

Introduction to Ethics

Jerry Piven, Ph.D.

In case of *emergencies*, I can be reached at (201) 936-5843, or email me at jerry.piven@rutgers.edu

Ethics is the attempt to understand moral concepts and justify moral principles. What should I do? How do I determine what's right and wrong? Is moral good in the intention or the consequence of my actions? Everyone disagrees on what people should do. Is it all personal opinion? Cultural values? Is it all relative? Should I question what I've been told? In this course we'll survey readings in ethics and moral philosophy to understand different perspectives on how moral decisions can be made. We'll investigate such topics as virtue ethics, deontology, constructivism, objectivism, relativism, consequentialism, free will, and determinism.



Required Texts:

(Bring these to class!)

Gordon Marino (Ed.): *Ethics: Essential Writings*
Russ Shafer-Landau: *The Fundamentals of Ethics*

Assignments and Grading:

In *addition* to the required reading, the students will be assigned:

1) A midterm essay
of 4-6 pages
(40 % of total grade)

2) A final exam
(40% of total grade)

3) The task of participating in class!

You are expected to come to class prepared for a cordial and informed discussion of the material
(20% of total grade)

* **Grading** will be determined by the effort of the student, her/his evidence of having carefully read and contemplated the material, and her/his expression of independent thought on the ideas. Late assignments will suffer penalties as follows: the subtraction of one grade increment for every class the assignment is late.

* **Attendance** is mandatory. After the 3rd absence one letter grade will be subtracted from your final course grade. **Lateness** will not be tolerated. It is rude and disruptive, and may be considered a complete absence. Visible lack of preparation for a session will also be counted as a missed class and will result in a proportional deduction of points from the final grade.

* **Readings** consist of the required texts. There will also be a number of *optional* handouts supplied to help students understand the primary readings and provide perspective. Suggested readings appear below the required & optional handout readings and are for your interest and edification only.

IMPORTANT:

Class Credo and Ethic: Like all classes, philosophy is about the free exchange of ideas as well as relentless questioning of beliefs and concepts. You are entitled to your beliefs but in a philosophy class *no idea is spared* from questioning or examination. If you do not want your beliefs or faith questioned, you are *strongly* advised to enroll in other classes more suitable to your beliefs and temperament.

Participation and Conduct:

Cell phones, computers, MP3 players, video games, and other non-class-related accouterments will absolutely be turned off during class. There will be no web surfing, instant messaging, texting, tweeting, game playing, or any similar activities during class. These activities are disrespectful and disrupt the instructor and your fellow classmates. Students are expected to engage in lively discussion and spirited exchange. They need not agree with one another and they are encouraged to question ideas, but they must also be respectful towards other students and the instructor. You can argue forcefully for or against an idea, but are required to comport yourselves with civility.

Communications:

You may email me with concerns and questions, but do not expect me to recapitulate class lectures or discussions. Feel free to come by for office hours if you wish to discuss the ideas or other issues. Office hours will be by appointment, and usually before or after class sessions.

Academic Honesty:

Violations of Rutgers policies on academic honesty will not be tolerated in this course. Plagiarism and cheating will be grounds for failure, if not expulsion from the university.

COURSE OUTLINE:

I. INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

Overview and Course Goals
Distinguishing Moral Philosophy & Ethics
Ethical Questions & Problems

Readings:

- Marino, Introduction
- Shafer-Landau: Preface & Introduction

II. VIRTUE ETHICS

Action & Character
Moral Education & Responsibility
The Goals of Ethical Behavior

Readings:

- Plato: *Euthyphro* / *Crito* / *Republic* (Marino, pp. 3-42)
- Aristotle: *Ethics* (Marino, pp. 43-84)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapter 17

Suggested Readings:

Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue / A Short History of Ethics*
Laurence Thomas: *Living Morally*
Bertrand Russell: *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*

III. MORAL AUTHORITY

Who Decides What is Moral & Ethical?
Divine & Human Justification
Bases for Moral Reasoning

Readings:

- Augustine: *City of God* (Marino, pp. 107-118)
- Aquinas: *Summa Theologica* (Marino, pp. 119-133)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapter 5
- Anselm: (handout)
- Qutb: Milestones (handout)
- Ross: *Zen and the Art of Divebombing* (handout)

Suggested Readings:

Ruth Stein: *For Love of the Father*
Brian Victoria: *Zen at War*
Sam Harris: *Letter to a Christian Nation*

IV. THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Nature, Cooperation, & Self-Interest
Social Darwinism
Egoism, Predation, & Social Chaos
Civil Disobedience

Readings:

- Hobbes: *Leviathan* (Marino, pp. 134-148)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapters 7-9, 13 & 14

Suggested Readings:

Thomas Hobbes: *Behemoth*
John Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
Ayn Rand: *Atlas Shrugged* (read critically if you peruse this one....)

V. UNIVERSAL, PLURAL, AND RELATIVE ETHICS

Deontological Ethics: Obedience & Autonomy
Universal Moral Principles
Pluralism & Relativism
Intention & Consequence
Metaethics

Readings:

- Hume: *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Marino, pp. 149-187)
- Kant: *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Marino, pp. 188-224)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapters 11 & 12, 15, 16, 19, 21

Suggested Readings:

Immanuel Kant: *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*
Friedrich Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morals / Beyond Good & Evil*

V. UTILITARIANISM

The Needs of the Many & the Needs of the Few
Maximizing Happiness
Minimizing Misery
Sinister Implications of Consensus

Readings:

- Mill: *Utilitarianism* (Marino, pp. 225-255)
- Rawls: *A Theory of Justice* (Marino, pp. 378-395)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapters 9 & 10

Suggested Readings:

VI. FEMINIST ETHICS

Ethics and Othering

Feminine Experience

The Underrepresented and Disparaged

The Unthought & Unacknowledged

Readings:

- Midgley: *Trying Out One's New Sword* (Marino, pp. 321-327)
- Noddings: *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Marino, pp. 424-444)
- Wolf: *Moral Saints* (Marino, pp. 462-485)
- Arendt: *Challenges to Traditional Ethics* (handout)
- Beauvoir: *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (handout)
- El Sadaawi: *The Hidden Face of Eve* (handout)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapter 18

Suggested Readings:

Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*

Hannah Arendt: *Thinking Without a Bannister*

Judith Butler: *Undoing Gender*

Karen Horney: *Feminine Psychology*

Camille Paglia: *Sexual Personae*

Yosano Akiko: *Tangled Hair*

Evelyn Accad: *The Excised*

Nell Noddings: *Women and Evil*

Fatmagul Berktay: *Women and Religion*

Howard Eilberg-Schwartz & Wendy Doniger: *Off with Her Head!*

Rosemary Radford Ruether: *Religion and Sexism*

Rita Ransohoff: *Venus After Forty*

VII. CONCLUSIONS: FUTURE IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHICS

Extremist Relativism

Postmodernism, Multiculturalism, Politics, and the Conundrums of Intervention

Anarchy or Defensible Ethical Principles?

Suggested Readings:

John Caputo: *Against Ethics*

J. Edward Hackett: *What Caputo Got Wrong About Obligation*

Frans De Waal: *Good Natured*

Jesse Prinz: *The Emotional Construction of Morals*

Hilary Putnam: *Ethics Without Ontology*

R.M. Hare: *The Language of Morals*

Bernard Williams: *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*

