

Introduction to Ethics

Jerry Piven, Ph.D.

In case of *emergencies*, I can be reached at (201) 936-5843, or email me at jerry.piven@rutgers.edu

Ethics is the attempt to understand moral concepts and justify moral principles. What should I do? How do I determine what's right and wrong? Is moral good in the intention or the consequence of my actions? Everyone disagrees on what people should do. Is it all personal opinion? Cultural values? Is it all relative? Should I question what I've been told? In this course we'll survey readings in ethics and moral philosophy to understand different perspectives on how moral decisions can be made. We'll investigate such topics as virtue ethics, deontology, constructivism, objectivism, relativism, consequentialism, free will, and determinism.



Required Texts:

- * Russ Shafer-Landau: *The Fundamentals of Ethics*
- * Ethics handouts (uploaded and/or sent to students)

Assignments and Grading:

In *addition* to the required reading, the students will be assigned:

1) Weekly Reflections

2-3 page analysis & discussion of the readings
(40 % of total grade)

2) Final Portfolio Project

Your collected weekly reflections further amended and corrected after you receive my feedback and reflect even further....
(40% of total grade)

3) Forum Discussion Participation

Questions and topics will be posted to the course website. You are expected to participate, provide your own analysis, and ask further questions...
(20% of total grade)

* **Grading** will be determined by the effort of the student, her/his evidence of having carefully read and contemplated the material, and her/his expression of independent thought on the ideas. Late assignments will suffer penalties as follows: the subtraction of one grade increment for every day the assignment is late.

* **Readings** consist of the required texts. There will also be a number of *optional* handouts supplied to help students understand the primary readings and provide perspective. Suggested readings appear below the required & optional handout readings and are for your interest and edification only.

IMPORTANT:

Class Credo and Ethic: Like all classes, philosophy is about the free exchange of ideas as well as relentless questioning of beliefs and concepts. You are entitled to your beliefs but in a philosophy class *no idea is spared* from questioning or examination. If you do not want your beliefs or faith questioned, you are *strongly* advised to enroll in other classes more suitable to your beliefs and temperament.

Communications:

You may email me with concerns and questions, but do not expect me to recapitulate class lectures or discussions. I'm happy to discuss philosophy with you but I can't repeat everything you should have read or internalized from the uploaded lecture videos.

Academic Honesty:

Violations of Rutgers policies on academic honesty will not be tolerated in this course. Plagiarism and cheating will be grounds for failure, if not expulsion from the university.

COURSE OUTLINE:

I. INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

Overview and Course Goals

Distinguishing Moral Philosophy & Ethics

Ethical Questions & Problems

Readings:

- Shafer-Landau: Preface & Introduction

II. VIRTUE ETHICS

Action & Character

Moral Education & Responsibility

The Goals of Ethical Behavior

Readings:

- Plato: *The Republic* (handout)
- Aristotle: *Ethics* (handout)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapter 17

Suggested Readings:

Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue / A Short History of Ethics*

Laurence Thomas: *Living Morally*

Bertrand Russell: Practical Intelligence and the Virtues

III. MORAL AUTHORITY

Who Decides What is Moral & Ethical?

Divine & Human Justification

Bases for Moral Reasoning

Readings:

- Shafer-Landau: Chapter 5
- Qutb: Milestones (handout)
- Ross: Zen and the Art of Divebombing (handout)

Suggested Readings:

Ruth Stein: *For Love of the Father*

Brian Victoria: *Zen at War*

Sam Harris: *Letter to a Christian Nation*

IV. THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Nature, Cooperation, & Self-Interest
Social Darwinism
Egoism, Predation, & Social Chaos
Civil Disobedience

Readings:

- Hobbes: *Leviathan* (handout)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapters 7-9, 13 & 14

Suggested Readings:

Thomas Hobbes: *Behemoth*
John Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
Ayn Rand: *Atlas Shrugged* (read critically if you peruse this one....)

V. UNIVERSAL, PLURAL, AND RELATIVE ETHICS

Deontological Ethics: Obedience & Autonomy
Universal Moral Principles
Pluralism & Relativism
Intention & Consequence
Metaethics

Readings:

- Kant: *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* (handout)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapters 11 & 12, 15, 16, 19, 21

Suggested Readings:

Immanuel Kant: *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*
Friedrich Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morals / Beyond Good & Evil*

V. UTILITARIANISM

The Needs of the Many & the Needs of the Few
Maximizing Happiness
Minimizing Misery
Sinister Implications of Consensus

Readings:

- Mill: *Utilitarianism* (handout)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapters 9 & 10

Suggested Readings:

Jeremy Bentham: *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*
Peter Singer: *Practical Ethics*

VI. FEMINIST ETHICS

Ethics and Othering

Feminine Experience

The Underrepresented and Disparaged

The Unthought & Unacknowledged

Readings:

- Noddings: *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (handout)
- Beauvoir: *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (handout)
- Shafer-Landau: Chapter 18

Suggested Readings:

Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*

Hannah Arendt: *Thinking Without a Bannister*

Judith Butler: *Undoing Gender*

Karen Horney: *Feminine Psychology*

Camille Paglia: *Sexual Personae*

Yosano Akiko: *Tangled Hair*

Evelyn Accad: *The Excised*

Nell Noddings: *Women and Evil*

Fatmagul Berktaý: *Women and Religion*

Howard Eilberg-Schwartz & Wendy Doniger: *Off with Her Head!*

Rosemary Radford Ruether: *Religion and Sexism*

Rita Ransohoff: *Venus After Forty*

VII. CONCLUSIONS: FUTURE IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHICS

Extremist Relativism

Postmodernism, Multiculturalism, Politics, and the Conundrums of Intervention

Anarchy or Defensible Ethical Principles?

Suggested Readings:

John Caputo: *Against Ethics*

J. Edward Hackett: What Caputo Got Wrong About Obligation

Frans De Waal: *Good Natured*

Jesse Prinz: *The Emotional Construction of Morals*

Hilary Putnam: *Ethics Without Ontology*

R.M. Hare: *The Language of Morals*

Bernard Williams: *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*