

Philosophy 107: Introduction to Ethics
M/Th 9:50-11:10 AM, SC-206
Spring 2019

Instructor: Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini
Office: Philosophy Department Room 514, 106 Somerset Street, 5th Floor
Office Hours: Tu 10:00-11:00 AM (or by appointment)
Email: cdkgsp19@gmail.com (all assignments should be submitted to this address)

Class Description and Learning Objectives

This course is an introduction to ethical theory with an emphasis on practical ethics. We will begin with two foundational topics: the question of how to make sense of moral language and the debate between consequentialist and deontological theories. Then we will consider a number of ethical issues of contemporary significance: the value of human and animal lives, the permissibility of causing death, and the question of global poverty. Along the way, we will gain an understanding of fundamental concepts in ethical theory, explore some of the most important issues in practical ethics, and develop core philosophical abilities like reconstructing and evaluating arguments, articulating ideas precisely, and writing cogently.

Textbook

Singer, Peter. *Practical Ethics*, Third Edition. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Assignments and Grading

There will be three significant course requirements. First, there will be one homework assignment each week. Second, there will two 900-1200 word papers. Third, there will be a final examination at the end of the semester.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Homework: 30%
- First Paper: 20%
- Second Paper: 20%
- Final Exam: 30%

Course Structure

We will have one reading each week. Every Friday, you will be required to write a short (one-page) response to the reading by 5 pm EST. These responses must *not* merely

summarize the reading — they must describe a weakness in the author’s argument, defend the author’s argument against a criticism, or articulate a sophisticated question about the reading. All responses must be typed and submitted in PDF format.

Semester Overview

Week 1 (Week of Monday 1/21):

Reading: None

1/24 (Th): First Meeting (Introduction)

Week 2 (Week of Monday 1/28):

Reading: James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Chapters 2 (“The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”) and 3 (“Subjectivism in Ethics”) [§3.7 optional]

1/28 (M): Discussion

1/31 (Th): Lecture — Relativism in Ethics

Week 3 (Week of Monday 2/4):

Reading: Mark Schroeder, *Noncognitivism in Ethics*, Chapter 2 (“The Noncognitivist Turn”)

2/4 (M): Discussion

2/7 (Th): Lecture — Ethics and Speech Act Theory

Week 4 (Week of Monday 2/11):

Reading: James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Chapters 7 (“The Utilitarian Approach”) and 8 (“The Debate over Utilitarianism”)

2/11 (M): Discussion

2/14 (Th): Lecture — Consequentialism

Week 5 (Week of Monday 2/18):

Reading: Julia Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals*, Chapter 5 (“Kantian Ethics”)

2/18 (M): Discussion

2/21 (Th): Lecture — Deontological Ethics

Week 6 (Week of Monday 2/25):

Reading: Singer, Chapter 3 (“Equality for Animals?”)

2/25 (M): Discussion

2/28 (Th): Lecture — Species and Speciesism

Week 7 (Week of Monday 3/4):

Reading: Singer, Chapter 4 (“What’s Wrong with Killing?”)

3/4 (M): Discussion

3/7 (Th): Lecture — Lives and Persons

PAPER 1 DUE AT 5 PM EST ON FRIDAY, 3/8

Week 8 (Week of Monday 3/11):

Reading: Singer, Chapter 5 (“Taking Life: Animals”)

3/11 (M): Discussion

3/14 (Th): Lecture — Nonhuman Persons

Week 9 (Week of Monday 3/25):

Reading: Elizabeth Anderson, “Animal Rights and the Values of Nonhuman Life”

3/25 (M): Discussion

3/28 (Th): Lecture — The Argument from Marginal Cases

Week 10 (Week of Monday 4/1):

Reading: Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”

4/1 (M): Discussion

4/4 (Th): Lecture — Abortion and the Right to Life

Week 11 (Week of Monday 4/8):

Reading: Singer, Chapter 6, (“Taking Life: The Embryo and Fetus”)

4/8 (M): Discussion

4/11 (Th): Lecture — Abortion and Utilitarianism

Week 12 (Week of Monday 4/15):

Reading: Singer, Chapter 7, (“Taking Life: Humans”)

4/15 (M): Discussion

4/18 (Th): Lecture — Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide

Week 13 (Week of Monday 4/22):

Reading: Singer, Chapter 8, (“Rich and Poor”)

4/22 (M): Discussion

4/25 (Th): Lecture — Our Obligations to the Less Fortunate

Week 14 (Week of Monday 4/29):

Reading: Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints”

4/29 (M): Discussion

5/2 (Th): Lecture — Is It Best to Be Moral?

PAPER 2 DUE AT 5 PM EST ON FRIDAY, 5/3

Week 15 (Week of Monday 5/6):

Reading: None

5/6 (M): Last Meeting (Review)

Lateness Policy

Reading responses may not be turned in late, but you are permitted to skip up to three without penalty. Other assignments may be turned in late, but will be subject to a one-letter-grade penalty per day late (a one-letter-grade drop is the difference between an A and a B and between a B+ and a C+).

If you would like an extension on an assignment, you must notify me at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline for that assignment. Extensions will be granted on a discretionary basis.

Corrupt Files

It is your responsibility to ensure that you provide your written work to me in a format I can access. If you submit a corrupt file, I will do my best to notify you as soon as possible. It is then your responsibility to send me another copy of the file in a timely manner. This means it is very important that you open and read emails from me. If I request a second copy of a file and you do not reply in a timely manner, I will regard the assignment as not having been submitted.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism of any form is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. For more information on what constitutes plagiarism, see: <http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/plagiarism>. Please note that submitting the same material for credit on more than one assignment, whether in the same class or in different classes, is self-plagiarism and will be treated like any other form of plagiarism.

Collaboration

There are two kinds of collaborators. *Reviewers* offer comments on a pre-existing piece of writing. They are not responsible for the writing or major aspects of the argument of the pieces on which they comment. You are encouraged to seek reviewers for your pieces of writing. Please acknowledge your reviewers by name in a footnote at the end of your essay.

Co-authors enter into the creative process with the author. They are responsible for significant parts of the writing and/or argument of the pieces which they co-author. You are not permitted to submit co-authored work for credit in this course.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Every effort will be made to accommodate students who present a valid Letter of Accommodations. For more information, see: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations/letter-of-accommodations>

Religious Observance

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

No Extra Credit

There are no opportunities for extra credit in this course.

Confidentiality

Please note that I am required to report certain sensitive information you might relate to me to the University. If you would like to confidentially report sensitive information, you may do so through CAPS. For more information, see: <http://rhscaps.rutgers.edu/>.