

Philosophy 105:01
Current moral and social issues

Fall 2023

Sorensen

Dates: 9/4-12/15

Location: Murray Hall, Room 114

Sessions: MW 7:30pm-8:50pm

Instructor: Professor David Sorensen
email: david.sorensen@rutgers.edu

Office hours: TBA

Textbook (Optional):

The Ethical Life by Russ Shafer-Landau, 4th or 5th edition. ISBN: 9780190631314

Additional readings will be made available online.

Course description: This will primarily be a course on applied ethics, though we will discuss political, social, legal, scientific, and metaphysical issues as well. We regularly form judgments about what is right and wrong and about who is and isn't a good person. While we may have strong views about moral and social issues, what kinds of arguments and reasons do we have for holding them? Are our moral beliefs rational?

We will start with looking at meta-ethical and normative ethical theories. With an understanding of the different theoretical standpoints, we will then move forward to applying these theories to the real world. Throughout the course, we will read and discuss articles written by not only moral philosophers, but journalists, academics, and scientists as well. Among many others, we will ask ourselves the following questions:

- Do animals have rights?
- What is the moral status of a human fetus?
- Is there an important moral difference between killing and letting someone die?
- Do we have obligations to help the poor?
- Should we recycle, drive electric cars, travel less?
- Do gun control laws violate individual rights?
- Is it morally permissible to discriminate on the basis of vaccination status?
- What might future generations condemn us for?

Specific Learning Objectives:

- to develop critical thinking skills
- to properly articulate and defend/critique arguments and viewpoints
- to understand the source of moral disagreements and how to resolve them
- to understand the relationship between philosophy, science, religion, and the law
- to become a clear, concise, and effective writer

Expectations of students:

Students are expected to carefully read the syllabus, regularly attend (online) class, do the readings, and complete all course assignments. Students should also regularly check your email (every day), and log onto Canvas to check for course updates or revised deadlines. If any problems arise, you should contact me ASAP.

Course Requirements:

1. Course readings:

(a) Textbook: *The Ethical Life* by Russ Shafer-Landau, 4th or 5th edition (scanned copies of **some** of the textbook readings will be available on Canvas)

(b) Supplementary readings available on Canvas (go to “pages” and then “reading and homework”)

1) You are expected to read the assigned articles and chapters **before** the class session the readings are scheduled for. However, I recommend doing the readings both before and after the class session, as the material may at times be difficult, unclear, or confusing the first time reading it. After having a session discussing the reading, with plenty of opportunity for questions and clarity, the material should be much easier to understand. The tests will assume that you have understood the readings. If you do not understand them, please send me an email or visit me during office hours.

(c) Powerpoints will be made available on Canvas

2. Course evaluation:

(a) Homework: Canvas quizzes (based on lecture and readings), discussion posts.

(b) Paper: There will be one (6-8 page double spaced) paper due at the end of the semester (5/7). The paper may be on any of the issues discussed in class. I will provide a list of possible paper topics, but you are free to send me an email or meet with me during office hours to present a topic of your own

(c) Exams: Midterm and Final. Essay-based exams.

Course grade breakdown:

Reading Quizzes and Homework: 25%

Midterm exam: 25%

Paper: 25%

Final exam: 25%

Course format: Combination of lecture (Powerpoint), discussion/debate, and small group activities.

Detailed course schedule: Please complete the readings in the order listed (do not pay attention to the numbers). Unless stated otherwise, the readings will chapters be from the course textbook (Shafer-Landau).

Date	Topic	Reading(s)
	Course introduction	Course syllabus
	Moral reasoning and objectivity	

	The origins of morality	<i>The Biological Basis of Ethics</i> Singer <i>Euthyphro</i> Plato
	Cultural Relativism	17. Cultural Relativism Optional: <i>The Challenge of Cultural Relativism</i> (Canvas)
	Culture and Toleration: Case Studies	Excerpts from <i>The Evil Within</i> , Jeske
	Ethical Egoism	<i>The Ring of Gyges</i> , Plato <i>Egoism and Moral Skepticism</i> (Canvas)
	Utilitarianism	<i>Utilitarianism</i> , Mill <i>The Experience Machine</i> , Nozick
	Kantianism	Rachels readings
	Euthanasia: part 1	
	Euthanasia: part 2	Rachels on Euthanasia
	Euthanasia: part 3	
	Midterm Exam	
	Abortion I	<i>Is Abortion Morally Wrong?</i> Stich and Donaldson
	Abortion II	<i>Judith Jarvis Thomson, A Defense of Abortion</i>
10/23	Abortion III	<i>On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i> , Warren <i>Don Marquis, Why Abortion Is Immoral</i>
10/25	Extreme Poverty	The Singer Solution to World Poverty
10/30	Extreme Poverty II: Critiques to the Singer Solution	More Than Charity: Cosmopolitan Alternatives to the “Singer Solution” Response from Singer
11/1	Animal ethics: The argument from suffering	
11/6	Animal ethics II: The cocamone argument	28. Puppies, Pigs, and People Norcross
11/8	Animal ethics III: The argument from marginal cases	<i>Excerpts from Dialogues on Vegetarianism</i> (Canvas)
11/13	Climate Change	It’s not my fault, Sinnott-Armstrong
11/15	Climate Change part 2	TBA
11/20	Gun control: part 1	Huemer, McMahan
11/22	Gun control: part 2	DeGrazia
11/27	The ethics of vaccine mandates	https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/24/are-covid-vaccine-mandates-ethical-heres-what-medical-experts-think.html
11/29	Healthcare ethics	
12/4	Drug Decriminalization	
12/6	SLACK	

11/11	The Importance of Moral Philosophy	
	Final exam	

COVID-related policies:

In the event that the college closes temporarily or permanently due to COVID or some other emergency, we will shift to a remote synchronous format. The lectures will take place during the same time as the in-person sessions. Additionally, exams will be taken remotely rather than in person.

Unexplained absences and missing assignments:

Under most circumstances, if you do not report to me, in advance, that you will be absent or unable to submit an assignment on time, then you will not receive full credit. Assignments and problem sets that are not complete by May 4th will receive zeros.

Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy: *Principles of academic integrity require that every Rutgers University student:*

- *properly acknowledge and cite all use of the ideas, results, or words of others*
- *properly acknowledge all contributors to a given piece of work*
- *make sure that all work submitted as his or her own in a course or other academic activity is produced without the aid of unsanctioned materials or unsanctioned collaboration*
- *obtain all data or results by ethical means and report them accurately without suppressing any results inconsistent with his or her interpretation or conclusions*
- *treat all other students in an ethical manner, respecting their integrity and right to pursue their educational goals without interference. This requires that a student neither facilitate academic dishonesty by others nor obstruct their academic progress*
- *uphold the canons of the ethical or professional code of the profession for which he or she is preparing.*

Adherence to these principles is necessary in order to insure that:

- *everyone is given proper credit for his or her ideas, words, results, and other scholarly accomplishments*
- *all student work is fairly evaluated and no student has an inappropriate advantage over others*
- *the academic and ethical development of all students is fostered*
- *the reputation of the University for integrity in its teaching, research, and scholarship is maintained and enhanced.*

Failure to uphold these principles of academic integrity threatens both the reputation of the University and the value of the degrees awarded to its students. Every member

of the University community therefore bears a responsibility for ensuring that the highest standards of academic integrity are upheld.

Disability services: The Office of Disability Services works with students with a documented disability to determine the eligibility of reasonable accommodations, facilitates and coordinates those accommodations when applicable, and lastly engages with the Rutgers community at large to provide and connect students to appropriate resources (e-mail: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>, phone: (848) 445-6800). Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-services>. Please give your letter of accommodation to me as soon as possible, and we will coordinate the accommodations privately.

Useful resources:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/> *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/> *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy*