



# OGLETHORPE

UNIVERSITY

GO ROME

How Ought We Live?

An Introduction to Ethics and the Good Life

PHI-202-01

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## **Course Description**

Descriptive theories explain *how things are* (e.g. the table is hard; most Georgians drive to work) whereas normative or prescriptive theories explain *how things ought to be*. Ethics is about what ought to be, not what is; it is a branch of philosophy that investigates the set of questions that arise when we think about the question “how ought one act, morally speaking?” If you are confronted with a situation and must determine how you ought to act, what principles do you use for determining, assessing, and justifying your actions and behaviors? In this course, we will examine a set of answers to the latter questions. These ethical theories are concerned with finding principles which allow one to determine whether an action is right, wrong, good, or bad and to provide overarching principles to which one could appeal in resolving difficult moral decisions. After examining these ethical theories, we will apply them to practical and contemporary social issues such as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, animal rights, war, public health, and the global environment. Ideally, your own views with respect to these contemporary social issues will be more rationally grounded when you leave this course.

## **Learning Outcomes**

From our studies you will become acquainted with ethical theories that provide standards for determining whether an action is right, wrong, good, or bad. You will also apply these theories to contemporary social issues such as abortion, capital punishment, animal rights, and the global environment. By the end of the semester each of you will be able to

- ✓ Provide an account of at least five ethical theories that provide criteria for determining the rightness, wrongness, goodness, or badness of actions: ethical egoism, utilitarianism, deontology, cultural relativism, and virtue ethics.
- ✓ Apply the traditional ethical theories to contemporary social issues.
- ✓ Demonstrate your own rationally grounded arguments as they relate to ethical theory and contemporary social issues.

## **Methods of Instruction**

Our classes will be a mixture of lecture and discussion with the majority of each class devoted to the latter. There will be regular reading and writing assignments. What you get from this course and how well you do in it depends on the time you devote to preparing for class and the thoughtfulness with which you approach the material. To succeed in this course, you not only

need to read the assigned reading and do the assigned written work, you must also actively engage yourself with the material and come to class prepared to participate fully in class discussions.

### **Required Texts**

James E. White, *Contemporary Moral Problems* (January 2011, 10th Edition), Cengage Learning Publishers

ISBN 10: 0840033788 or ISBN13: 978-0840033789

### **Methods of Assessment**

- A) Two Short Papers: 10% each, Total Percentage of Grade 20%**
- B) Three Quizzes: 15% each, Total Percentage of Grade 45%**
- C) Final Exam: 25%**
- D) Participation and Attendance: 10%**

#### **A) Two Papers**

You will write two four page papers for this course. For these papers, you will choose a contemporary social issues and analyze it from the utilizing one of the ethical theories you have learned. You should consider these papers as learning opportunities in which you will not only deepen your thinking on a particular question or issue but also continue to sharpen your abilities to read critically and communicate your thoughts in a clear, well-reasoned manner. Your grade for the papers will be based on the quality of your insights about the issue being examined, your use of the text in supporting these insights, and the coherence of your argument and presentation. Please note: these papers are NOT book reports and neither are they regurgitations of the discussions we have in class. Instead, they are papers in which you will be critically examining a moral theory and/or contemporary moral problem and developing and deepening your understanding of the questions and issues it raises.

*\*All papers are to be typed, double-spaced.*

*\*All papers are due in my Oglethorpe email inbox at the beginning of class time on the date that they are due.*

*\*You must also submit a hard copy of your paper in class on the date that they are due.*

*\*Your paper must include the OU honor code pledge: "I pledge that I have acted honorably."*

*Signed \_\_\_\_\_*

*\*If you need an extension on a paper you must ask me no less than three days prior to the due date. Papers handed in late (without my permission) will have 5 points deducted from the grade for each day that it is late. Papers that are more than 1 week late will not be accepted.*

#### **B) Three Quizzes**

You will have three quizzes, the first three weeks of the course. The quizzes will assess your knowledge of the normative theories we have discussed. The format of the quizzes will be a mixture of short answer and one longer short essay question.

#### **C) Final Exam**

The final exam for this class will be cumulative and will cover all of the material that we have read and discussed throughout the entirety of the course. The exam will include 5-10 questions and you will write a short essay answer for each question.

#### **D) Participation/Attendance**

A portion of your final grade depends on your attendance and participation in this course. In short, to succeed and get the most from this class, you must come to class and you must come prepared, ready to participate in discussions, and ready to engage with the text in a serious and meaningful way.

Participation: You are expected to be a regular and active participant in discussions and you are expected to contribute to those discussions in meaningful and positive ways. Not all participation is equal: to say something just to say something is not a meaningful contribution to the discussion. Participation in discussion is the best way for you to dig into the text and to decipher your own questions and thoughts concerning it.

Attendance: You are expected to come on time to every class and there is a ZERO absence policy for this class. This means that you are not allowed to miss a class and for every class you do miss, 10 points will be deducted from your final grade.

*\*The following is meant only as a rough guide as to how your participation grade will be determined:*

A: Participates voluntarily and frequently. Shows a good grasp of the material and good preparation.

B: Participates voluntarily with less frequency but still makes an important contribution to the class discussion.

C: Participates voluntarily but shows a lesser grasp of the material or little preparation.

D: Participates only when asked to do so.

F: Does not participate or is frequently absent.

Please see the university's policy with regard to INCOMPLETE grades in OU's Bulletin.

### **Course Policies and Classroom Ethics**

#### **Classroom Ethics:**

- Respect yourself and one another in the classroom. The obvious aim of this course is to provide an opportunity for you to engage in some of the most stimulating and controversial questions in ethics and contemporary society. A classroom environment that is conducive to such learning must be one in which each person is able to freely express his/her thoughts, to ask questions, to make mistakes, to disagree in a non-combative way, and to learn from and with one another. In short, use neither disrespectful speech nor any other form of disrespectful behavior towards one another.
- Cell phones and all other electronic devices (laptops, tablets, music devices, etc.) may NOT be used in the classroom. They are unnecessary and distracting.
- Do not leave the room during class unless it is absolutely necessary. Leaving the room while class is in session is disruptive to your learning and to the learning of others.
- Enjoy yourself!

#### **Course Policies:**

- **Honor Code.** You are expected to adhere to standards of personal and academic integrity and to uphold the Oglethorpe University Honor Code. For a complete account of the Honor Code, review Section 10 in the 2015 *Bulletin*. All work you hand in should carry the Honor Code pledge as it is quoted above. You are required to refrain from engaging in acts that do not maintain academic and personal integrity. These include but are not limited to plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, aid of academic dishonesty, lying, bribery or threats, and stealing. Each of these violations can be thought of as a

form of cheating. Oglethorpe University defines cheating as “any willful activity impacting or connected to the academic enterprise and involving the use of deceit or fraud in order to attempt to secure an unfair advantage for oneself or others or to attempt to cause an unfair advantage to others.”

**Any violation of academic integrity is grounds for failing this course.**

- **Students with Disabilities.** I will work with Oglethorpe University to provide reasonable accommodations for every student with a learning disability or special learning needs. If you need special accommodations, please give the relevant documentation to the Learning Disabilities Coordinator or me. It is the student’s responsibility to register for services with the Learning Disabilities Coordinator and to discuss his/her needs with his/her professor.

### **Class Schedule:**

#### **WEEK ONE: Ethical Theory**

##### **Monday:**

What is Ethics? Testing our Ethical Intuitions

##### **Tuesday:**

Psychological Egoism

James Rachels: Egoism and Moral Skepticism

##### **Wednesday:**

Ethical Egoism

James Rachels: Egoism and Moral Skepticism

##### **Thursday:**

Cultural Relativism and Moral Isolationism

Mary Midgley: Trying Out One’s New Sword

QUIZ #1

#### **WEEK TWO: Ethical Theory**

##### **Monday:**

Utilitarianism

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism

##### **Tuesday:**

Utilitarianism (Cont.)

John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism

##### **Wednesday:**

Deontology

Immanuel Kant: The Categorical Imperative

##### **Thursday:**

Deontology (cont)

Immanuel Kant: The Categorical Imperative

QUIZ #2

#### **WEEK THREE: Ethical Theory and Contemporary Social Issues**

##### **Monday:**

Virtue ethics

Aristotle: Happiness and Virtue

##### **Tuesday:**

Virtue Ethics (cont)

Aristotle: Happiness and Virtue

**Wednesday:**

Capital Punishment

The Supreme Court--Gregg v Georgia

Immanuel Kant: The Retributive Theory of Punishment

**Thursday:**

Abortion

The Supreme Court: Roe v Wade

Judith Jarvis Thompson: A Defense of Abortion

Don Marquis, "A Future Just Like Ours"

QUIZ #3

**WEEK FOUR: Contemporary Social Issues**

**Monday:**

Euthanasia

James Rachels: Active and Passive Euthanasia

Bonnie Steinbock: The Intentional Termination of Life

**Tuesday:**

Just War Theory

**Wednesday:**

War and Terrorism :

Thomas Nagel: What Is Wrong with Terrorism?

David Luban: The War on Terrorism and the End of Human Rights

**Thursday:**

Animal liberation and Vegetarianism:

Immanuel Kant: Our Duties to Animals

Peter Singer: All Animals are Equal

Alastair Norcross: Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases

PAPER #1 DUE FRIDAY BY NOON

**WEEK FIVE: Contemporary Social Issues**

**Monday:**

Same Sex Marriage

Jeff Jordan: Is it Wrong to Discriminate on the Basis of Homosexuality?

David Boonan: Same Sex Marriage and the Argument from Public Disagreement

**Tuesday:**

Poverty, Famine, Homelessness—Our Duty to Others

**Wednesday:**

Review for Final Exam

PAPER #2 DUE

**Thursday:**

Final Exam

