future?</p> <p>Read: John Nolt, "Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the Domination of Posterity" [16p]</p>
<p>PART 4 ETHICS IN PRACTICE: OUR SOCIETY AND OUR POLITICS</p>	
<p>M, 4/11: The Idea of Liberty</p> <p>Read: John Stuart Mill, "On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion" from <i>On Liberty</i> [34p]</p>	<p>W, 4/13: The Idea of Equality</p> <p>Read: Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> (excerpts) [8p]</p>
<p>M, 4/18: Holiday (No Class)</p>	<p>W, 4/20: Balancing Liberty and Equality</p> <p>Read: John Rawls, "Fundamental Ideas" from <i>Justice as Fairness: A Restatement</i> [38p]</p>
<p>M, 4/25: Social Oppression (1)</p> <p>Read: Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression" (pp. 39-48) [9p]</p>	<p>W, 4/27: Social Oppression (2)</p> <p>Read: Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression" (pp. 49-65) [16p]</p> <p>Submit AA3: Argument Repair (by 11:59pm)</p>
<p>M, 5/2: Political Disobedience (1)</p> <p>Read: Martin Luther King, Jr., <i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i> [10p]</p>	<p>W, 5/4: Political Disobedience (2)</p> <p>Listen: "Anger, Rage, and Forgiveness" with Myisha Cherry, from <i>Why We Argue</i> [32m]</p>
<p>M, 5/9: Course Wrap-Up</p>	
<p>F, 5/13: Final Exam Period</p> <p>Submit Take-Home Exam (by 11:59pm)</p>	