

**Introduction to Ethics**  
Instructor Lauren Lyons  
Fall 2021

*Class Sessions:*

Mondays and Thursdays, 11:00-12:20pm

*Office Hour:*

Monday 2:00-3:00pm

---

In this course, we will explore philosophical questions related to pressing moral and social issues. Along the way, you will become familiar with key ideas and debates in analytic ethics, broadly construed. You can think of the course as a philosophical exploration into the controversial topics we cannot seem to stop talking about.

The course is divided into four units. In the first, we will learn about canonical theories and approaches in moral philosophy. This unit will give you a “toolbox’ of concepts and ideas that we will use to think about the applied moral issues we explore in the rest of the course.

In the second unit, we will delve into moral questions about borders and migration. We will frame our discussion by thinking about cosmopolitan approaches to migration and global justice, and then home in on questions related to the right the amnesty and the meaning of citizenship. We close by considering the proposals of proponents of the open borders movement.

The third unit is about criminal justice ethics. We will first consider how, if at all, we can be morally justified in punishing people and what types of conduct we can justifiably criminalize, focusing on whether we ought to criminalize recreational drugs. Following, we will think about the role of race and inequality in criminal justice ethics, debating whether we ought to reform and/or abolish legal punishment and policing in light of present, non-ideal social circumstances.

For the final unit, we will consider moral questions connected to ongoing culture wars about gender and sexuality. We begin by thinking about how we should understand the meaning of sex, gender, and sexuality categories. Then, we will delve into moral issues pertaining to gendered speech and bioethical questions about the rights of trans and intersex children.

The objective of this course is to (i) to introduce you to philosophical ways of thinking through pressing moral and social issues and (ii) for you to become comfortable using them in analyzing such issues now and in the future. Some of these skills include reconstructing and evaluating arguments, clearly articulating moral arguments, and engaging in respectful and constructive philosophical debates.

### Course Structure

We will meet two times per week, on Mondays and Thursdays from 11:00am until 12:20pm EST. For each session, you will be required to complete discussion questions, which will be posted on the

course website (under “Assignments”) before the beginning of class. All readings will be posted in Canvas, under “Files.” Students are not required to purchase textbooks for the course.

Attending class at the scheduled time is mandatory, and I will take attendance at the beginning of each session. If you must miss class, please send me a note in advance. You are also required to participate in class discussions, and participation comprises a substantial portion of your grade (see more on grading below).

All students are also required to have their video turned on during the duration of class sessions unless you have spoken with me (and given me a reason for not doing so). If you are having issues with technology access, please let me know, and we will try to find a solution together.

Students will also be required to act as discussion leaders at some point during the course. A form to sign-ups for this (and details of the assignment) will be distributed in the first week of class.

After the first unit of the course, you will take an exam. The exam is designed to assess your grasp of the philosophical concepts and ideas we studied during the unit as well as your analytical skills, such as identifying and evaluating arguments. The second major assessment is a philosophical essay. We will spend one class session going over the expectations for this assignment. For the final, students can either write an essay or take an exam.

Finally, it’s important to note that many of the issues we deal with in the course are sensitive and controversial. Thus, it is crucial we are respectful, professional, and constructive to one and other. We will discuss our community agreements for the class in the first session.

## Schedule

### *Unit 1: The Basics of Moral Philosophy*

Thursday 9/2

1 • What is Philosophy?

No reading.

Tuesday 9/7

Legislative Monday– **No Class**

Thursday 9/9

2 • Utilitarianism

Reading: John Stuart Mill, “What Utilitarianism Is;” Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine”

Monday 9/13

3 • Deontology

Reading: Onora O’Neill, “A Unified Account of Kant’s Ethics”

Thursday 9/16

4 • Virtue Ethics

Reading: Nafsika Athanassoulis, “Virtue Ethics” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Monday 9/20

5 • Moral Theories in Practice I

Reading: Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre"

Thursday 9/23

6 • Moral Theories in Practice II

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Monday 9/27

7 • Unit I Exam

*No Reading*

*Unit 2: Ethics of Borders and Migration*

Thursday 9/30

8 • Cosmopolitanism

Reading: Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Chapters 1 and 10

Monday 10/4

9 • Introduction to Ethics of Immigration

Reading: Christopher Heath Wellman, "Immigration" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Thursday 10/7

10 • Amnesty and Refugees I

Joseph Carens, "Refugees" in *The Ethics of Immigration*

Monday 10/11

11 • Amnesty and Refugees II

Reading: David Owen, Chapters 1 and 3 in *What Do We Owe to Refugees*,

Thursday 10/14

12 • Open Borders I

Reading: Joseph Carens, "Aliens and Citizens— the Case for Open Borders"

Monday 10/18

13 • Open Borders II

Reading: David Miller, "Immigration: The Case for Limits"

*Unit 3: Prisons, Police, Prisons, and Protest*

Thursday 10/21

14 • Injustice and Mass Incarceration

Glen Loury, "Race, Incarceration, and American Values" (p. 1-41)

Monday 10/25

15 • Why Punish?

Zachary Hoskins, entry on "Punishment" in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Thursday 10/28  
16 • Decriminalization  
Doug Husak, "Four Points About Drug Decriminalization"

Monday 11/1  
17 • Prison Reform and Abolition  
James Cullen, "Ways to End Mass Incarceration;" Rachel Kushner, "Are Prisons Necessary?"  
Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change Your Mind"

Thursday 11/4  
18 • Police Reform and Abolition  
Mariame Kaba, "Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police;" Jeffrey Isaac, "Why Abolition of the Police is a Bad Idea;" "8 To Abolition" Policy Demands

Monday 11/8  
19 • Protest and Civil Disobedience  
Reading: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "How Do We Change America?;" Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail;" and Paul Heideman, "When Rioting Works"

Thursday 11/11  
20 • Philosophical Writing Workshop  
Reading: "A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper"

#### Unit 4: Ethics and Trans Issues

Monday 11/15  
21 • Introduction to Trans Issues in Philosophy  
Reading: Bettcher, "Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues" (SEP)  
[Essay outline due]

Thursday 11/18  
22 • Trans Identities  
Reading: Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority"

[Essay due on Sunday 11/21]

Monday 11/22  
23 • Gendered Speech I  
Reading: Kapusta, "Misgendering and its Moral Contestability"

Thursday 11/25  
Thanksgiving Break– No Class

Monday 11/29  
24 • Gendered Speech II  
Reading: Robin Dembroff and Daniel Wodak, "He/She/They/Ze"

Thursday 12/2

25 • Bioethics and Trans Youth I

Reading: Maura Priest, "Transgender Children and the Right to Transition: Medical Ethics When Parents Mean Well but Cause Harm"

Monday 12/6

26 • Bioethics and Trans Youth II

Reading: Lehrbach and Gleaves, "Beyond fairness: the Ethics of Inclusion for Transgender and Intersex Athletes"

Thursday 12/9

27 • Course Wrap-Up

### **Assignments and Grading**

Your grade for the course will be based on your homework assignments, participation, attendance, exam, first paper, and final assignment.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Homework: 20%
- Participation (incl. kickstart assignment): 10%
- Attendance: 10%
- Unit 1 Exam: 20%
- First Response Paper: 20%
- Final Exam or Paper: 20%

### **Course Policies**

#### Lateness Policy

Homework assignments may not be turned in late under any circumstance. Readings assignments and homework questions will generally be posted in advance of the due date, so it will be possible for you to complete your homework early if you have a conflict. It is important that papers be turned in on time, and late papers will be subject to a five-point deduction for each day the paper is late.

Note that I am accommodating of extenuating circumstances (I am human, after all!), so please reach out to me if you have any issues meeting deadlines. It's best that you reach out to me as soon as possible— extensions will be granted on a discretionary basis, and the earlier I hear about the issue the better. I want you all to succeed in this course and am willing to work with you to make that happen.

#### Blind Grading

I will grade all major assignments blindly. I will give details about how to submit your assessments anonymously when I distribute assignment instructions.

#### Email Policy

I only check email on weekdays during normal hours (9-5pm), and I will usually respond within 48 hours. If you haven't heard from me in 48 hours, feel free to send a follow-up. Canvas is the best way to contact me, though I regularly check my Rutgers email ([lauren.lyons@rutgers.edu](mailto:lauren.lyons@rutgers.edu)) as well.

### Academic Integrity

Plagiarism of any form is unacceptable and will not be tolerated, both on papers and in homework assignments. For more information on what constitutes plagiarism, see:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

### Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

I am committed to doing my best to accommodate students with disabilities. Please reach out to me with any issues. I may ask you to present a valid Letter of Accommodations. For more information, see: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations/letterof-accommodations/>

### Religious Observance

I am happy to accommodate special needs related to students' religious practices. Please notify me in writing within the first two weeks of class if you will need such accommodation at any point during the semester.

### Extra Credit

If you are concerned about your grade in the course, there may be opportunities for extra credit or paper rewrites on a case-by-case basis. It is also possible that I will offer an extra credit opportunity to the entire class at some point during the semester.

### Meetings

The best time to meet with me is during my office hour. If you cannot make it to my office hour, please be in touch and we can try to make an appointment for another time in the week.

### **Resources**

I recommend that you consult the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* when/if you have any questions about course material or would like to know more about a topic. I am also very willing to provide additional readings on any topic that interests you.

I am also very happy to chat with you via our Canvas site.