

# Introduction to Ethics

Rutgers University  
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**Instructor:** Amir Saemi ([saemi.amir@gmail.com](mailto:saemi.amir@gmail.com))

Office Hours: MW 1-2 (with appointment)

**Course Description:** This course is an introduction to some of the major problems of moral philosophy. We begin by exploring some preliminary issues about the nature of morality. We will then overview the major schools of normative ethics including Kantian Ethics, Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics.

## Course Goals:

- Learn how to approach difficult theoretical problems in a careful and rigorous manner
- Learn to write in a way that clearly presents an argument, explicitly identifying its premises and outlining its logical structure
- Learn to grasp subtle distinctions, formulate general abstract principles, and apply these principles to specific cases

**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. The question should be written in a piece of paper. You *may not* submit your question by email *under any circumstances*. Attendance without turning in your question would count as an absence. 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 (e.g. you are using your cellphone for texting or shopping!), 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 have to hand in your papers two weeks after the prompt is given to you. Each paper counts for 35% of your final grade.

**Four Quizzes (20%).** Each Quiz consists in multiple-choice questions. Each quiz will be on the first class after finishing the relevant part

**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*

### TOPIC 3: Consequentialism

- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*
- Peter Singer, *The life you can save*
- Warren Quinn, *Actions, Intentions, and Consequences: The Doctrine of Double Effect.*
- Thomas Scanlon, *Contractualism and Utilitarianism*

### TOPIC 4: A Third Method of Ethics, Virtue Ethics

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics.*
- Rosalind Hursthouse, *Virtue Ethics*
- Roger Crisp, *A Third Method of Ethics?*
- Julia Annas, *Happiness as achievement*