

PHILOSOPHY 8: INTRO TO MORAL THEORY
WINTER 2009

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OFFICE HOURS: 11:15-12:30 MWF

LECTURES: CLASS PERIOD 12

X-PERIOD: TUES 1:00-1:50

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Everyone, it seems, has opinions concerning moral issues. They are usually happy to share these opinions as well, whether it be to praise or condemn certain acts, or to claim that morality is a lie, a mistake, or an illusion. Few of these opinions are well formed, however; fewer still know what professional ethicists have to say about these issues.

It is the goal of this course that students should avoid these pitfalls. To that end, we shall spend a good deal of time investigating the underlying bases of our moral judgments – a study called *metaethics*. Doing so will help us to understand those foundations on which our moral judgments rest and those which they lack.

We shall also study several major systems of moral theory, which should provide students with the tools to analyze and make moral arguments. Finally, we shall look at a few issues in applied ethics to see how we may apply what we have learned.

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to speak and write clearly, consistently, and from an informed position on the nature and content of morality.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. *Whatever happened to Good and Evil?* Russ Shafer-Landau, Oxford, 2004.
2. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, James Rachels, McGraw Hill, 2006.
3. *The Right Thing to Do*, James and Stuart rachels, McGraw Hill, 2006.

All textbooks are available at Wheelock Books.

COURSE FORMAT & REQUIREMENTS:

The course format is lecture, supplemented with discussion. Please arrive prepared to discuss the current material. Term grades are to be assigned based upon the quality of two exams (25% each) and an argumentative essay (40%). Participation and attendance accounts for the final 10%. Except in the case of medical emergency, no late papers will be accepted.

PAPER DUE DATES:

Metaethics exam: Friday, January 30th
Theoretical ethics exam: Friday, February 20th
Applied ethics essay: Monday, March 9th

Papers are to be blitzed in .rtf, .pdf, or .odt format – NOT .doc or .docx!

FURTHER NOTES:

- I may post optional readings on Blackboard. I shall endeavor to notify you whenever such materials appear on the website.

Course Outline:

Monday, January 5th

NO CLASS

Wednesday, January 7th: Introduction

Assignment for Friday: Write a paragraph defending your **moral** position on one of the following issues: abortion, affirmative action, animal rights.

Friday, January 9th: What is Morality?

Shafer-Landau, ch. 1

Rachels, *Elements of Moral Philosophy* [hereafter “EMP”] ch. 1

Monday, January 12th: Intro to Metaethics

Shafer-Landau, ch. 2

Wednesday, January 14th: Subjectivism

Shafer-Landau, ch. 3-6

Rachels, EMP ch. 3

J.L. Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values,” in *The Right Thing to Do* [hereafter “RTD”] – also posted on Blackboard [hereafter “BB”]

Friday, January 16th: Cultural Relativism

Shafer-Landau, ch. 7-11

Rachels, EMP ch. 2

Monday, January 19th

NO CLASS – Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Wednesday, January 21st: Moral Objectivism/Realism

Shafer-Landau, ch. 12-14

Friday, January 23rd: God and Morality

Shafer-Landau, ch. 15

Rachels, EMP ch. 4

an excerpt from Plato's *Euthyphro* [BB]

Monday, January 26th: The naturalistic worldview and Morality

Shafer-Landau, ch. 16-19

David Hume, “Morality as Based on Sentiment” [RTD]

Wednesday, January 28th: Egoism

Shafer-Landau, ch. 20

Rachels, EMP ch. 5

Plato, “the Ring of Gyges,” an excerpt from the *Republic* [BB]

Friday, January 30th

Metaethics Exam

Monday, February 2nd: Theoretical ethics – Utilitarianism

Rachels, EMP ch. 6

John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism” [RTD]

Wednesday, February 4th: Utilitarianism, Critique and Defense

Rachels, EMP ch. 7

Richard Brandt, “Real and Alleged Problems with Utilitarianism” [BB]

Bernard Williams, “Utilitarianism and Integrity” [RTD]

Friday, February 6th: Kant's categorical imperative

Rachels, EMP ch. 8

Immanuel Kant, “The Categorical Imperative” [RTD]

Monday, February 9th: More on Kant's moral theory

Rachels, EMP ch. 9

Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck” [BB]

Wednesday, February 11th: Social Contract Theory

Rachels, EMP ch. 10

Thomas Hobbes, “The Social Contract” [RTD]

Friday, February 13th

NO CLASS

Monday, February 16th: Feminist Ethics and Virtue Ethics

Rachels, EMP ch. 11-12

Aristotle, “The Virtues” [RTD]

Wednesday, February 18th: Theoretical Ethics Conclusion

Rachels, EMP ch. 13

Friday, February 20th

Theoretical Ethics Exam

Monday, February 23rd: Applied Ethics – Abortion

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” [RTD]

Wednesday, February 25th

Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral” [RTD]

Friday, February 27th: Applied Ethics – Affirmative Action

Peter Singer, “Is Racial Discrimination Arbitrary?” [RTD]

Monday, March 2nd

James Rachels, “In Defense of Quotas” [RTD]

Jospeh Lefevre, “The Value of Diversity: A Justification of Affirmative Action” [BB]

Wednesday, March 4th: Applied Ethics – Poverty

Peter Singer, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty” [RTD]

Friday, March 6th: Applied Ethics -- Euthanasia

James Rachels, “The Morality of Euthanasia” [RTD]

Monday, March 9th: Wrap-Up

Applied ethics essays due