

COURSE NUMBER: PHI 119
COURSE TITLE: Introduction to Ethics
SEMESTER: Spring 2019
CREDITS: 3 Credits
CAMPUS: Greensboro Main Campus
PREREQUISITES: None
FOR WHOM PLANNED: For students with little or no experience with philosophy

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

Jeffrey Kaplan

Office: 232 Curry

Email: jikaplan@uncg.edu

Office Hours: Mon & Wed, 12noon-1pm, at Tate Street Coffee

DESCRIPTION:

What is the morally right thing to do? Is there some moral law that applies to everyone, or is morality relative in some way? And what's so good about morality anyway? In this course, we will study these questions, and traditional attempts to answer them. In addition to studying philosophy, we will also *do* philosophy. That is, while being informed by the answers and arguments of Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Hume, Bentham, Nietzsche, Singer, O'Neill and others, we will develop and defend our own answers to these questions. We will be thinking critically and carefully about the nature of right and wrong. This is an introductory level philosophy course. Students do not need any prior experience with philosophy.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This course is part of UNCG's General Education Program. More specifically, it falls under the general education category of *Philosophical/Religious/Ethical Perspectives* (abbreviated as "GPR"). Here are the student learning outcomes (abbreviated at "SLOs") for this category:

1. Describe and analyze at least two significant philosophical, religious, and/or ethical theories or traditions.
2. Compare and contrast the assumptions, arguments, beliefs, and/or practices of two or more theories or traditions.
3. Apply the general description of at least two theories and/or traditions to specific instances.

The assignments and methods of evaluation for this course are designed to achieve these GPR student learning outcomes, but the course also includes its own, more specific student learning outcomes (called "course specific SLOs"). They are the following. Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. characterize and compare the principles at the center of first-order ethical theories (GPR SLOs 1 & 2),

2. apply those theories to specific cases, and explain how differences in their application bear on the theories themselves (GPR SLOs 2 & 3),
3. analyze a metaethical (i.e., second-order ethical) issue (GPR SLOs 1 & 2),
4. distinguish the argument given for an ethical or metaethical position from the position itself (GPR SLOs 1 & 2),
5. assess and compare those arguments (GPR SLO 2).

TEACHING METHODS:

The meetings of this class will not consist solely, or even mostly, of the instructor speaking and you quietly listening. Rather, you should come to class having read the material and prepared to participate in a discussion. Typically, I will begin class by recapping the material and explaining things, and we will transition into discussion. I will often call on students to share their thoughts, summarize part of the reading, or read a short passage out loud. Come prepared to participate.

The course begins with a focus on specific ethical theories, primarily utilitarianism and Kantianism. These theories are understood with a focus on the principle of utility and the categorical imperative (course specific SLO 1; GPR SLOs 1 & 2). However, it becomes clear that the plausibility of these theories can be assessed through the examination of cases, which often serve as counterexamples (course specific SLOs 2, 4, & 5; GPR SLOs 1, 2, & 3). In the assessment of utilitarianism in particular, it becomes clear that it is possible to reject certain components of the ethical theory, while preserving others (course specific SLOs 1 & 4; GPR SLOs 1 & 2).

The second unit of the course makes a metaethical turn, asking what compels us to obey the prescriptions handed down by ethical theories (course specific SLOs 3, 4, & 5; GPR SLOs 1 & 2). There is an emphasis on how moral and ethical issues relate to other norms of normativity (course specific SLO 3; GPR SLO 2). The final unit of the course focuses on a different metaethical question, “Is morality relative in some way?” (course specific SLO 3; GPR SLO 2). After different varieties of ethical skepticism and relativism are distinguished, several arguments in favor of relativism are considered, and responded to (course specific SLOs 3, 4, & 5; GPR SLOs 1 & 2).

EVALUATION AND GRADING:

Beginning-of-Lecture Quizzes (course specific SLOs 1, 2, 3, & 4; GPR SLOs 1, 2, & 3):

There will be an electronic reading quiz for every reading at the beginning of lecture.

Why?

Students can only learn how to have a philosophical discussion if their peers come prepared by having done the reading. These quizzes guarantee that everyone does the reading, so everyone can engage in a productive discussion.

What does “electronic quiz” mean?

The students go to b.socrative.com on any internet browser. Questions are displayed in the front of the class, and students input their answers on their devices. The responses are recorded and

displayed—anonously—in front of the room. We then discuss the answers. Altogether, the quiz takes 10 minutes. We will do a practice quiz the first day.

What will the questions be like?

The questions are multiple choice. Most of them are designed to be very easy if you have done the reading and impossible if you have not. A small percentage of the questions require you to not only have done the reading, but to have understood it.

Are there other details that you could not naturally fit into this question-and-answer format?

The quizzes serve as a de-facto way to taking attendance. When calculating your final grade, your lowest 4 quiz grades will be dropped.

Exams:

There will be a midterm exam and a final exam. These will be conducted through Canvas. The final exam will be cumulative in the sense that some questions on the final exam will concern material covered during the first half of the course. More details about the exams will be distributed in class during the semester. (Course specific SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5; GPR SLOs 1, 2, &3).

Grade Breakdown:

1. Beginning-of-Lecture Quizzes¹ (35%)
2. Midterm (30%)
3. Final Exam (35%)

Constructive, thoughtful, enthusiastic, and polite class participation will be used to ‘bump up’ borderline grades.²

Grading Scale:

A	93-100%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D+	67-69%
D	63-66%
D-	60-62%
F	0-59%

¹ This is the average grade of all beginning-of-lecture quizzes, except for the 4 lowest grades, which are dropped when calculating this portion of the grade.

² In extremely rare instances, disruptive class participation will harm a student’s grade.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

There are no required textbooks. All readings will be pdf files provided on Canvas. However, you (the students) are responsible for printing paper copies of all of the readings. You can have them printed at any copy/printing center and have them bound, or you can print each reading as you go along through the semester. But on the day in which we discuss a reading, you must have a paper copy of the reading with you in class.

Why?

Because we will be referring to the readings in class, and you cannot use electronic devices during class. In particular, you need a printed copy of the first reading by the time we discuss it in class. If you are reading this on the first day of class, then that is soon!

Is there a lot of reading for this course?

No. But also, yes. This is an introductory course, and the readings are appropriate for first-time philosophy students. Some of the readings are short (in some cases, only a few paragraphs). But they are dense and may be more difficult than what you are accustomed to reading. It is not unreasonable to read a text three or four times, put it aside, and later read it several more times. Most of the readings come with reading guides, which say what to read and provide guidance without actually explaining the content of the readings. Passing this course will require a significant amount of time and effort.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

This schedule is subject to change. You should complete the reading assignments *before* the date associated with that assignment, and be prepared for the beginning-of-lecture quiz. Also, most of the readings are accompanied by reading guides. These are documents written by me, your instructor, to help make the readings easier to understand. They include definitions of obscure terms, and they tell you which sections of the reading are most important. The reading guides also say which portions of the reading to read, and which portions should be skipped entirely. So they should be read first (i.e., before the readings that they are guides to). If a reading has an associated reading guide, it is followed by an asterisk (*).

M	Jan 14th	Introductory Meeting; no reading
The Content of Morality: What is the morally right thing to do?		
W	Jan 16th	Jeremy Bentham, <i>Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> , Ch. 1*
F	Jan 18th ³	
M	Jan 21st	Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. No class.

³ Last day to change course(s) or course section(s) without special permission. Last day to withdraw from a course for tuition and fees refund.

W	Jan 23rd	Jeremy Bentham: <i>The Rationale of Reward</i> , Book III, Ch. 1, just paragraph 8*
F	Jan 25th	Robert Nozick, <i>The Experience Machine</i> ⁴ *
M	Jan 28th	Jeremy Bentham, <i>Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> , Ch. 13*
W	Jan 30th	Jeremy Bentham, <i>Offenses Against One's Self</i> , selection*
F	Feb 1st	J.J.C. Smart, <i>Utilitarianism and Justice</i> ⁵ *
M	Feb 4th	Peter Singer, <i>Famine, Affluence, and Morality</i> ⁶
W	Feb 6th	
F	Feb 8th	Onora O'Neill, <i>Kant on Treating People as Ends In Themselves</i> , selection ⁷
M	Feb 11th	
The Authority of Morality: Why should we do the morally right thing?		
W	Feb 13th	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I, selections*
F	Feb 15th	
M	Feb 18th	Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , selections* (and Tom Ley on Jim Harbaugh)
W	Feb 20th	
F	Feb 22nd	Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> , First Essay, selections*
M	Feb 25th	
W	Feb 27th	Review for Midterm Exam
F	Mar 1st	Midterm Exam
M	Mar 4th	Spring break. No class.
W	Mar 6th	Spring break. No class.
F	Mar 8th	Spring break. No class.
The Objectivity of Morality: Is morality relative in some way?		
M	Mar 11th ⁸	A.J. Ayer, <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i> , Chapter 6, selection*
W	Mar 13th	
F	Mar 15th	David Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> , Book III, Part 1, §1, selections.

⁴ This is a selection from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

⁵ This is a selection from *An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics*.

⁶ Also read “Peter Singer's Drowning Child Argument” by Philosophy Bro.

⁷ Do not read the last two sections, “The Limits of Kantian Ethics: Intentions and Results” and “Kant and Respect for Persons.”

⁸ Last day to withdraw from a course without incurring a WF grade (withdraw failing).

M	Mar 18th	Bernard Williams, <i>Interlude: Relativism</i> ⁹ *
W	Mar 20th	
F	Mar 22nd	John Locke, <i>Two Treatises of Government</i> , Book II, Chapter 2, Sections 4 & 6*
M	Mar 25th	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> *
W	Mar 27th	
F	Mar 29th	Russ Shafer-Landau, <i>Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?</i> , Chapter 1
M	Apr 1st	Russ Shafer-Landau, <i>Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?</i> , Chapter 2
W	Apr 3rd	Russ Shafer-Landau, <i>Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?</i> , Chapter 3
F	Apr 5th	
M	Apr 8th	Russ Shafer-Landau, <i>Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?</i> , Chapter 11
W	Apr 10th	
F	Apr 12th	Barbara MacKinnon & Andrew Fiala, <i>Reasons Supporting Ethical Relativism</i> ¹⁰
M	Apr 15th	
W	Apr 17th	Russ Shafer-Landau, <i>Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?</i> , Chapter 14
F	Apr 19th	Spring holiday. No Class
M	Apr 22nd	Instructor out of town. No Class
W	Apr 24th	Russ Shafer-Landau, <i>Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?</i> , Chapter 14
F	Apr 26th	Russ Shafer-Landau, <i>Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?</i> , Chapter 17
M	Apr 29th	
W	May 1st	Review for Final Exam

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY: Students are expected to abide by the UNCG Honor Code. For all major assignments, students will be required to sign the university's academic integrity policy.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: I will not be taking attendance, but coming to class regularly is essential to success in this course. Moreover, the beginning-of-lecture quizzes function to impose an attendance policy of sorts. When calculating that portion of the final grade, each student's 4 lowest quiz grades will be dropped.

⁹ This is a selection from Williams's book, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*.

¹⁰ This is a selection from their book, *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*.

FINAL EXAMINATION: There will be a final exam for this course. The date and time of the final exam depends on which section you are enrolled in this semester:

Spring 2019		
PHI 119-01	MWF 10am in Curry 241	Final Exam: Monday, May 6th 12 Noon–3:00 P.M.
PHI 119-02	MWF 11am in Curry 238	Final Exam: Wednesday, May 8th 8:00–11:00 A.M.

More details will be provided during the semester.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

Electronic Devices Policy:

Students are not permitted to use any electronic devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.) during class.

- *Why?*

Here is a list of *real things that I actually witnessed* students do on the internet during lecture:

- Browsed Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Shopped for boots (did not make a purchase)
- Googled “how to focus in class”
- Booked round-trip ticket to Paris
- Read half of the Wikipedia entry on Plato
- Played first-person shooter game

No one comes to lecture planning to play a video game. What happens, I suspect is the following. Listening to a lengthy philosophical lecture is difficult and requires a good deal of focus. Inevitably, students zone out. This is the crucial moment: will they listen with even greater focus and figure out what they missed while continuing to take in the new information, or will they give up? Access to the internet makes giving up almost irresistible.

- *Are there any exceptions to this policy?*

Yes, the only exceptions are (a) if you have a relevant disability with official documentation by the UNCG Office of Accessibility and Services and (b) for the beginning-of-lecture quizzes, explained above.