

Moral Issues

Philosophy 150-001, TR, 9:30am – 10:45am, Ross 1060
UNC Syllabus – FALL 2023

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

Instructor: Josh Brekel (He/Him/His)

Office: N/A

Email: josh.brekel@unco.edu

Virtual Office Hours:

10-11am Mondays, 10:30-11:30am Fridays, or by appointment. A zoom link will be provided on Canvas at the beginning of the semester.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Lafollette, Hugh. *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, 5th Edition.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course aims to analyze relevant moral issues in the service of introducing students to the academic study of philosophy. The course will begin with an overview of how philosophical methods can be used as tools for clear-thinking. Then, we will consider some popular ethical theories, which will provide students with the tools needed to contemplate the nature of key moral and social problems. Finally, we will apply philosophical methods and ethical theories to various moral issues, with the goal of understanding the nuances of the debates around those moral issues. It is my hope that careful analysis of these issues can provide students with the tools they need to consider the moral issues that arise in their lives.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students will examine the details of various ethical issues, all of which are relevant to their lives (in some way). Furthermore, students will develop an understanding of the nature of the philosophical arguments in favor of various positions on those ethical issues. Study of academic philosophy cultivates other valuable skills as well. During every class session this semester, we will carefully examine philosophical arguments and texts. By engaging in close-reading of complex works, students will hone their ability to retain information and gain understanding via reading. Throughout the semester, students will also practice the craft of argumentative writing. Many of the course assignments give students the opportunity to refine their ability to write in a clear, charitable, and persuasive manner. The three overarching goals of this course are to:

1. Improve student reading comprehension,

2. Improve student argumentative writing,
3. Demonstrate the value provided by close study of philosophy and philosophical ethics.

DIVERSITY & RESPECT OF OTHERS:

To provide the most benefit possible, philosophical inquiry requires diversity in perspectives. In this class, the perspective of each student matters, regardless of the student's race, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, ancestry, and religious or political views.

Not only is it your right to be passionate about the issues considered in this course, but it can be philosophically commendable to approach these issues with some degree of intensity. However, philosophical contemplation requires open-mindedness. As your instructor, part of my job is to put pressure on your opinions and help you consider the value in the opinions with which you disagree. By considering ways in which your long-held, passionate opinions (whatever those happen to be) might be mistaken, you will (hopefully) gain more respect for the gravity of the issues, the perspectives of others, as well as a better understanding of the ways to support your own views.

Not only will disagreements occur—they are welcome in this class. Keep your fellow *classmates* in mind and engage in disagreements in a respectful manner. You are welcome to fervently disagree with the opinions of others, but it is **never** acceptable to disrespect the *people* who hold those opinions. If something I or another student says offends you, then let me know so that we can work together to resolve the issue.

EXPECTATIONS:

Academic credits are expected to meet the federal credit hour definition of **2-3 hours** of work outside of class **for every hour** of time spent in class. Basic class expectations include the following:

- Come to class,
- Carefully read the listed readings **prior** to class,
- Be willing to engage in class discussion, and
- Complete listed assignments by the listed due dates.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Academic integrity is taken seriously in this course. It is expected that students will maintain a high standard of academic integrity—cheating will not be tolerated. This course will adhere to the UNC Academic Integrity Policy and the BEAR Code found in Section 3-2-211 of the UNC Student Code of Conduct. Unless written permission is given by the instructor, the use of ChatGPT, Google Bard, or other Large-Language Models (LLM) is strictly prohibited and will be treated as academic

misconduct. At an absolute minimum, instances of academic misconduct will result in a substantial grade penalty on the assignment. Often, academic misconduct is grounds for a failing grade in the course. Talk to the instructor if you have questions about academic integrity.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

The course assignments are described in the table below.

Category	Description	Final Grade Allocation
Skill-Building Assignments	Throughout the semester, there will be 5 low-stakes assignments designed to build your philosophical skills.	4% each, 20% total
Class Participation	<p>Each day, attendance will be taken via a sign-in sheet or a free-writing exercise. I do not require perfect attendance, but regular attendance is vital to class success. Signing the sign-up sheet and then immediately leaving class is a violation of academic integrity. I reserve the right to use unannounced (“pop”) reading quizzes to ensure consistent class participation.</p> <p>Frequent participation in philosophical inquiry can only improve this aspect of your course grade. Participation includes (but is not limited to): in-class discussion, philosophical discussions in office hours, or digital communication about non-administrative course topics.</p>	10%
Papers	<p>You will be required to write 2 short papers. The paper topics will be given out approximately two weeks before the paper’s due date. Paper topics focus on clear and accurate presentation of class readings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper #1 is worth 15% of your overall course grade. • Paper #2 is worth 20% of your course grade. <p><u>To pass the course, you MUST complete BOTH paper assignments; in other words, failure to submit a paper results in a failing grade.</u></p>	35%
Exams	<p>There will be one closed-book midterm exam which will count for 15% of your overall grade.</p> <p>There will be a closed-book, cumulative final exam. The final exam will test your understanding of the course material and your ability to connect that material to the larger story of the course. The final exam counts for 20% of your course grade.</p> <p>There is a chance that there will be small extra credit opportunities on the exam(s). All extra credit is up to the instructor’s discretion.</p> <p><u>To pass the course, you MUST take BOTH exams; failure to do so will result in a failing grade.</u></p>	35%

GRADING SCHEME:

On individual assignments, this course uses letter grades corresponding to the grading scheme below.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Letter Grade	Percentage	Letter Grade	Percentage
A+	100 to 96.5	B/B-	68.49 to 65	D+	36.99 to 33.5
A+/A	96.49 to 93	B-	64.99 to 61.5	D+/D	33.49 to 30
A	92.99 to 89.5	B-/C+	61.49 to 58	D	29.99 to 26.5
A/A-	89.49 to 86	C+	57.99 to 54.5	D/D-	26.49 to 23
A-	85.99 to 82.5	C+/C	54.49 to 51	D-	22.99 to 19.5
A-/B+	82.49 to 79.0	C	50.99 to 47.5	F	19.49 to 0
B+	78.99 to 75.5	C/C-	47.49 to 44		
B+/B	75.49 to 72	C-	43.99 to 40.5		
B	71.99 to 68.5	C-/D+	40.49 to 37		

For the final course grade, the instructor will calculate each student's average letter grade, weighted by the assignments listed in Course Assignments section. Then, the instructor will report the nearest allowed letter grade to the UNC Registrar's Office.

LATE-WORK POLICY:

Late work will be subject to penalty of **one letter grade step per day late** unless:

- The student provides official documentation (from the university) that explains why the assignment was turned in late.

There are **no exceptions** to this policy. This course uses a generous grading scheme and late policy in recognition of the difficulty of balancing college with other aspects of life. However, success in college requires a certain level of dedication and commitment from students. For those reasons, official documentation is the only way to avoid being penalized for late work.

If University-sanctioned extracurricular/co-curricular activities or religious holidays prevent a student from attending class, then it is the responsibility of that student to notify the instructor prior to the anticipated absence. Furthermore, it is the student's responsibility to take the initiative to make-up missed work in a timely fashion. In other words, let the instructor know about any absences or conflicts before they occur so that we can work together to find a solution.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

This is an extremely tentative plan for the semester. As the semester proceeds, it may become necessary to check Canvas for updates to the reading schedule. If you have questions about the

reading schedule, then ask those questions in class, office hours, or via email. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they are staying up-to-date with the course readings and assignments.

Week	Date	Class Meeting	Topic	Readings	Assignments Due
1	8/22/23	1	Syllabus		
	8/24/23	2	The Nature (and Danger?) of Philosophy	Schur, "Introduction" from <i>How to Be Perfect</i> (Canvas)	
2	8/29/23	3	Reading Workshop	Kaplan, "How to Read Philosophy" (Video, Canvas)	
	8/31/23	4	Moral Skepticism	Morrow, "Chapter 9: Skepticism, Subjectivism, and Relativism" from <i>Moral Reasoning</i> (Canvas)	SBA#1 (Reading)
3	9/5/23	5	Divine Command Theory	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (Canvas)	
	9/7/23	6	Writing Workshop		
4	9/12/23	7	Consequentialism	Shaw, "Consequentialism" (A#1)	SBA#2 (Writing)
	9/14/23	8	Deontology	McNaughton and Rawling, "Deontology" (A#2)	
5	9/19/23	9	Virtue Ethics	Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory" (A#4)	
	9/21/23	10	Theory Review		Paper#1
6	9/26/23	11	Death Penalty	Pojman, "In Defense of the Death Penalty" (A#51)	
	9/28/23	12	Death Penalty	Reiman, "Against the Death Penalty" (A#52)	
7	10/3/23	13	Review		
	10/5/23	14	Midterm		Midterm
8	10/10/23	15	Free Speech	Arthur, "Sticks and Stones" (#35)	
	10/12/23	16	Free Speech	Altman, "Speech Codes and Expressive Harm" (A#36)	
9	10/17/23	17	Euthanasia	Beauchamp, "Justifying Physician-Assisted Deaths" (A#5)	
	10/19/23	18	Euthanasia	Velleman, "Against the Right to Die" (A#6)	
10	10/24/23	19	Euthanasia	Hardwig, "Dying at the Right Time: Reflections on (Un)assisted Suicide" (A#8)	SBA#3 (Reading)

	10/26/23	20	Abortion	Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" (A#10)	
11	10/31/23	21	Abortion	Marquis, "An Argument that Abortion is Wrong" (A#12)	
	11/2/23	22	Abortion	Little, "The Moral Permissibility of Abortion" (A#13)	
12	11/7/23	23	Writing Workshop		SBA#4 (Writing)
	11/9/23	24	Animals	Singer, "All Animals Are Equal" (A#15)	
13	11/14/23	25	Animals	Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights" (A#17)	
	11/16/23	26	Environment	Rolston, "Animal Welfare and Environmental Ethics" (Canvas)	Paper#2
14	11/21/23	27	Environment	Gardiner, "A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics, and the Problem of Moral Corruption" (A#26)	
	11/23/23		Thanksgiving		
15	11/28/23	28	Poverty	Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (A#61)	
	11/30/23	29	Review		SBA#5 (Reflection)
	12/4/23	30	Final Exam	8-10:30am, same classroom	Final Exam

UNC COURSE DESCRIPTION:

An introduction to moral reasoning about issues such as drug use, capital punishment, world hunger, animal rights, internet privacy, discrimination and sexual morality.