

Philosophy 107: Introduction to Ethics

Taught by Justin Kalef at Rutgers University, Fall 2020

Purpose and approach: This course will teach you how to think about morality in a principled, reasonable and open-minded manner. You will also learn the fundamentals of philosophical thought and conversation.

I designed this course for you over the past three months. As far as I know, it is unlike any other introduction to ethics course taught anywhere else in the world. The course topic will be approached using somewhat radical active learning strategies. Rather than passively absorb lectures and memorize key points from the writings of great philosophers or the pages of a textbook, you and your fellow students will help to *create* the course material every week.

Active learning strategies have been repeatedly demonstrated to be the most effective at getting students to learn, but it has also been found that many students incorrectly believe that they learn less with these techniques even when there is excellent evidence to the contrary. Please make sure that this is the sort of course you're interested in taking!

Meeting time and (online) place: This course has a scheduled meeting from 1:00pm to 2:30pm every Monday. The meetings will *not* involve live video or audio feeds: they will take place on a **Slack** site I have put together for this course. **Our first meeting of the semester will take place on Tuesday, September 8th, at the usual 1pm meeting time** (Monday courses, rather than Tuesday courses, will be held on that day at Rutgers). To join this session, simply log in to the **Slack** by 1pm Eastern time. In order for this to be possible, you will have to have already accepted my invitation to you to join the Slack, which will be sent to the email address you provided to Rutgers to list by your name in the course roster. **Please accept this invitation and visit the **Slack site** during the first week of class so that we can be sure there won't be any difficulties on Tuesday the 8th.** On every Monday after the 8th, we will meet at the same place.

Any reasonably serious student 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-hour course, the total number of time you should plan to spend on this course each week is 9-12 hours. Our Monday meeting only covers 1.5 of those hours. Therefore, reasonably serious students should plan to spend an additional 7.5 – 10.5 hours working on the course each week.

How should you spend those study hours in this course? For the most part, by

- **Critically thinking through the implications** of the moral principles you'll be asked to consider;
- **Self-critically reconsidering** your initial reactions; and perhaps most important,
- **Bringing the results of that critical and self-critical reflection to our online discussions.**

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: There are no set readings for this course. You are responsible for watching all the lectures carefully, keeping up with all class discussions, and reading any additional materials I will write for the course (yes, I will write them myself in response to the natural development of our conversations). All those readings will appear on our Canvas site under **???** when they have been written.

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:

First week activities	5 points
Weekly team principles	6 points (plus possible bonus)
Weekly counterexample	12 points
Contribution score for Fortnights 1-6	30 points
Monday activities	25 points
Final exam	18 points
Syllabus and rules score	4 points

Explanation of Assignments

First week activities: Before 11:59pm on **Monday, September 7th**, please be sure to

a. take the **introductory quiz** on the **first lectures** (3 points) and

b. Do the counterexamples worksheet, discover the secret word, **log into the Slack**, and send me the secret word by direct message there. (2 points). The reason you're sending me this in the Slack is that I want to be sure you can log in for our class session at 1pm on the 8th.

Those (and only those) who were not registered in the course by Friday, September 4th will be given an opportunity to take a **makeup quiz** at some point after September 7th.

Weekly team principles: Each Friday after the first week, I will provide you with a moral principle and three cases for which it seems to be good. However, many of the principles I give you will be bad for reasons you will have to think through on your own. You and the teammates you'll be matched with will then have the choice: either agree completely with the principle, or produce a different principle and submit it to me by 6pm on Monday. Your new principle (if you reject mine and submit a new one) must also work well with the three cases I provided. Your team may, if it wishes, submit a justification for its principle.

The different team principles, and the principle I suggested, will be discussed between Monday and Friday. On Friday at noon, that discussion will end and I will look over how well the principles have fared. I will then give each team a half-point if the principle seems plausible at the end; a quarter-point if the team's initial principle wasn't very plausible but the time revised the principle into something plausible during the week (teams may revise their principles between noon and 11:59pm on Wednesdays by sending me a revised version then); and no points if the team ended up defending an implausible principle. Every member of each team will be given that score directly. Since you will do this on thirteen weeks, and I will drop each student's lowest score, you may earn up to six points for these activities. However, I will select, each week, the team whose principle is most plausible, and award that team a full point rather than a half point.

Weekly counterexamples: On Monday nights, I will publish all the team principles and justifications on Canvas. Between then and Wednesday morning, each student will have the job of picking *one* of the team principles (or my principle, if one of the teams chooses to endorse it) and coming up with *one* counterexample that clearly shows that the suggested principle fails. I will clarify what a counterexample is in the first week of class. I will score your counterexample as follows:

- A counterexample that very closely resembles another one that has already been posted will get no points.
- A counterexample that is slightly different but essentially the same idea as another one that has already been posted will get a quarter point.
- An original counterexample that leaves it unclear why the principle is weak will get a half point.
- An original counterexample that presents some reason for thinking the principle is weak but can be answered quite straightforwardly will get three quarters of a point.
- An original counterexample that presents a strong reason for thinking the principle is weak will get a full point.

You will do one of these each week for thirteen weeks (starting on Week Three), and I'll drop your lowest score. That leaves you with up to twelve points for this work.

Contribution score: From Wednesday afternoon to noon on Friday, there will be a general online discussion (asynchronous) on our Canvas site about the strengths and weaknesses of the various moral principles offered by the teams *and* of the counterexamples raised against them. My hope is that there will be, each week, an intense discussion over those two days, in which the principles are defended and attacked using philosophical reasoning. I have divided the course into six different two-week fortnights, starting on Week Two. At the end of each of these fortnights, I will give each of you a grade out of five points. Over the six sections of the course, you will therefore have a score out of thirty points. Scores for each fortnight will be as follows:

- Someone who has contributed nothing original to the discussions for the fortnight will earn **0** points.
- Someone who has contributed something original and clear, but whose relevance to the resolution of the issue is not obvious, will earn **1** point.
- Someone who has contributed something original, clear, and relevant, but that doesn't really help resolve the issue, will earn **2** points.
- Someone who has contributed *two* things that are original, clear, and relevant, but that don't really help resolve the issue, will earn **3** points.
- Someone who has contributed something original, clear, and relevant that helps resolve the issue and moves the discussion forward will earn **4** points.
- Someone who has contributed *two* original, clear, and relevant contributions that help resolve the issue and move the discussion forward will earn **5** points.

Only your *best* contributions in any fortnight will be counted. Therefore, if you fall into two or more of these categories, you get the score of the highest category.

There is no specific recommended word length: simply write enough to make your point clearly, and no more. (Please remember that others will have to read everything you write!)

Monday activities: Each Monday, during our 1pm-2:30pm meeting on the Slack, I will give you and your teammates a problem to try to solve together under a time constraint. In order to solve these problems, you will all have to have kept up with the class discussions so far, and you will have to have watched the summary lectures I will release each Friday (the lectures on the Friday just before the Monday meeting will of course be most important). On the basis of your team's work, your team will earn up to two points each week.

These points will *not* be distributed evenly to all team members, since some teammates may have worked harder than others and a few students (sad to say) take advantage of their hard-working teammates while doing nothing. Instead, your teammates' scores will be determined by a process, to be explained later, in which you will *anonymously* evaluate your teammates' work and indicate how many of the points earned should go to each of your teammates.

The teams will be reconfigured twice during the semester. The first teams will be established for the September 8th meeting; the second teams will be established for the October 12th meeting; and the third teams will be established for the November 16th meeting.

Final exam: **Our final exam will be held from 9-11am on Friday, December 18th.** The exam will count for 18 points. It will consist of an individual portion and a team portion (points earned on the team portion will, as in the case of the Monday activity points, be distributed in light of how much each student contributed).

Syllabus/rules score: This score is the easiest one to earn. In fact, you have already provisionally earned four points out of four. 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

Schedule

Introductory Week

Week 1: September 1st – 4th

Read the syllabus, **watch all lectures**, **take the quiz**, send me the answer to **the worksheet** through a direct message on the **Slack**. **First teams will be announced on Friday.**

First Fortnight

Week 2: September 8th - 11th

Tuesday: First meeting.

Wednesday: Canvas discussion from noon on Wednesday to noon on Friday, using my prompts.

Friday: New lectures posted.

Week 3: September 14th – 18th

1. Monday from 1-2:30: Class meeting and team activity.
2. Monday at 6pm: Your team must submit your principle to me through your team channel on the Slack.
3. Monday to Wednesday: look over the team principles (which will be posted on Canvas on Monday evening) and come up, *on your own* (without your team this time) with a counterexample to one of them. Please submit that **on Canvas** by noon on Wednesday. Also,
4. Wednesday afternoon to Friday at noon: continue to argue for or against the various principles on Canvas. Please be *particularly* careful to respond to weak arguments against your team's principle.
5. Wednesday at 11:59pm: last chance for your team to send me a revised version of your principle for the week.
6. Friday afternoon: the summary lecture and the prompt for next week's discussion will be posted on Canvas. Please watch it in preparation for Monday.

Second Fortnight

Week 4: September 21st – 25th

Same schedule as Week 3.

Week 5: September 28th – October 2nd

Same schedule as Week 4.

Third Fortnight

Week 6: October 5th – 9th

Same schedule as Week 5, except that **your (anonymous) peer evaluations of your teammates and point distributions are due by 3pm on Friday.**

Week 7: October 12th – 16th

Same schedule as Week 5, only this time you'll be working with your new teams starting on Monday.

Fourth Fortnight

Week 8: October 19th – 23rd

Same schedule as Week 5

Week 9: October 26th – 30th

Same schedule as Week 8

Fifth Fortnight

Week 10: November 2nd – 6th

Same schedule as Week 9

Week 11: November 9th – 13th

Same schedule as Week 10, except that **your (anonymous) assessments and point distributions for your teammates are due at 3pm on Friday.**

Sixth Fortnight

Week 12: November 16th – 20th

Same schedule as Week 10, but you'll be working with your final teams starting on Monday.

Week 13: November 23rd – 27th

Same schedule as Week 10

Final Fortnight

Week 14: November 30th – December 4th

Same schedule as Week 13.

Week 15: December 7th – 9th

Same schedule as Week 13, except that **classes end on Wednesday.**

Final Exam: 9am – 11am, Friday, December 18th, on the Slack.

*** Your final peer evaluations are due at 6pm on December 18th.**