

# PHIL 2332: ENGINEERING ETHICS FOR A JUST AND DIVERSE WORLD

Autumn 2025  
The Ohio State University

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<b>Office Hours</b>	WF 1 - 2pm and by appt.
<b>Class Time</b>	TR 2:20 - 3:40pm
<b>Class Location</b>	Kottman Hall 102

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**Description** Welcome! I'm very excited to do philosophy with you all. Philosophy is, fundamentally, a conversation about some of the deepest mysteries of the universe and of the human condition. In this class, we will be focusing on the sub-field of philosophy called "ethics." Ethics is concerned with questions like the following: What is the morally right thing to do? Are there definite moral truths? Where do moral truths come from: God, our fellow human beings, or something else? Why should I be a good person whether or not there is an afterlife? We will be addressing some of these more general ethical questions, but we will focus on ethical questions concerning justice and diversity that arise in the context of professional engineering.

We will begin the course by thinking about whether ethics is objective or subjective and why one ought to be good. Then we'll start to examine major ethical traditions from across the history of philosophy so that we can apply different moral considerations to topics in engineering. Each of the major ethical theories has different answers as to what they think we should focus on in living ethical lives.

As we begin to get some moral theory under our belts, we will consider a variety of ethical issues pertaining to social justice and diversity within the engineering profession. We will think about the ethics of and approaches to racial justice, environmental justice, global justice, human enhancement, and algorithmic justice. In reflecting on these issues of justice and diversity, we will also reflect on what it means to be a citizen of our community and our world.

**Prerequisites** GE Foundations in Writing and Information Literacy; Race, Ethnicity and Gender Diversity; and Historical and Cultural Studies.

**General Education Information** This is a course in the GE Theme: Citizenship for a Just and Diverse World. The goals of *Citizenship for a Just and Diverse World* GE courses include the following.

**Goal One:** Successful students will analyze an important topic or idea at a more advanced and in-depth level than in the Foundations component. The associated expected outcomes for this goal are that successful students are able to:

1. Engage in critical and logical thinking about the topic or idea of the theme.
2. Engage in advanced, in-depth, scholarly exploration of the topic or idea of the theme.

**Goal Two:** Successful students will integrate approaches to the theme by making connections to out-of-classroom experiences with academic knowledge or across disciplines and/or to work they have done in previous classes and that they anticipate doing in future. The associated expected outcomes for this goal are that successful students are able to:

1. Identify, describe and synthesize approaches or experiences as they apply to the theme.
2. Demonstrate a developing sense of self as a learner through reflection, self-assessment and creative work, building on prior experiences to respond to new and challenging contexts.

**Goal Three:** Successful students will explore and analyze a range of perspectives on local, national or global citizenship, and apply the knowledge, skills and dispositions that constitute citizenship. The associated expected outcomes for this goal are that successful students are able to:

1. Describe and analyze a range of perspectives on what constitutes citizenship and how it differs across political, cultural, national, global, and/or historical communities
2. Identify, reflect on and apply the knowledge, skills and dispositions required for intercultural competence as a global citizen.

**Goal Four:** Successful students will examine notions of justice amidst difference and analyze and critique how these interact with historically and socially constructed ideas of citizenship and membership within society, both within the United States and around the world. The associated expected outcomes for this goal are that successful students are able to:

1. Examine, critique and evaluate various expressions and implications of diversity, equity and inclusion, and explore a variety of lived experiences.
2. Analyze and critique the intersection of concepts of justice, difference, citizenship, and how these interact with cultural traditions, structures of power and/or advocacy for social change.

Students will satisfy these expected learning outcomes through close reading of assigned texts, active participation in class discussion, successful completion of written assignments, and critical engagement with fellow students and the instructor.

**Class Conduct** This class will be heavily discussion based. And we will discuss very sensitive political and moral topics, so even if we disagree with someone else, we must voice that disagreement in a respectful manner and treat all the members of class with human dignity. If we want to, as a class, we may develop a list of conversational ground rules for our discussion posts.

**Carmen** All course content such as announcements, slides, assignments, grades and required readings (or videos) will be made available on Carmen (or be made available via an Internet link on Carmen). You are expected to do the readings *before* class for which the reading is assigned. Check Carmen regularly. What is assigned on Carmen takes precedence over the assignments/readings detailed on the syllabus. Contact me via *email*, *instead* of via the Carmen messaging for faster responses.

**Materials** All of the assigned reading/watching/listening material will be available for free on Carmen or available free through the Internet via a link on Carmen. There are no required textbooks for the class.

**Requirements and Grading** Your overall course grade will be assigned based on the following components (with the corresponding percentage of overall grade for the assignment given in parenthesis):

- Participation and attendance (**20%**).
- Initial reflection paper (**5%**).
- Short response papers (**15%**).
- Midterm exam (**25%**).
- Final exam (**25%**).
- Final reflection (**10%**).

Detailed assignment sheets for the reflection papers will be distributed closer to the time of assignment, though some minimal detail for each portion of your grade can be found in the next section of this syllabus. Tentative due dates will be given below. The only opportunity for extra credit in this class will be a small one at the very end of the course.

### **Descriptions of Major Course Assignments**

There will be two **reflection papers**, one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end. Your initial reflection paper will be a very short paper in which you describe your personal philosophical beliefs regarding some of the topics of our class. I expect you to offer some reasoning for the beliefs you hold, but not much reasoning as we will have only just begun our introduction at this point in the semester. You will compare this paper with your final reflection paper at the course's end so that you can see how much you have grown as a philosopher. These will be relatively short, low-stakes assignments.

The **midterm exam** will be a cumulative exam on the various concepts we've learned over the semester. It will consist of multiple question types: multiple choice, true or false, fill in the blank, and short essay. More detail will follow as we approach the midterm. The **final exam** will be the same format.

The **short response papers** will be available most weeks. You only have to do 3 total out of all the options. Full marks on all 3 will get you 15% of your final grade. I will open up a space for your short response papers to be uploaded in the Carmen module for each week. You will be asked to present an argument for or against one of the main philosophical claims studied that week. These short response papers will be around 350 words each.

**Participation and attendance.** Please read the assigned reading material *before* class for the day that it was assigned. Everyone is expected to participate in the class in some capacity, whether it be in small group discussion, by asking questions, or by participating in whole-class discussions. A note will be made of participation in lectures, and your participation grade will rise the more one conscientiously participates. A conscientious participant is one who makes respectful contributions to the discussion, not one who tries to dominate it or change the subject. Conscientious participation also requires being familiar with the material before class begins. As for attendance, it will be recorded and kept up with via exit cards. Most class periods, I will distribute index cards where you are to write a question or comment that you had about the material for the day. Make sure to write your full name on them legibly as they will serve as the way I take attendance during lectures. You are allowed up to **four** absences, no questions asked. That is, you can miss four lectures, for any reason whatsoever, with no penalty to you. Starting with the fifth day missed, however, a point will be dropped from your

participation and attendance grade for every further day missed. This means, for example, if you miss five lectures, the **maximum** participation and attendance grade you will be able to receive will be an 19 out of 20. Of course this attendance policy is up to negotiation on a one-on-one level if you are suffering from a more severe illness, facing some serious life event during the semester, or are a student-athlete with the University-approved travel documentation. If any of this applies to you or if you have any questions about the attendance policy (or any other grading policy), please just come see me or email me. I'm happy to discuss things with any of you.

**Late Assignments** Extensions will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances (or, of course, if you have an accommodation from SDLS which involves an extension). That being said, please email me ASAP if you need an extension because of some emergency. Late submissions of assignments will lose 5 points per day. No credit will be given after 5 days.

**Instructor Feedback and Response Time** For every assignment, I will have grades returned to the students within 11 days of submission. If you need to contact me out of class, please email me at dewitt.197@osu.edu directly. I have technical difficulties getting Carmen messages, so if you message me via Carmen do not expect me to receive your message quickly. I will respond to emails within about 24 hours on weekdays and around 48 hours on weekends.

**Grading Scale** We will use the OSU Standard Grade Scheme:

- 93-100: A
- 90-92.9: A-
- 87-89.9: B+
- 83-86.9: B
- 80-82.9: B-
- 77-79.9: C+
- 73-76.9: C
- 70-72.9: C-
- 67-69.9: D+
- 60-66.9: D
- Below 60: E

**Disability Services** The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; slds.osu.edu; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

**Academic Misconduct** Academic misconduct is a serious offense. You are responsible for knowing what counts as academic misconduct. You are also expected not to commit it. In accordance with Faculty Rule 3335-5-487, all suspected cases of academic misconduct will be reported to the university's Committee on Academic Misconduct who will then be responsible for investigating or establishing procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

We will discuss what and how to cite sources for philosophical writing as we go through our first set of writing assignments. We will also discuss which online resources are the most reliable sources for writing philosophy.

**Commitment to a diverse and inclusive learning environment** The Ohio State University arms the importance and value of diversity in the student body. Our programs and curricula reflect our multicultural society and global economy and seek to provide opportunities for students to learn more about persons who are different from them. We are committed to maintaining a community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among each member of our community; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. Discrimination against any individual based upon protected status, which is defined as age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status, is prohibited.

**Your Mental Health** As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learn, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. No matter where you are engaged in distance learning, The Ohio State University's Student Life Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) is here to support you. If you find yourself feeling isolated, anxious or overwhelmed, on-demand resources are available at [go.osu.edu/ccsondemand](http://go.osu.edu/ccsondemand). You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766, and 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org). The Ohio State Wellness app is also a great resource available at [go.osu.edu/wellnessapp](http://go.osu.edu/wellnessapp).

### **Tentative Course Schedule**

The schedule below is tentative. Any unexpected changes to the schedule will be announced on Carmen as the course proceeds. **Do all assignments, readings and video viewings before the corresponding class period.**

#### **Week One**

August 26th .....Introduction  
■ Read the Syllabus.

August 28th .....Philosophy & Ethics  
■ Read "Introduction: On the Study of Philosophy" and "Logical Toolkit" by Perry, Bratman, and Fischer.

#### **Week Two**

September 2nd ..... Ethical Questions & Codes

█ (1) Read selections from chs. 1-2 of *Ethics for Engineers* by Peterson. (2) Read “Moral Education” by Balg.

September 4th ..... Meta-ethics

█ (1) Read “Why Be Moral?” by Case.

### Week Three

September 9th ..... Meta-ethics

█ Read “Cultural Relativism” by Nobis.

September 11th ..... Meta-ethics

█ Read “Ten Arguments Against Moral Objectivity” by Shafer-Landau.

### Week Four

September 16th ..... Meta-ethics

█ Read “Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And So Are You)” by Enoch.

September 18th ..... Ethical Theory

█ Read selections from “Virtue Ethics” by Shafer-Landau.

### Week Five

September 23rd ..... Ethical Theory

█ Read selections from “Virtue Ethics” by Shafer-Landau.

September 25th ..... Ethical Theory

█ Read “Are There Absolute Moral Rules?” by Rachels.

### Week Six

September 30th ..... Ethical Theory

█ Read selections from *The Fundamentals of Ethics* by Shafer-Landau.

October 2nd ..... Ethical Theory

█ Read “What is Act Utilitarianism” by Feldman.

### Week Seven

October 7th ..... Ethical Theory

█ Read “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” by Singer.

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October 9th ..... Midterm Exam

█ Midterm exam.

**Week Eight** ..... Autumn Break

█ **Enjoy Autumn Break!**

### Week Nine

October 21st ..... Double-Effect

█ Read “Killing and Letting Die” by Foot.

October 23rd ..... Justice and Diversity in Engineering

█ (1) Read selections from chapter one of *Race After Technology* by Benjamin. (2) Read “Introduction” from *Invisible Women* by Criado Perez.

### Week Ten

October 28th .....Justice and Diversity in Engineering  
 (1) Read “Pulse Oximeter Devices Have Higher Error Rate in Black Patients” by Caryn Rabin. (2) Read “The Deadly Truth about a World Built for Men - From Stab Vests to Car Crashes” by Criado Perez.

October 30th .....Algorithmic Justice  
 Read “Machine Bias” by Angwin, Larson, Mattu, and Kirchner.

### Week Eleven

November 4th .....Algorithmic Justice  
 Read “Retooling Solidarity, Reimagining Justice” by Benjamin.

November 6th .....Human Enhancement  
 Read “The Case Against Perfectionism: what’s wrong with designer children, bionic athletes, and genetic engineering” by Sandel.

### Week Twelve

November 13th .....Human Enhancement  
 Read “Life Enhancement Technologies and the Significance of Social Category Membership” by Overall.

### Week Thirteen Enjoy Thanksgiving Break!

### Week Fourteen

December 2nd .....Environmental Justice  
 Read “Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement” by Bullard.

December 4th .....Science and Democracy  
 Read “Science and Society” by Dewey.

### Week Fifteen

December 9th .....Exam Review  
 Exam review.

December 12th .....Final Exam  
 Final exam.

### Important Assignment Dates (Also Tentative!)

Initial reflection paper .....September 7th by 11:59pm  
 Midterm exam .....October 9th in class  
 Final exam .....December 12th (location tbd)  
 Final reflection .....December 16th by 11:59pm