

Philosophy 470: Ethics and Practical Reason

Taught by Justin Kalef at Rutgers University, Fall 2020

Purpose and approach: There are epistemic norms and practical norms. Epistemic norms tell us what we ought to believe, while practical norms tell us what we ought to do. Ethical norms, we often think, are confined to practical matters: they tell us what which *actions* are morally compulsory, which *actions* are morally permissible, and which *actions* are morally impermissible. But some have questioned this assumption and suggested that we can be morally praiseworthy and blameworthy for *believing*, or *failing to believe*, certain propositions under certain circumstances. This version of PHIL 470 will be devoted to exploring this issue.

(Online) meeting places: All the readings, lectures, and announcements for this course will appear on our Canvas site. The discussion and question forums (see below) will also be held on the Canvas site.

However, I have also created a Slack site for us to use for quicker interactions. Slack is a text-based interactive app that you can easily download to your computer, phone or tablet. We will use the Slack for three main purposes:

- Conversations between teammates working on a project together (I will set up private channels for that purpose);
- Office hours;
- The final exam.

I have sent an invitation to **our Slack site** to all the email addresses that appear in my roster. Please check that email address for your invitation. If you can't find it, please let me know (I'm at jkalef@philosophy.rutgers.edu).

How much work this course will require

Any reasonably serious student in a serious university course should plan to spend 2-3 hours outside of class for every hour of official class credit, in addition to the indicated meeting hours. Since this is a 3-credit course, the total number of time you should plan to spend on this course each week is 9-12 hours.

Office hours: I will be available for consultation every Tuesday from noon to 3pm, on the Slack. If you are not available then, I am also available for consultation by email at jkalef@philosophy.rutgers.edu .

Readings: The course readings will appear on the Canvas site under 'Resources'. I will try to ensure that they are posted two weeks before we will cover them in class.

Grading: You can earn up to 100 points in this course. That will make it easy for you to calculate, at any time, how many more points you need to achieve a given grade. My grade conversions are a little unusual.

A grade of **A** is meant to indicate **outstanding** achievement. 85 points are needed for an A.

A grade of **B+** is meant to indicate **very good** achievement. 80 points are needed for a B+.

A grade of **B** is meant to indicate **good** achievement. 70 points are needed for a B.

A grade of **C+** is meant to indicate **fair** achievement. 65 points are needed for a C+.

A grade of **C** is meant to indicate **satisfactory** achievement. 55 points are needed for a C.

A grade of **D** is meant to indicate **barely acceptable** achievement. 50 points are needed for a D.

A grade of **F** is meant to indicate **failing** achievement. Anything below 50 points earns an F.

Points will be distributed as follows:

Contributions to the Discussions Forum.....4 x 15 =60 points

Team essays.....4 x 5 = 20 points

Final exam (December 20th or 22nd).....20 points

(Optional) Questions forum work.....8 bonus points

Syllabus/instructions bonus.....5 bonus points

Grade appeals will only be considered if the student has written out a full explanation of why he or she was misgraded. The student must also indicate how many points he or she wishes to win or lose. If the appeal is successful, I will add the points. If the appeal is not successful, I will **deduct the points** instead! Please only submit an appeal if you are absolutely sure there is no doubt that you should have earned the credit.

Explanation of the Syllabus/rules score: This score is the easiest one to earn. In fact, you have already provisionally earned five points out of five! The only challenge now is not to *lose* any of those points.

You are awarded those points for being responsible enough to read the syllabus and watch the videos and updates, and to take note of rules, policies, due dates, and other instructions. If you do that, wonderful: the four points are yours to keep. If, however, you fail to do those things

and instead compel me to repeat things to you that were already clearly written in this syllabus, you will lose some or all of these points.

Schedule

Later readings will be decided on as the course progresses.

Week 1: September 1st – 4th

Watch the introductory lectures (posted on Tuesday), then the lectures describing the four characters you may play as (these will be posted by Thursday). Please provisionally choose your character by Friday.

Week 2: September 8th - 11th

No readings this week – instead, please watch the lectures discussing the history of the approach we will refer to as ‘liberal science’. Those videos will be posted throughout the week, but they should all be up by Thursday.

Week 3: September 14th – 18th

Readings:

For Monday: William Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief* (<https://ajburger.homestead.com/files/book.htm#ethics>)

For Thursday: William James, *The Will to Believe* (<https://ajburger.homestead.com/files/book.htm#will>)

Week 4: September 21st – 25th

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Week 5: September 28th – October 2nd

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Week 6: October 5th – 9th

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Week 7: October 12th – 16th

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Week 8: October 19th – 23rd

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Week 9: October 26th – 30th

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Week 10: November 2nd – 6th

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Week 11: November 9th – 13th

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Week 12: November 16th – 20th

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Week 13: November 23rd – 27th

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Week 14: November 30th – December 4th

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Week 15: December 7th – 9th

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Final Exam: December 20th or 22nd (as will be decided based on student convenience), on the Slack.