

Syllabus

Course: SYC 596E – Scientific Research, Ethics and Seminar (CRN: 13106)

Semester: 2025-2026 Fall

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course introduces students to the meaning and content of ethics, various moral theories, their historical and intellectual origins, and contemporary issues in moral philosophy. In addition, this course is organized to enable students to gain a basic awareness of ethical concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral, just and unjust, value, duty, virtue, utility, happiness, care, etc. and to understand different perspectives on morality. By the end of the course, I believe that students will have a sophisticated understanding of the leading moral theories, their social causes, and the social outcomes of their applications in addition to an enriched and developed perspective on politics.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the course are as follows:

- 1) To develop a sophisticated insight of philosophy and, in particular, moral philosophy,
- 2) To comprehend the meaning, scope and fundamental questions of ethics,
- 3) To learn how to construct arguments and what the most common fallacies in reasoning are,
- 4) To learn the basic concepts of moral philosophy,
- 5) To comprehend the basic arguments and problems/shortcomings of the prominent moral theories,
- 6) To develop analytical and critical thinking abilities on various moral problems that we face in our daily lives,
- 7) To be able to see the relationship between moral philosophy and political philosophy,
- 8) To be able to analyze the implications of moral theories in the field of politics and *vice versa*.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation in discussions: The course format requires active participation from all attendees. You are expected to prepare for each session by thoroughly reading and reflecting on the assigned materials. The aim of the discussions is to collaboratively interpret, critique, and expand upon the readings by examining their arguments, evidence, and perspectives. You should be ready to share your insights and questions with the group during each session without hesitation.

Instructor: Gökem Giray (girayg@itu.edu.tr)

Day, time, and place: Wednesday, 10.30-12.29, FEB 000

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory in this course, which requires both regular attendance and active participation. Students who are absent for more than two weeks during the semester without an official excuse will be considered to have failed the attendance requirement and will receive a grade of VF. If a student has a valid reason for being absent, such as illness or an emergency, they must provide official documentation to receive an excused absence. If a student has a chronic condition or a personal crisis that will frequently prevent them from attending the class during the semester, they are highly encouraged to talk to the course instructors as early as possible.

Oral Presentations: This section of the course aims to enhance the students' oral communication and critical analysis skills. To achieve this goal, each student is required to give a presentation in the assigned sessions. Each presentation should be no longer than 20 minutes and should be based on the assigned text(s) from the course material. The presentation must include:

- a) A brief summary of the main argument of the text,
- b) An explanation of how the argument is justified,
- c) A clear connection between the text and the overall course content,
- d) The presenter's critical questions, comments, and/or counterarguments on the text.

Additionally, each presentation should:

- a) Be focused and clear, and delivered in a well-structured manner,
- b) Emphasize the theoretical dimension of the topic,
- c) Demonstrate the presenter's knowledge of the subject and the further research conducted,
- d) Clearly reflect the presenter's intellectual effort.

All oral presentations must be visually supported by a PowerPoint presentation.

Reflection Papers: In cases where the number of students enrolled in the course is high and an oral presentation by each student would not leave enough time for discussion, some students will be assigned a reflection paper instead of a presentation for the relevant week. This section of the course aims to enhance the academic writing and critical analysis skills of the participants. Reflection papers should be around 1,500 words in length and should cover:

- a) A brief summary of the main argument of the text,
- b) An explanation of how the argument is justified,
- c) A clear connection between the text and the overall course content,
- d) The presenter's critical questions, comments, and/or counterarguments on the text.

Syllabus

Course: SYC 596E – Scientific Research, Ethics and Seminar (CRN: 13106)

Semester: 2025-2026 Fall

Term Paper and Presentation: A term paper is a major assignment that requires students to conduct independent research and present their findings in a clear and persuasive way. In the term paper, students are expected to focus on an issue regarding moral philosophy in an original way. Originality can be achieved by adopting at least one of the following approaches:

- Propose a research question that has never been asked before in the literature,
- Demonstrate the invalidity of previously asked questions,
- Offer a different answer to a question that has already been posed in the literature,
- Show that existing answers are invalid, inadequate, or flawed,
- Justify an existing answer using a methodologically different approach while invalidating existing approaches giving the same answer, • etc.

The term paper should:

- a) Present a research question and put forward arguments that are clearly and concisely stated and thoroughly justified,
- b) Be focused and clear, and written in a well-structured manner,
- c) Emphasize the theoretical dimension of the topic,
- d) Demonstrate the presenter's knowledge of the subject and the further research conducted,
- e) Clearly reflect the presenter's intellectual effort.

The term paper should be 5,000–6,000 words in length (excluding the bibliography) and should include the following components, though it is not required to present them under separate headings:

- a) Introduction: This section should introduce the research question or problem, explain why it is important and interesting, and provide an overview of the main argument and structure of the paper.
- b) Literature review: This section should review the existing literature on the topic, identify the main debates and gaps, and situate the paper's contribution within the scholarly context.
- c) Analysis and discussion: This section should present and interpret the findings of the research, justification of the main argument with evidence and logic, and address possible counterarguments and limitations.
- d) Conclusion: This section should summarize the main points of the paper, restate the thesis statement, and discuss the implications and significance of the research.

Each term paper must also be presented orally in class by the student who prepared it. Term paper presentations will be held during the second week of the final exams period and on the day of the lecture (January 14, 2026).

Instructor: Gökem Giray (girayg@itu.edu.tr)

Day, time, and place: Wednesday, 10.30-12.29, FEB 000

Term Paper Proposal: Before writing the term paper, students are required to submit a research paper proposal of 1,000–1,200 words, including a brief literature review and a short bibliography. The proposal should state the research question or problem, explain the argumentative direction of the paper, and provide an outline of the main points. The proposal is due on the 10th week of the semester.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Activity	Effect on grading (%)
Participation in discussions*	15
Oral presentations and reflection papers**	25
Term paper proposal	15
Term paper and presentation	35+10
TOTAL	100

* Missing a class will have a negative effect on the participation score as it eliminates the opportunity to participate in discussions.

** The situation of those who present (and write) more than the normal number of presentations (and reflection papers) will be considered in grading.

GRADING SCALE

Letter grades	grade in %
BL (Successful)	$65 \leq g \leq 100$
BZ (Unsuccessful)	$g < 65$

VF Condition: Students who are absent for more than **two weeks** in the semester without an official excuse will be considered to have failed the attendance requirement.

RESOURCES

I have tried to select the resources for the course in such a way as to ensure that students learn about major moral theories and debates on contemporary ethical problems as comprehensively and efficiently as possible during the 14-week course. The works listed below under the heading “required resources” provide a well-organized overview of major moral theories and debates on contemporary ethical problems in a well-structured framework, but I do not think that any of them alone can meet my expectations or the intellectual needs of the students. Nevertheless, these works, which have different styles and perspectives, provide a unique unity when taken together. While Shafer-Landau approaches the issues analytically and formulates well the theses and antitheses of the theories, MacKinnon & Fiala do not leave aside the historical background and go more outside the

Syllabus

Course: SYC 596E – Scientific Research, Ethics and Seminar (CRN: 13106)

Semester: 2025-2026 Fall

mainstream. Rachels & Rachels, on the other hand, present the application of theories to practice without explicitly separating theory and practice, but by intertwining the two.

Unfortunately, introducing different moral theories spanning thousands of years and different places to graduate students in a coherent manner in a single semester is only possible by not focusing on a particular theory or philosopher. For this reason, when choosing the course resources, I avoided primary sources that require a good command of the philosopher's terminology and secondary sources dealing with a theory or philosopher in detail with a style that makes it difficult to read (except for the 6th week: social contract theory). For students who are interested in one of the subjects particularly, I recommend that they check out more advanced readings given below under the heading "additional resources" in order to learn the theories and discussions in more detail.

Required Texts:

- MacKinnon, B., & Fiala, A.G. (2018). *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues* (9th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Rachels, J., & Rachels, S. (2019). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (9th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Shafer-Landau, R. (2019). *Living Ethics: An Introduction with Readings* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Shafer-Landau, R. (2022). *Living Ethics: An Introduction with Readings* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press. [The publication can be found in ITU Mustafa Inan Library.]

Additional Resources:

- Angier, T. (2023). *Ethics: The Key Thinkers* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Feldman, F. (1978). *Introductory Ethics*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Norman, R. (1998). *The Moral Philosophers: An Introduction to Ethics* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Suikkanen, J. (2020). *Contractualism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Timmons, M. (2017). *Disputed Moral Issues: A Reader* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Timmons, M. (2022). *Moral Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Course resources can also be found in the class Kovan folder.

All assignments must be written in accordance with ITU Graduate Thesis Writing Guide and APA (7th edition) style and grammar guidelines, and submitted via Turnitin.

Instructor: Gökem Giray (girayg@itu.edu.tr)

Day, time, and place: Wednesday, 10.30-12.29, FEB 000

SCHEDULE

SECTION I. INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS	
Week 1 (01.10.25)	What is Ethics? On the Distinction between Morality and Ethics (No readings. Introductory lecture and general discussion.)
Week 2 (08.10.25)	Skepticism about Morality <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 3: <i>Skepticism about Morality</i> [SL]• MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 3: <i>Ethical Relativism</i> [MF]• Rachels & Rachels (2019), Chapter 2: <i>The Challenge of Cultural Relativism</i> [RR]• Rachels & Rachels (2019), Chapter 3: <i>Subjectivism in Ethics</i> [RR]
SECTION II. MORAL THEORIES	
Week 3 (15.10.25)	Natural Law Theory <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 8: <i>Natural Law</i> [SL1]• MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 7: <i>Natural Law and Human Rights</i> [MF1] Consequentialism: Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 4: <i>The Good Life</i> [SL2] Consequentialism: Ethical Egoism <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 4: <i>Egoism, Altruism, and the Social Contract</i> [MF2]• Rachels & Rachels (2019), Chapter 5: <i>Ethical Egoism</i> [RR]
Week 4 (22.10.25)	Consequentialism: Utilitarianism <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 5: <i>Utilitarianism and John Stuart Mill</i>• Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 5: <i>Consequentialism</i>• Rachels & Rachels (2019), Chapter 7: <i>The Utilitarian Approach</i>• Rachels & Rachels (2019), Chapter 8: <i>The Debate over Utilitarianism</i>
Week 5 (29.10.25)	Public holiday... (No class.)
Week 6 (05.11.25)	Kantian Deontology <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 6: <i>Deontological Ethics and Immanuel Kant</i>• Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 6: <i>Kantian Ethics</i>• Rachels & Rachels (2019), Chapter 9: <i>Are There Absolute Moral Rules?</i>• Rachels & Rachels (2019), Chapter 10: <i>Kant and Respect for Persons</i>
Week 7 (12.11.25)	Social Contract Theory <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 7: <i>Social Contract Theory</i> [SL1]• Timmons (2022), Chapter 10: <i>Moral Contractualism</i> [T1]

Syllabus

Course: SYC 596E – Scientific Research, Ethics and Seminar (CRN: 13106)

Semester: 2025-2026 Fall

Instructor: Gökem Giray (girayg@itu.edu.tr)

Day, time, and place: Wednesday, 10.30-12.29, FEB 000

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suikkanen (2020), pp. 1-23: <i>Scanlon's Contractualism & Objections to Scanlon's Contractualism [Sui]</i>
Week 8 (19.11.25)	Virtue Ethics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 8: <i>Virtue Ethics</i> • Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 10: <i>Virtue Ethics</i> • Rachels & Rachels (2019), Chapter 12: <i>Virtue Ethics</i>
Week 9 (26.11.25)	Feminist Thought and the Ethics of Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 11: <i>Feminist Ethics and the Ethics of Care</i> • MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 9: <i>Feminist Thought and the Ethics of Care</i> • Rachels & Rachels (2019), Chapter 11: <i>Feminism and the Ethics of Care</i>
SECTION III. APPLIED ETHICS	
Week 10 (03.12.25)	Sexual Morality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 23: <i>Sexual Morality</i> • MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 12: <i>Sexual Morality</i> <p>P.i. J. Corvino, <i>What's Wrong with Homosexuality?</i> In Timmons (2017), pp. 94-102.</p> <p>P.ii. R. Halwani, <i>Virtue Ethics and Adultery</i>. In Timmons (2017), pp. 113-119.</p>
Week 11 (10.12.25)	Sexism, Racism, and Reparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 18: <i>The Legacy of Racism</i> • MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 13: <i>Equality and Discrimination</i> <p>P.i. A. E. Cudd & L. E. Jones, <i>Sexism</i>. In Timmons (2017), pp. 217-226.</p> <p>P.ii. T. Shelby, <i>Is Racism in the "Heart"?</i> In Timmons (2017), pp. 240-247.</p>
Week 12 (17.12.25)	Globalization and Immigration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 17: <i>Globalization and Immigration</i> • MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 20: <i>Global Justice and Globalization</i> <p>P.i. G. Hardin, <i>Lifeboat Ethics</i>. In Timmons (2017), pp. 642-647.</p> <p>P.ii. F. Engels, <i>The Attitude of the Bourgeoisie Towards the Proletariat</i>. In F. Engels, "The Condition of the Working-Class in England".</p>
Week 13 (24.12.25)	The Environment, Consumption, and Climate Change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 14: <i>The Environment [SL1]</i> • MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 16: <i>Environmental Ethics [MF1]</i> The Ethical Treatment of Animals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 13: <i>Animals [SL2]</i> • MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 17: <i>Animal Ethics [MF2]</i>
Week 14 (31.12.25)	War, Terrorism, and Torture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shafer-Landau (2019), Chapter 19: <i>Terrorism [SL1]</i> • MacKinnon & Fiala (2018), Chapter 19: <i>Violence and War [MF1]</i>

	Privacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shafer-Landau (2022), Chapter 19: <i>Privacy [SL2]</i>
--	---

Syllabus

Course: SYC 596E – Scientific Research, Ethics and Seminar (CRN: 13106)

Semester: 2025-2026 Fall

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is defined by the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) as “a commitment to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. By embracing these fundamental values, instructors, students, staff, and administrators create effective scholarly communities where integrity is a touchstone. Without them, the work of teachers, learners, and researchers loses value and credibility. More than merely abstract principles, the fundamental values serve to inform and improve ethical decision-making capacities and behavior. They enable academic communities to translate ideals into action.”¹

The fundamental values for academic integrity² are,

Honesty: We must be honest with ourselves and with our academic community, and develop trust.

Trust: We must trust our work and trust others, thus make others trust our work.

Fairness: We must be fair and acknowledge others’ efforts, such as those whose ideas we use in our works.

Respect: We must respect ourselves and others in our academic community. Reciprocal respect will lead to the flourishing of knowledge, contribute to active learning and healthy communication, and prevent taking advantage of others.

Responsibility: We must take responsibility for our actions, including our works, and be accountable. This will strengthen the bonds within our academic community. It is required both for our respect to ourselves and for the reciprocal respect between ourselves and others.

Courage: “Being courageous means acting in accordance with one’s convictions”¹ and, as members of the academic community, we must have courage in order to trust our works and take the responsibility for our actions. “Only by exercising courage is it possible to create communities that are responsible, respectful, trustworthy, fair, and honest and strong enough to endure regardless of the circumstances they face.”¹

Instructor: Görkem Giray (girayg@itu.edu.tr)

Day, time, and place: Wednesday, 10.30-12.29, FEB 000

In this course, students are expected to act in line with the values of academic integrity and strictly avoid forms of breaching academic integrity (also referred to as “academic misconduct” or “academic dishonesty”) such as plagiarism, recycling or resubmitting work, fabricating information, collusion, exam cheating, contract cheating, impersonation, and unapproved use of digital technologies including AI.³

! This course enforces a zero-tolerance policy for behaviours breaching academic integrity, and any such violation will result in a final grade of BZ. Students must be aware that copying others’ work or presenting someone else’s words as their own—whether deliberate or accidental—constitutes plagiarism. This is a serious academic offense with weighty consequences.

“Ignorance is never an excuse for academic dishonesty.”
(Academic Integrity at MIT: A Handbook for Students)

Resources on Academic Integrity:

- <https://odek.itu.edu.tr/en/code-of-honor/ethics-in-university-life>
- <https://integrity.mit.edu/>
- <https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/academicintegrity/about>

¹ International Center for Academic Integrity [ICAI]. (2021). *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity* (3rd ed.). <https://academicintegrity.org/resources/fundamental-values>

² A more detailed explanation of each of those fundamental values can be found in the publication mentioned in the previous footnote.

³ For definitions of those behaviours undermining academic integrity, visit <https://www.sydney.edu.au/students/academic-integrity/breaches.html>