

Thinking About Right and Wrong: An Introduction to Ethics

Winter 20??

Instructor: Gerard Rothfus
Classroom: ???
Day/Time: ???
Office Hours: ??? or by appointment
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Description

This course surveys (some of) the rich field of modern moral philosophy, with an emphasis on exploring the most prominent theories in normative ethics and engaging various contemporary debates in applied ethics. Students will wrestle with the question of what distinguishes morally right from morally wrong action and then consider how different answers to this question bear upon topics as significant and contested as abortion, animal welfare, and climate change.

Learning Objectives

This course will equip students to think critically and thoughtfully about the nature and demands of human morality. Students will finish the course with a broad appreciation of the motivation and structure of each of the central moral traditions in philosophy. They will also gain a good sense of the relevance of these moral traditions to contemporary moral controversies (e.g. abortion, climate change, etc.) as well as the dialectical state of academic debate on these topics. Finally, students who complete the course will have advanced in the skill of writing clear, lucid, and charitable argumentative papers.

Course Materials

There is no required text for the course as all readings will be made available online via However, a recommended undergraduate-level textbook in the field of applied ethics that interested students may draw on during the relevant section of the course is:

- *Applied Ethics: An Impartial Introduction* by Jackson et al., 2021, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Course Structure

The course will be organized around a weekly lecture/discussion period, where various topics in moral philosophy will be explored and discussed in person. You are strongly urged to do the suggested readings before each lecture in order to be better prepared to engage, ask questions, make suggestions in discussion, etc. Periodically, I may also release short, pre-recorded videos to the class site (as well as YouTube), summarizing different ideas covered in the course. You may view these videos to help with understanding particular readings or just to get a better grip on key ideas in the course.

I will also hold office hours on ... after class until Feel free to come to office hours and ask any questions you may have about the course! If you are unable to make this time any week and would like to discuss the course, you are very much encouraged to set up an appointment for another time. In these office hours, I am happy to go over past readings or discuss questions about upcoming assignments, new material, writing strategies, etc. Whether in or out of office hours, please feel free to reach out to me any time!

Course Assignments and Grading

Your grade will be determined by (i) a short midterm paper (25%), (ii) a rough draft of a longer paper (25%), (iii) a final version of the longer paper (35%), and (iv) class attendance/participation (15%).

Midterm Paper

Your short midterm paper will require you to write a philosophical response to one of the authors we read on normative ethics. You will select one of the readings and write a 1,000 to 2,000 word response to the reading that summarizes and explains a view held or an argument made by the author and then either (a) criticizes the author's view or argument (by, respectively, presenting an argument against it or raising and defending an objection to the argument) or (b) defends the author's view or argument (by, respectively, presenting a new argument for the view or supplying new support for the argument's premises). Every student will have the option of rewriting their midterm paper in light of my feedback to improve their grade.

I will make use of this general rubric in grading both the midterm and final papers: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/grades.html>

Final Paper

Your final paper will require you to write a philosophical essay arguing for or against a significant position in contemporary applied ethics. You may write concerning one of the topics discussed in class (e.g. abortion or climate change) or may find an alternative topic if you clear it (and the sources you will use) with me first. Your paper should be 1,500 to 2,500 words in length and will be assessed according to the general rubric linked above. We will discuss good philosophical writing practices and tips for handling the final paper as the course goes on.

Attendance and Participation

Participation credit can be earned by (i) attending lectures, (ii) thoughtfully participating in class discussions, and (iii) attending office hours. Students are expected to attend lectures, though two classes may be missed without penalty to a student's participation score. Students are encouraged to participate actively in course discussions by asking questions, raising objections, or presenting their own ideas. It is very natural to feel apprehensive or intimidated about speaking during class. (I often felt this way in my philosophy classes!) If you have any concerns about classroom participation, please feel free to come talk with me about it during office hours, both because this is an additional way to earn participation credit outside the classroom and because maybe we can find ways to make classroom discussion seem less formidable.

Every voice is welcome in our classroom and students should feel free to raise any questions or thoughts they may have regarding course material during our class discussions. However, every student is expected to respect the bounds of kindness and respect for their peers during these discussions. (Avoid interrupting, rude language, etc.) Conducting oneself with honesty and compassion is essential to good participation in the discussion and debate of controversial moral topics.

Grade Scale

A: 90-100	B: 80-89	C: 70-79	D: 60-69	F: < 60
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If you have any questions about your grade at any point in the course, please don't hesitate to ask!

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Though collaboration among students is encouraged, any work a student turns in must ultimately be their own.

Students who have any questions or uncertainty about this policy are responsible for meeting with the instructor to discuss the policy.

Disabilities

Please notify me in advance of the need for accommodation of a University verified disability. I will gladly provide the required accommodations. If you have any questions or concerns about disability accommodations, please don't hesitate to speak with me; I am happy to help out.

Course Outline

Week:	Topic:
Week 1	<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philosophical method and writing, Logic <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Finding, Clarifying, and Evaluating Arguments” by E.J. Coffman.
Part I	Moral Theory
Week 2	<p>Moral Relativism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is morality culturally relative? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Morality is a Culturally Conditioned Response” by Jesse Prinz. • “Moral Relativism, Truth, and Justification” by Alasdair MacIntyre.
Week 3	<p>Divine Command Theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Euthyphro Dilemma: Does morality depend upon God? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Euthyphro</i> by Plato. • “The Euthyphro Dilemma Once Again” by William Lane Craig.
Week 4	<p>Utilitarianism I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classical Utilitarianism: Is morality about achieving good outcomes? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> by Jeremy Bentham (selections). • <i>Utilitarianism</i> by John Stuart Mill (selections).

Week:	Topic:
Week 5	<p>Utilitarianism II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemporary Utilitarianism <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics” by J.J.C. Smart.
Week 6	<p>Utilitarianism III</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objections to Utilitarianism: Experience Machines, Utility Monsters, and Trolleys <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Experience Machine” by Robert Nozick • “A Critique of Utilitarianism” by Bernard Williams
Week 7	<p>Deontology I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kant’s Moral Theory: Is morality captured by the Categorical Imperative? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> by Immanuel Kant.
Week 8	<p>Deontology II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Law Theory: Is morality determined by human nature? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Natural Law Tradition in Ethics” by Mark Murphy. <p>Midterm Paper Due</p>
Week 9	<p>Contractualism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Contract Theory: Is morality what rational agents would agree to? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A Theory of Justice</i> by John Rawls (selections). • “Why Contractualism?” by David Gauthier.

Week:	Topic:
Week 10	<p>Feminism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feminist Moral Theory <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Feminist Ethics” by Alison Jaggar.
Part II	Applied Ethics
Week 11	<p>Abortion I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do human fetuses have a right not to be killed? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion” by Mary Anne Warren. <li>• “Why Abortion is Immoral” by Don Marquis.
Week 12	<p>Abortion II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does bodily autonomy secure a right to abortion? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A Defense of Abortion” by Judith Thomson. <li>• “Fetuses, Orphans, and a Famous Violinist: On the Ethics and Politics of Abortion” by Gina Schouten.
Week 13	<p>Animal Ethics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do non-human animals have moral rights? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Case for Animal Rights” by Tom Regan. <li>• “What’s Wrong with Speciesism” by Shelly Kagan.
Week 14	<p>Environmental Ethics I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are our moral obligations to future generations? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Paradox of Future Individuals” by Gregory Kavka. <li>• “Sustainability and Intergenerational Justice” by Brian Barry.

Week:	Topic:
Week 15	<p>Environmental Ethics II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do individuals have a responsibility to mitigate climate change? <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Climate Complicity and Individual Accountability” by Douglas MacLean. <li>• “Against Denialism” by John Broome.
Week 16	<p>End of Semester</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanks for taking the class! <p>Final Paper Due</p>