

Current Moral & Social Issues
Rutgers University
Fall 2021

Instructor: Amir Saemi (saemi.amir@gmail.com)

Office Hours: MH 12:30-1:30 (with appointment)

Course Description: This course is an introduction to some of the major issues in contemporary moral philosophy. We begin by exploring some preliminary questions about the nature of morality. We will then overview the major schools of normative ethics including Kantian Ethics, Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics. Using the ideas presented in those schools, we tackle some important current moral and social issues including lying and honesty, paternalism, animal rights, collateral damage in war, and happiness.

Course Goals:

- Learn about the main schools of moral philosophy
- Learn how to approach difficult theoretical problems in a careful and rigorous manner
- Learn to grasp subtle distinctions, formulate general abstract principles, and apply these principles to specific cases.
- Learn how to apply theoretical knowledge to current moral and social issues
- Learn to write in a way that clearly presents an argument, explicitly identifying its premises and outlining its logical structure
- Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, value, and/or cultural production

Required Texts: All readings will be provided through Canvas.

Course Requirements: Your grade will be determined by your active participation in class (10%), two papers (70%), four quizzes (20%).

Grading Scale: The grading scale for the course is as follows:

- A = 89.5-100
- B+ = 84.5-89.49
- B = 79.5-84.49
- C+ = 74.5-79.49
- C = 69.5-74.49
- D = 59.5-69.49
- F = 0-59.49

Active Participation (10%): All students are expected to do the assigned reading and come to class *prepared*. Your attendance would not be very helpful to you if you are not prepared for the class. To show that you are prepared for the class, *for each class*, you have to bring *one question* from the reading to be discussed in the class. Your question would not be graded. However, if I see that your question is not relevant to the reading, or that it is very sloppy, then you would miss the participation point for that class. You will be allowed two absences. Your participation grade will be adjusted downward by a third (e.g. A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for each additional absence. If I notice that you are consistently late to lecture, or that you are distracting other students, or that you are being discourteous, then your participation grade will be adjusted downward. Students absent for any of the reasons such as, religious observances, official university activities, documented illness, death of a family member or loved one, must inform me with official or verifiable written documentation before the fact. In case your absence is justified by proper documentation, you don't to submit any question.

Two paper (70%). Each paper consists of you writing a four to five page paper in response to a question given to you in the class. You will be provided with a prompt approximately two weeks before the paper is due. If you do not like the prompt, you can write your paper on another topic. But the topic must be related to the course and it must be approved by me. Your paper grade will be adjusted downward by a third (e.g. A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for each day it's late.

Each paper counts for 35% of your final grade.

The first paper is due October 15th

The Second paper is due December 10th

Four Quizzes (20%). Each Quiz consists in multiple-choice questions. Each quiz will be on the first class after finishing the relevant part. The last quiz would be on the final day of the class.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: *All* written work for the course must be your own. Be sure to cite any works you use, including web sites, books, and articles. Presenting *anyone* else's work as your own is considered plagiarism.

Disabilities: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>.

If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of

Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

The following schedule is tentative and may be changed with prior notification from the instructor.

TOPIC 1: Preliminary Issues

- *A brief introduction to logic*
- Russ Shafer-Landau, *Ethical Relativism*
- Russ Shafer-Landau, *Religion and Morality*

TOPIC 2: Kantian Ethics

- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*
- Christine Korsgaard, *The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil*
- Senna Shiffrin, *Lies and the Murderer Next Door*
- Gerald Dworkin, *Paternalism*

TOPIC 3: Consequentialism

- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*
- Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Consequentialism*
- Russ Shafer-Landau, *Problems of Consequentialism*
- Peter Singer, *The life you can save*
- Gaverick Matheny, *Utilitarianism and Animals*
- Joseph Desjardins, *Responsibilities to the Natural World: From Anthropocentric to Nonanthropocentric Ethics*
- Warren Quinn, *Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect.*
- Frowe, *Immunity of Noncombatants in war*
- Thomas Scanlon, *Contractualism and Utilitarianism*

TOPIC 4: A Third Method of Ethics, Virtue Ethics

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics.*
- Rosalind Hursthouse, *Virtue Ethics*
- Julia Annas, *Happiness as achievement*