

Philosophy 107: Introduction to Ethics Spring 2017

Instructor: Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini

Office: Philosophy Department Room 514, 106 Somerset Street, 5th Floor

Office Hours: Tuesdays 11 am - 12 pm (or by appointment)

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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 moral relativism 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 two homework assignments each week. Second, there will two 900-1200 word papers. Third, there will be an in-person final 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 Tuesday, you will be required to send me one question you have about the reading by 5 pm EST. 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 (*not* like the Tuesday questions). All submissions must be typed and submitted in .pdf format.

I will upload a number of video lectures each week discussing the reading, as well as a handout highlighting its main argument. These will be available to view before your reading responses are due — but you should not use them as a substitute for detailed reading of the assignments!

Semester Overview

Week 1 (Week of Friday 1/20):

None

Week 2 (Week of Friday 1/27):

Rachels and Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, Chapters 2 (“The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”) and 3 (“Subjectivism in Ethics” — Section 3.7 optional)

Week 3 (Week of Friday 2/3):

Gilbert Harman, “Moral Relativism Defended”

Week 4 (Week of Friday 2/10):

Rachels and Rachels, Chapters 7 (“The Utilitarian Approach”) and 8 (“The Debate over Utilitarianism”)

Week 5 (Week of Friday 2/17):

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

Week 6 (Week of Friday 2/24):

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

Week 7 (Week of Friday 3/3):

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

PAPER 1 DUE AT 5 PM EST ON WEDNESDAY, 3/1

Week 8 (Week of Friday 3/10):

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

Week 9 (Week of Friday 3/24):

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

Week 10 (Week of Friday 3/31):

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”

Week 11 (Week of Friday 4/7):

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

Week 12 (Week of Friday 4/14):

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Physician-Assisted Suicide: Two Moral Arguments”

Week 13 (Week of Friday 4/21):
Singer, Chapter 7 ("Taking Life: Humans")

Week 14 (Week of Friday 4/28):
Singer, Chapter 8 ("Rich and Poor")

PAPER 2 DUE AT 5 PM EST ON MONDAY, 5/1

Lateness Policy

Tuesday questions may not be turned in late. 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/>.