

# PHIL 21001: Introduction to Ethics

Spring 2024 · WEB COURSE · No Fixed Meeting Times

**Professor:** Dr. Gina Zavota

**Office:** 320 Bowman Hall, Room G

**Office Hours:** MW 12:15-2:15 & 3:45-4:15 (in person and on Teams)  
and remotely by appointment

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## Graduate Assistants

## Email

## Office Hours

Nathan Brant

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MW 12:30-2:00

Anya Galperin

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Th 10:00-12:00 & 2:00-3:00

Tim Lin

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T 3:30-5:00 & F 10:00-11:30

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T 2:00-5:00

**Remote Office Hours Procedure:** All remote office hours for this course will be held in Teams unless otherwise specified. The links to access Dr. Zavota's and the Graduate Assistants' office hours can be found on the home page for this course on Canvas.

The times listed above are the hours we'll definitely be available for in-person appointments and/or Teams meetings. You don't need to make an appointment to meet with us at those times; just come to the office or join the Teams meeting. If those times aren't good for you, we'd be happy to schedule a different time to meet. We look forward to seeing you during office hours, whether in person or remotely!

## COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course will introduce you to some of the ways in which philosophers have approached the field of ethics, or the study of moral choices and values. Over the course of the semester, we will study several ethical theories, including relativism, utilitarianism, the ethics of duty, and virtue ethics; in many cases, we will consider contemporary as well as historical sources from various cultures and traditions. We will gain a solid understanding of each system, its strengths and weaknesses, and the various philosophical terms and concepts associated with it. In addition, we will come to appreciate the relevance of these moral theories in today's world, by using them to examine the debates surrounding important contemporary ethical issues.

**Learning Outcomes:** This course has several distinct but related learning outcomes. In particular, **after successfully completing the course, you should be able to:**

- **understand and explain various systems of moral reasoning**, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each system
- **understand the nature of moral reasoning** and recognize both strong and weak arguments within the realm of ethics
- **recognize some important contemporary moral issues** and the various positions people might take when they discuss these issues
- **construct strong, rational arguments** in defense of your own positions, applying principles learned from studying different ethical theories
- **critically read texts** containing ethical arguments, analyze the strengths and weaknesses of those arguments, and respond to those arguments with a well-reasoned argument of your own
- **appreciate the diversity of ethical theories and views**, even those you disagree with
- **comfortably and respectfully discuss moral issues with others**, including people whose views are

different from your own

- **understand the ethical aspects of your interactions with others and your actions in society**

The critical thinking, reasoning, writing and argumentation skills that you will acquire in this course will benefit you no matter what your major is or what type of career you choose to pursue. In addition, the study of ethical theories is important for its own sake, since it is a vital tool for better understanding ourselves, the world we live in, and the people we share it with.

**Diversity Element:** This course may be used to satisfy 3 credits of the University Global Diversity Requirement. It will include philosophical works written from feminist, BIPOC, and non-Western perspectives.

**Kent Core:** This course may be used to satisfy 3 credits of the Kent Core Humanities requirement.

**Prerequisites:** There are no prerequisites for this course.

## STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

**Weekly Modules:** This course has 16 weekly modules, each of which will consist of the following components:

- **Study questions** designed to help you study for the weekly quiz. While the quiz questions will not be identical to the study questions, the quiz will not cover any material not addressed by the study questions. Thus, if you are able to answer all of the study questions, you should be able to do well on the quizzes.
- **One or more readings** in PDF format
- **A PowerPoint video or videos with narration**, which will serve as your “lecture(s)” for the week
- **A quiz** which you will need to take by the end of the week
- **A discussion board** in which you will post a response to a discussion question and reply to other students’ responses, **or a journal entry** to complete; the journal assignments are designed to help you connect the ideas in the readings to your daily life outside the classroom

Since this is an entirely asynchronous online course, you are responsible for completing the weekly readings on your own time. I strongly suggest that you read through the weekly readings once, then watch the narrated PowerPoint(s), and then work through the readings again while answering the study questions, before beginning the quiz.

**Discussion Boards for Questions:** In addition to the graded discussions, there are two discussion boards for this course which will be available throughout the semester, where you can ask public questions:

- The “**Content Questions**” discussion is where you should ask any questions you might have about the readings. It is important that you post your questions here, since some of your classmates will probably have the same question as you, and thus they will also be able to read my response there. This also means that, if you have a question, you should check to see whether it’s been answered in the Questions Forum form first.
- The “**General Questions**” discussion is where you should ask any questions that are *not* about difficulties you’re having understanding the readings, such as questions about the assignments, course requirements, or the structure of the class.

Of course, if you have any personal questions or concerns (e.g. regarding your grade, illness or other circumstances that might keep you from completing an assignment on time), you can **e-mail me at [gzavota@kent.edu](mailto:gzavota@kent.edu)**.

**I expect students to observe normal rules of etiquette when posting on the discussion boards.** It goes without saying that no offensive language or bullying will be tolerated and that students should treat each other with respect. Do not share anything from this class with others who are not in the class; similarly, do not communicate anything confidential or private within the class. In addition, you should write in complete sentences, as if you're writing a paper for a class or a professional document, not like you would write in a social media post or text. Any posts that do not comply with these guidelines may be removed.

## REQUIRED TEXTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

**Required Text:** All readings will be made available on Canvas; you are not required to purchase any texts.

**Assignments:** All assignments, feedback, and grades will be made available on Canvas. A running total of your weighted average in the course will also be available on the "Grades" page in Canvas throughout the semester. Grades will generally be posted approximately a week after the due date for the assignment.

Your final grade will be based on your performance on the following:

- 1) **Weekly Quizzes:** (*graded out of 10 points*): quizzes will include multiple-choice, multiple answer, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, matching, and short answer questions
  - each week's quiz will become available only **after you click through the week's study questions, readings, and narrated PowerPoint lecture(s)**
  - you will have **30 minutes** to complete each quiz, starting when you begin the quiz
  - **you will not be able to pause the quiz in the middle or restart it**, so you should make sure that you have an uninterrupted 30 minutes to take the quiz before starting it
  - **you will not be able to go back and change your answer to a question once you've moved on to the next one**
  - **your lowest quiz grade will be dropped**
  
- 2) **Discussion Board Posts and Replies** (*10 points total, including post (7 points) & two replies (1½ points each)*)
  - a) **Post:** you will be required to respond to several discussion questions over the course of the semester
    - each week's discussion will be open **from noon Monday to 11:59pm the following Sunday**
    - you must answer all parts of each discussion question; for multi-part questions, you should devote a roughly equal number of words to each part of the question
    - your response must be **at least 300 words** in length (this is roughly equivalent to one double-spaced typed page)
    - your response must contain your own original thought and a well-reasoned argument in support of your position and must demonstrate that you have understood the reading(s)
    - **you will not be able to edit your response after posting it**, so be sure to proofread and edit carefully before posting
    - your posts will be graded based on how well you demonstrate your understanding of the material, as well as how thorough, complete, clear, and well-reasoned they are
    - **you should not use any outside sources in your response**; you will lose points if you discuss concepts that were not in the readings or lectures, even if these concepts are described accurately

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** You will not be able to see or reply to other students' posts until you have posted your own response to the discussion question. The discussion board is set up this way to ensure that each student posts their own original reply to the question, without seeing how others have responded. As a result, **you will only be allowed to post one response to the discussion question. If you post a blank or incomplete post, that will be counted as your response.** I recommend that you type out your response in a different app and cut and paste it into the discussion board to minimize the possibility of errors.

- b) **Replies:** you will also be required to write **two brief replies to posts** each week; **at least one of the replies must be a reply to an original post from a classmate** (in other words, not a reply to a reply)
- you will not be able to see or reply to other students' posts until you have posted your own response to the discussion question (see (a) above)
  - your replies must be **at least 150 words** long each (roughly equal to ½ a double-spaced page)
  - your replies must be substantive and contain the following components:
    - a brief statement of the point made by the person you're replying to
    - a statement of whether or not you agree with the poster's point or position
    - an explanation of *why* you agree or disagree

- 3) **Ethics Journal:** throughout the semester, you will complete several brief entries in an online journal; each will ask you to apply the theories we'll be studying to your own life and experiences outside the classroom
- the journal entries differ from the papers and discussion board posts in that they focus on your own experiences, as opposed to demonstrating your understanding of the texts or applying that understanding to current events or issues; because of this, **journal entries will only be graded "excellent," "satisfactory," or "unsatisfactory" (1, .5, or 0)**
  - each journal entry should be approximately **2-3 paragraphs long** and will be due Sunday at 11:59pm like the other assignments

## GRADING PRACTICES

Your final grade will reflect your performance on the various types of assignments as explained above. The percentages are summarized in the table below.

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade
Quizzes	50%
Discussion Board Posts & Replies	30%
Ethics Journal	20%
Total	100%

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

Total Points	Final Grade
93-100	A
90-92.99	A-
87-89.99	B+
83-86.99	B
and so on...	
67-69.99	D+
60-66.99	D
<60	F

**Late or Missed Assignments:** If you think that you will not be able to complete an assignment on time, you will be allowed to turn the assignment in late with no penalty **only if** (1) you have an acceptable reason for the delay (see below), **and** (2) you provide documentation of whatever caused you to miss the assignment. **You must contact me before the due date to request an extension if you meet criteria (1) and (2) listed above.**

**Students who miss a quiz, discussion, or journal assignment due to an unexcused reason will receive a grade of zero on the missed assignment, and no makeups will be allowed.**

**Acceptable reasons for a late assignment** include illness or a medical or family emergency. Documentation is required for an extension on the assignment to be granted, either prior to the due date or as soon as possible after it. Situations where documentation is impossible will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

## TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

**Internet Access:** This is a fully online course with no fixed meeting times or face-to-face component. As a result, it is extremely important that you ensure that you have regular access to a laptop or desktop computer with consistent, reliable internet access, as well as a backup plan if your Wi-Fi goes out or your computer breaks. Computer malfunction or lack of internet access will not be accepted as an excuse for not completing an assignment or taking a quiz on time. Further information regarding technology requirements for online courses can be found on the [Getting Started in Your Online Course](#) web page.

**Canvas:** This is the official platform for this class, and it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with it before the start of the semester. In order to login to Canvas, you will need a Kent State FlashLine User ID and password. You can access Canvas at <https://canvas.kent.edu> or through FlashLine. Canvas works best using the latest version of Chrome, Safari, or Firefox. Do not use Internet Explorer. **Students have reported issues with the Canvas mobile app, so it is recommended that you complete the assignments for this course in a web browser.**

**Email:** A university-assigned student e-mail account is the official university means of communication with all students at Kent State University. Students are responsible for all information sent to them via their university-assigned e-mail account. Students who choose to forward information in their university e-mail account are responsible for all information, including attachments, sent to any other e-mail account. To stay current with university information, students are expected to check their official university e-mail account on a frequent and consistent basis.

Dr. Zavota and the Graduate Assistants will communicate with the class through the Announcements function in Canvas, so make sure that your Canvas account is configured to notify you whenever there is a new announcement in this course.

We will check our email at least once per day Monday through Friday, and at least once during the weekend. **We will generally respond to all emails within 24 hours during the week, and within 48 hours on the weekend.** If there are special circumstances that will delay responses, I will make an announcement to the class.

**Technology Help:** Kent State University offers 24/7 technology support to all students. For technical issues with your computer, any KSU-supported software, Canvas, FlashLine, or your kent.edu email, please contact Information Services via phone, email, or Live Chat. More information, including contact information, is available on the [Information Services](#) web page. Students can access tech help day or night by calling 330-672-HELP. **Please contact the Helpdesk for technical assistance; we will not be able to assist you with technical issues.**

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

**Students with Disabilities:** University policy 3-01.3 in the *University Policy Register* requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note that you must first verify your eligibility through Student Accessibility Services (contact (330) 672-3391 or visit <http://www.kent.edu/sas> for more information on registration procedures).

**Academic Dishonesty:** University policy 3-01.8 in the *University Policy Register* deals with the problem of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism. None of these will be tolerated in this class. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. It is recommended that students familiarize themselves with this policy at <http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/administrative-policy-regarding-student-cheating-and-plagiarism>. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

**Academic Complaint Procedure:** The Philosophy Department Grievance Procedure for handling student grievances is in conformity with the Student Academic Complaint Policy and Procedures set down as University Policy 4-02.3 in the *University Policy Register*, which can be found at <http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/administrative-policy-and-procedure-student-academic-complaints>. For information concerning the details of the grievance procedure, please see the departmental chairperson.

**Add/Drop and Withdrawal Deadlines:** The official registration deadline for this course is **January 22, 2024**. The last day to drop the course without a “W” appearing on your record is **January 29, 2024**. The withdrawal deadline for this course is **April 1, 2024**. University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Students must confirm enrollment by checking their class schedule in FlashLine prior to the deadline indicated. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline.

**Intellectual Property:** Any intellectual property displayed or distributed to students during this course (including but not limited to PowerPoint presentations, notes, quizzes, examinations) by the professor/lecturer/instructor remains the intellectual property of the professor/lecturer/instructor. This means that the student may not distribute, publish, or provide such intellectual property to any other person or entity for any reason, commercial or otherwise, without the express written permission of the professor/lecturer/instructor. Additionally, students may not distribute or publish recordings and/or links to live classroom presentations, lectures, and/or class discussions. **Please respect the intellectual property of your instructor by not posting class materials online.**

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Kent State University is committed to the creation and maintenance of equitable and inclusive learning spaces. This course is a learning environment where all will be treated with respect and dignity, and where all individuals will have an equitable opportunity to succeed. The diversity that each student brings to this course is viewed as a strength and a benefit. Dimensions of diversity and their intersections include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, national origin, primary language, age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, mental and physical abilities, socio-economic status, first-generation student status, family/caregiver status, and veteran status.

**Land Acknowledgment Statement:** We acknowledge that the lands of Kent State University were the previous homes of people who were removed from this area without their consent by the colonial practices of the United States government. Before removal, these groups created networks that extended from Wyoming to the Florida Coast and Appalachia and to the northern reaches of Lake Superior. These societies included people of the Shawnee, Seneca-Cayuga, Delaware, Wyandots, Ottawa and Miami. We honor their lives – both past and present – and strive to move beyond remembrance toward reflection and responsibility through honest accounts of the past and the development of cultural knowledge and community.

**Accommodations for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs:** In accordance with House Bill 353, KSU permits students to request class absences, without penalty, for up to three days per term in order to participate in organized activities conducted by a religious or spiritual organization. The request must be made to your instructor, in writing, during the first fourteen (14) days of the semester and must include the date(s) of each proposed absence. The request must clearly state that the proposed absence is to participate in religious activities and must describe the particular accommodation(s) you desire. For further information, please contact the Student Ombuds at [ombuds@kent.edu](mailto:ombuds@kent.edu).

# READING & ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

**Notes: All readings are available on Canvas in the weekly modules.**

**Remember that you will also have a weekly quiz that will be due by Sunday at 11:59pm each week!**

<b>TOPICS</b>	<b>WRITING ASSIGNMENTS</b>	<b>DUE DATE</b> (all due at 11:59pm US Eastern Time)
<b>Week 1: Introduction; Why study philosophy?</b> Basic Concepts in Moral Reasoning (video lecture only; no reading) Coles, "The Disparity Between Intellect and Character"	Discussion Board #1	Sunday, Jan 21
<b>Week 2: Cultural Relativism</b> Benedict, "A Defense of Cultural Relativism" Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"	Discussion Board #2	Sunday, Jan 28
<b>Week 3: Ethical Egoism; Consequentialism, Part 1</b> Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book II (excerpt) Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Chapter 1	Journal #1	Sunday, Feb 4
<b>Week 4: Consequentialism, Part 2</b> Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Chapters 2, 3	Discussion Board #3	Sunday, Feb 11
<b>Week 5: Communalism and African Ethics</b> Gyekye, "An Essay on African Philosophical Thought"	Journal #2	Sunday, Feb 18
<b>Week 6: Deontological Ethics, Part 1</b> Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i>	Journal #3	Sunday, Feb 25
<b>Week 7: Deontological Ethics, Part 2; Confucian Ethics</b> Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , continued <i>The Analects of Confucius</i> (excerpt)	Discussion Board #4	Sunday, Mar 3
<b>Week 8: Virtue Ethics, Part 1</b> Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I	Journal #4	Sunday, Mar 10

<b>Week 9: Virtue Ethics, Part 2; Buddhist Ethics</b> Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II "The Four Noble Truths"	Discussion Board #5	Sunday, Mar 17
<b>Week 10: Civil Disobedience</b> Plato, <i>Crito</i> (excerpt) King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"	Discussion Board #6	Sunday, Mar 24
<b>Week 11: SPRING BREAK</b>		
<b>Week 12: Feminist Ethics</b> Gilligan, "The Ethics of Care: Moral Orientation and Moral Development"	Journal #5	Sunday, Apr 7
<b>Week 13: Ethics and the Question of Race</b> TBD	Discussion Board #7	Sunday, Apr 14
<b>Week 14: Native American Ethics</b> Cordova, "Ethics: The We and the I"	Journal #6	Sunday, Apr 21
<b>Week 15: Animal Ethics</b> Singer, "All Animals are Equal"	Discussion Board #8	Sunday, Apr 28
<b>Week 16: Environmental Ethics</b> Hill, "Preserving the Environment"	Journal #7	Sunday, May 5

**THERE WILL BE NO FINAL EXAM IN THIS COURSE**



