

Philosophy 107: Introduction to Ethics
Summer 2019
Instructor: Lauren Lyons
Office Hours (Online): By appointment
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Course Description and Learning Objectives

Ethics is the study of what we ought to do and how we ought to live. This course invites students to ponder these central questions by offering an introduction to normative theory and applied ethics. The course begins with a broad overview to ethics as a discipline and to philosophical writing and methodology. Then, we will study and analyze some central theories normative ethics— ways of approaching questions of what we ought to do, and how we ought to live. We will examine utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Following, using that theoretical background, we will grapple with a series of contemporary moral issues, including abortion; the ethics of eating animals; the death penalty; poverty and altruism; gender and oppression; and racial inequality and racial justice.

The course has three objectives:

1. To introduce students to the essential tools of philosophical methodology and writing, including reconstructing and evaluating arguments, clearly articulating philosophical ideas, and engaging in respectful and constructive philosophical debates.
2. To familiarize students with the domain of moral philosophy, including central theories, concepts, figures, and questions, enabling them also to consider how conversations in the history of moral philosophy bear on present social moral and social issues.
3. (And, most importantly) To spark curiosity about (what I take to be!) exciting normative questions and enable students to think critically about their responses to them, and about moral issues in the world more broadly.

Course Structure

We will have two course sessions each week, each of which will be accompanied by an online video lecture on the topic. There are also 1-2 required readings for each session. The course is designed so that students complete the reading(s), do the homework, and *then* watch the lectures.

You will be responsible for completing one homework assignment for all sessions, which will most often involve responding to questions about the reading(s). Additionally, one homework assignment per week will involve an additional “Follow-Up” forum post, whereby you will be required to substantively respond to your fellow classmates’ posts. The specific requirements for the homework assignments, including word-length requirements, will be specified in the forums on Canvas.

Many of the issues we deal with in the course are sensitive and implicate people’s strongly-held beliefs. Thus, it is crucial that forum posts be respectful, professional, and constructive. Any disrespectful or inappropriate commentary on the forums will result in your receiving no credit for the assignment.

Note that there may be “Pop Quizzes” mentioned in the lectures (and not elsewhere), to be sure that students are closely engaging with the video lectures. Scores on pop quizzes will be factored into students’ homework and participation grade.

I may post additional video lectures in response to issues that arise in the course, or to help students in preparing for writing assignments. Additionally, the readings listed below are subject to change.

Assignments and Grading

Your grade for the course will take into account your homework assignments (on the Canvas forums), two “activities” (which will be assigned throughout the course, and ask you to engage with your peers), one short paper, and one longer, final paper. Since this is an online course, your participation in the course forums is imperative, as the forums will be the primary site of engagement with fellow students and will allow you to work through your questions and ideas about the readings. Thus, forum posts count for *both* homework and participation. For the both papers, you will be required to submit a topic and outline of your argument one and a half weeks before the paper is due.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Homework and Participation (including pop quizzes): 40%
- First Paper: 20%
- Activities: 10%
- Final Paper 30%

Textbook

Most of the readings from the course appear in James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *The Right Thing to Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy*, Fifth Edition*, McGraw Hill Education, 2009.

Other readings will be posted on the Canvas site.

*Note: I chose to use the Fifth Edition of the Rachels and Rachels text as it is significantly less expensive than later editions, though the readings appear in later editions (the Sixth and Seventh) as well. The text is available on Amazon. The chapter numbers may be different in those editions. Please reach out to me if you have any trouble, financially or otherwise, accessing the text, and we can work something out.

Course Schedule

Though this is an online course, it will precede as though we meet on Wednesdays and Fridays. Accordingly, homework is due at noon on each Wednesday and Friday of the term, and each lecture will be posted by noon on Wednesday and Friday, but likely earlier.

Unit I: Introduction

Session 1: Introduction to Moral Philosophy

No reading for this session.

Homework (“Introductions” on Canvas) due Wednesday 5/29

Session 2: Philosophical Methods: Analyzing and Reconstructing Arguments

Rachels and Rachels, Chapter 2: Rachels, “Some Basic Points About Arguments”

Homework due Friday 5/31

Unit II: Theories of Normative Ethics

Session 3: Utilitarianism

Rachels and Rachels Chapters 3 & 5: John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism;” Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine”

Homework due Wednesday 6/5

Session 4: Deontology
Rachels and Rachels Chapters 7: Kant, “The Categorical Imperative”
Homework due Friday 6/7

Session 5: Virtue Ethics
Rachels and Rachels Chapter 8: Aristotle, “The Virtues”
And Julia Annas, “Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing” (On Canvas)
Homework due Wednesday 6/12

Session 6: Writing a Philosophical Essay (*Subject to Change)
Reading TBD
Homework due Friday 6/14

**** Paper 1 Argument Outline due** Monday 6/17 at 5pm
(email to ethics107.summer2019@gmail.com)

Unit III: Moral and Social Issues

Session 7: Abortion
Rachels and Rachels Chapter 12: Judith Jarvis Thompson, “A Defense of Abortion”
Homework due Wednesday 6/19

Session 8: Eating Animals
Rachels and Rachels Chapter 14 and 16: Peter Singer, “All Animals are Equal” and Tibor R. Machan, “Do Animals Have Rights?”
Homework due Friday 6/21

Session 9: Poverty and Altruism
Rachels and Rachels Chapter 17 and 18: Mylan Engel Jr., “9/11 and Starvation” and Peter Singer, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty”
Homework due Wednesday 6/26

**** Paper I due** Wednesday 6/26 at 5pm EST

Session 10: Punishment– The Death Penalty
Rachels and Rachels Chapters 24 and 25: Louis P. Pojman, “A Defense of the Death Penalty” and Stephen B. Bright, “Why the United States Will Join the Rest of the World in Abandoning Capitol Punishment”
Homework due Friday 6/28

Session 11: Gender and Oppression
Marilyn Frye, “Oppression”(Canvas) and Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression” (Canvas)
Homework due Friday 7/5

Session 12: Racial Inequality and Injustice
Readings TBD
Homework due Wednesday 7/2

**** Paper II (Final Paper) due** Wednesday 7/10 at 5pm EST

Course Policies

Lateness Policy

Homework assignments may not be turned in late under any circumstance. Readings assignments and homework questions will generally be posted in advance of the due date, so it will be possible for you to complete your homework early if you have a conflict. It is important that papers be turned in on time, and late papers will be subject to a one-letter-grade penalty (i.e. A to B, B to C) for everyday the paper is late.

Note that I am accommodating of extenuating circumstances (I am human, after all!), so please reach out to me if you have any issues meeting deadlines. It's best that you reach out to me as soon as possible— extensions will be granted on a discretionary basis, and the earlier I hear about the issue the better. I want you all to succeed in this course and am willing to work with you to make that happen.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism of any form is unacceptable and will not be tolerated, both on papers or in homework assignments. For more information on what constitutes plagiarism, see:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

I am committed to doing my best to accommodate students with disabilities. Please reach out to me with any issues. I may ask you to present a valid Letter of Accommodations. For more information, see: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations/letterof-Accommodations>

Religious Observance

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

Extra Credit

If you are concerned about your grade in the course, there may be opportunities for extra credit or paper rewrites on a case-by-case basis. It is also possible that I will offer an extra credit opportunity to the entire class at some point during the semester.

Resources

I recommend that you consult the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy when/if you have any questions about course material or would like to know more about a given topic. I am also very willing to provide additional readings on any topic that interests you.

I am also very happy to chat with you via Google Hangouts or through our canvas site. Don't be a stranger!