

University of New Hampshire
Spring Semester 2016
Philosophy 530.01: Ethics
Prof. Ruth Sample

SYLLABUS

Meeting Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:40 a.m.-11:00 a.m., Nesmith 310.

Instructor: Professor Ruth Sample

Prof. Sample's Office: Nesmith 306; tel. 862-3074

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:35-1:35 p.m. I am also available by appointment if you cannot see me during office hours.

Email: ruth.sample@unh.edu (this is the best way to contact me)

Required Texts:

Sher, George, ed. *Ethics: Essential Readings in Moral Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

**Text available at Durham Book Exchange and the UNH bookstore. Some readings may be available as downloads from Canvas (<https://mycourses.unh.edu/>).

IMPORTANT: This course is taught through the on-line Canvas system. Students registered for this course are automatically enrolled as users of Canvas. Login using your UNH id and password at <https://mycourses.unh.edu/>.

A Brief Course Description:

When we engage in moral philosophy (also called *ethics*) we ask some of the most interesting and important philosophical questions. It is a compelling sub-discipline within philosophy because it deals with questions all of us must face. What makes a person a good person? How can we tell whether our actions are ethical? Is one's motivation most important, or is it the outcome or consequences of one's actions? Do we have stronger moral obligations to friends and family than we do to strangers? Should we focus our attention on good character, or on principles or rules that guide action? What is the relationship between our society and our ethics? What is the relationship between morality and self-interest? Do human beings have free will—and if they do not, are they responsible for the things that they do?

The answers to these questions have direct implications for our interactions with people, animals, and ecosystems—the entire world we live in. The particular nature of our moral outlook will determine how we act and what kind of life we choose to lead. It will determine whether we include other cultures and even other species or ecosystems in our moral deliberations, and how we do so. It will determine the kinds of laws and social policy that we support or reject. The morals we act upon—or choose not to act upon—have genuine and important consequences for others and the world in general.

This course touches upon the major ethical viewpoints since Aristotle. We will begin the course by examining the major moral theories: utilitarianism, Kantianism (or *deontology*), and virtue ethics (first made famous by Aristotle). These theories advocate very different pictures of

how to determine right moral action. Utilitarians emphasize the consequences of our actions as the basis for making moral decisions; Kantians emphasize features of human action that are, to some degree, independent of the consequences of the action. Proponents of virtue ethics maintain that focusing on principles of action as utilitarians and Kantians do gets the nature of morality wrong: character, not rules for guiding our action, should be the focus of ethical thought.

In addition to various moral theories, we will also encounter particular moral problems. One challenge to morality is raised the question “*Why be moral?*” When morality and self-interest conflict, as they so often do, is it rational to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of altruistic action? If not, does this mean that morality is irrational? Of course sometimes the moral course of action coincides with self-interest, but can morality and self-interest always be reconciled? This is the problem of *morality and rationality*. A second problem concerns the question of whether morality has the objectivity it is often said to have. Many of us have had the thought that what some people call a universal moral code appears to be little more than a local prejudice. Is this true for all moral viewpoints? Are there any moral values or principles that all persons must recognize? This is the problem of *moral or cultural relativism*. Finally, human beings are part of the natural world; we appear to be subject to the same natural laws as the rest of the natural world. If human beings are determined by natural laws and material conditions, do we have the kind of freedom that would make us responsible for our choices? Is it possible that humans are *both* determined and free? Recent experimental psychology claims to shed light on this problem, but does it really? This is the problem of *free will*.

We will conclude by examining three contemporary moral problems in light of our conversations about the various ethical theories and the problems they present: abortion, world hunger and poverty, and slavery. Is abortion a morally permissible action? If we understand a fetus as a being with rights, does this automatically imply that it is morally wrong to terminate a pregnancy? What must we do about global hunger and famine? Are we obligated to alleviate the suffering of others, even if we did not bring it about? Does it matter whether we know or interact with those in need? Finally, everyone agrees that slavery is wrong, but why is it wrong? Which moral theory gives us the best account of what makes it wrong?

In your papers, you will be expected to develop a solid understanding of the arguments presented by various writers in defense of their philosophical positions. In addition to explaining another writer's viewpoint in your own terms, you will be asked to tap into your own creative reserves even more deeply, developing philosophical insights of your own. The best philosophical papers demonstrate not only a familiarity with the philosophical positions of others, but also show your own creative and critical faculties at work.

We will use several different methods of learning and assessment, in addition to the lecture at the beginning of class and discussion at the end. You will write a brief précis of assigned readings and submit it through SafeAssign on Canvas. You will also bring a copy of your at the beginning of each class, which may be chosen at random to kick off our discussion. (This is not as scary as it sounds, and for the first couple of classes, I will ask for volunteers!) Regular quizzes will prepare you for class as well as provide you with ongoing assessment of your knowledge of basic concepts and lines of thought. The two examinations will test your

knowledge of the various views defended by the philosophers we study, the important conclusions they draw, and the reasons they give in support of those conclusions. They will also test the breadth and depth of your knowledge of the texts. Finally, your essays will give you an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of the moral philosophy we investigate, and to respond both analytically and creatively to the material. By carefully presenting and analyzing philosophical arguments of our authors, you position yourself to craft a view of your own, based on your own insight and analysis.

This course is a discussion-based course, although I will spend part of each class lecturing. It is imperative that you complete each assigned reading before the class in which we discuss it, and the précis you write each week will provide evidence of your understanding of the material. I have assigned less than fifty pages of reading each week because I expect you to read it at least twice during the week that it is assigned.

Course Requirements: You must complete all of the required assignments in order to pass this course.

- Two papers.
- Two in-class examinations.
- A short précis of assigned readings is due at the beginning of class on Tuesdays.
- Quizzes each Thursday, with exceptions as noted in the course schedule.
- Attendance at each class. ***Five or more absences will trigger a grade of AF (Administrative Failure)***

Grading:

- Each paper counts for 20% of your final grade totaling 40%.
- Each exam counts for 20% of your final grade totaling 40%.
- Quizzes count for 10% of your final grade.
- Précis and class participation will count for the remaining 10% of your grade.

Papers: Each paper will be 6-8 pages long.

Exams: Exams will be closed-book and in class. They will assess your knowledge of the readings and lecture material. The final exam is not cumulative.

Quizzes: Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped from the quiz average.

Précis: You must turn in each assigned précis **before class via SafeAssign**, and bring a paper copy to class. I will select a student précis to read at the beginning of each class to catalyze our discussion.

Participation: Attendance and participation in discussion are required for this course. You may have two absences without penalty. Three to four absences will count against your participation grade. **FIVE OR MORE ABSENCES WILL AUTOMATICALLY RESULT IN A GRADE OF AF (ADMINISTRATIVE FAILURE).**

NOTE: You must take the quizzes, as well as mid-term and final examinations, in class at the designated times. **DO NOT MAKE TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS THAT WOULD CONFLICT WITH THE SCHEDULED EXAMINATIONS.** You must submit both papers and take both exams in order to receive a passing grade for the course.

Special Accommodations/Disabilities:

The University is committed to providing students with documented disabilities equal access to all university programs and facilities. If you think you have a disability requiring accommodations, you must register with Disability Services for Students (DSS). Contact DSS at (603) 862-2607 or disability.office@unh.edu. If you have received Accommodation Letters for this course from DSS, please provide me with that information privately in my office so that we can review those accommodations.

Please do not hesitate to discuss this with me; I want to help you do your best work.

Class Rules:

1. Treat your fellow students with respect. Listen when others are speaking, and give them your full attention.
2. Try not to talk over or interrupt others in discussion. This can be difficult to do (especially during a heated discussion), but we will have plenty of practice!
3. Do not eat in class. You may drink coffee or soda, but please do not make noise.
4. Do not read or do homework in class.
5. Do not talk or whisper with classmates during class.
6. Students may not leave, except in the case of emergency, once our session has begun.
7. Use the bathroom before class.
8. **Absolutely no texting/email checking, etc. during class.** Turn off all electronic devices at the start of class, and keep them off until class is dismissed.
9. Do not arrive late. If for some reason you do arrive late, please be quiet when you do so.
10. If you must leave early, let me know in advance and sit near the door. Please be quiet when you exit.
11. Participants in varsity sports will need a special note from the coach or other relevant athletic authority in order to miss class or make up quizzes or exams because of away games. Athletes may not leave class early in order to get to practice early. If this course conflicts with your practice schedule, you should resign from the course or quit the team.
12. If you miss a quiz, you may not make it up. You may drop it as your lowest quiz grade.
13. Do not make travel plans (e.g., airline reservations) that would conflict with examination times. You must take the quizzes, as well as mid-term and final examinations, in class at the designated times.
14. Do not plagiarize. SafeAssign on Canvas is a program that detects plagiarism, and all papers are submitted via SafeAssign. Respect the UNH policy on academic integrity and honesty. For more information on this, see <http://www.unh.edu/liberal-arts/plagiarism/plagiarismHome.cfm>.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this semester, you will be able to

- Recognize ethical issues
- Reframe those issues in your own words
- Discuss those issues with others in an informed and thoughtful way
- Identify philosophical arguments and their component parts
- Critically assess philosophical arguments
- Formulate your own responses to philosophical arguments
- Develop reasons for your own philosophical views
- Formulate criticisms of your own philosophical views
- Respond to those criticisms with reasons
- Define key philosophical terms in ethics
- Identify the major ethical theories of Western Philosophy
- Identify some contemporary Western philosophers and their ethical views
- Explain the arguments of those philosophers
- Explain the major criticisms of those views

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR DOING WELL IN THIS COURSE

- 1. Read the syllabus carefully.** The syllabus provides an overview of the course, but it also has important details about the requirements for the course and my expectations of all students who take it.
- 2. Buy the assigned books; buy the assigned editions.** Textbooks cost money, but it is really very little compared to what you are spending on your education overall. Do not use internet versions of assigned readings. Web versions may not include the relevant commentary, footnotes, or ancillary material.
- 3. Do the assigned reading before class.** You should read it at least twice.
- 4. Come to class every day.** This is a component of your grade and a requirement for passing the class. However, lecture and discussion are also crucial to understanding philosophy. For most of people in this course, philosophy is completely new. Give yourself the benefit of lecture and discussion.
- 5. Check Canvas every day. Check the syllabus every day.** Don't hesitate to ask questions if you find something confusing. I post many short, simple handouts on Canvas to supplement lecture and readings, and to assist you with assignments.
- 6. Turn your papers and Canvas discussion contributions on time.** Late papers will be downgraded. My specific policies regarding late papers can be found in the Writing Folder on Canvas. Because you will submit your papers as a Word file through SafeAssign on Canvas, it is always clear when your paper was submitted.
- 7. Listen to your classmates respectfully; participate in discussion.** You will get the most out of this class if you are prepared for discussion and actively engaged in it. Try to really listen to what others say, and if you don't understand it, ask a question. This helps you as well as everyone else. Be a participant, not a spectator.

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- All readings are from George Sher, ed., *Ethics: Essential Readings in Moral Theory* unless otherwise specified.
- A précis of the reading is due before each class meeting, *except* for quiz days and days when papers are due, and where noted on the syllabus.
- Read each assignment twice before class to prepare for lecture, discussion, and quizzes.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPICS/READINGS</u>
January 26	<i>INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: WHAT IS MORAL PHILOSOPHY?</i>
January 28	<i>WHAT IS A GOOD PERSON?</i> Ian Parker, "The Gift," on Canvas in "Readings." Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," pp. 500-513. No quiz; first précis due.
February 2	<i>MORAL THEORIES.</i> Jeremy Bentham, "Pleasure as the Good," pp. 547-549. Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine," pp. 550-551. Précis due.
February 4	John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," pp. 241-252. Quiz 1.
February 9	Mill, cont'd; John Rawls, "Classical Utilitarianism," pp. 262-265. Précis due.
February 11	Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," pp. 253-261. Quiz 2.
February 16	Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and The Demands of Morality," pp. 266-280." Précis due.
February 18	Brad Hooker, "Rule Consequentialism," pp. 281-295. Quiz 3.
February 23	Immanuel Kant, "Morality and Rationality," (from <i>The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>) pp. 327-342. Précis due.
February 25	J. David Velleman, "Reading Kant's Groundwork," pp. 343-359. Quiz 4.

- March 1 Christine Mr. Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," pp. 360-376.
- March 3 Aristotle, "The Nature of Moral Virtue," pp. 433-445, *and excerpt on Canvas*.
Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," pp. 446-459.
First paper due in class.
No quiz, no précis.
- March 8 Midterm Review/Catch up.
- March 10 **MIDTERM EXAMINATION: in class.**
No quiz, no précis.
- March 14-18 SPRING BREAK**
- March 22 (Midterm Results/Review.)
MORALITY AND SELF-INTEREST.
Plato, "The Ring of Gyges," pp. 7-13.
Joel Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism," pp. 14-22.
"The Subway Hero" (Canvas)
Précis due.
- March 24 Thomas Hobbes, "Morality and Self-Interest," pp. 23-33.
Quiz 5.
- March 22 David Gauthier, "Morality and Advantage," pp. 34-42.
Précis due.
- March 24 Christine Korsgaard, "The Authority of Norms," pp. 43-54.
Quiz 6.
- March 29 Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," pp. 55-61.
Précis due.
- March 31 *OBJECTIVITY AND MORAL RELATIVISM.*
James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism," pp. 151-158.
Gilbert Harman, "Ethics and Observation," pp. 158-163.
Excerpt from Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Canvas)
Quiz 7.

- April 5 J. L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values," pp. 181-194.
Nicholas Wade, "Is 'Do Unto Others' Written into Our Genes?" (Canvas)
Précis due.
- April 7 Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," pp. 615-625.
Quiz 8.
- April 12 **Précis due.**
- April 14 P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," pp. 643-659.
Quiz 9.
- April 19 Gary Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme," pp. 659-674.
Précis due.
- April 21 Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck," pp. 675-684.
Ian Parker, "Suffering Souls," (Canvas)
Quiz 10.
- April 26 Shaun Nichols and Joshua Knobe, "Moral Responsibility and Determinism: The Cognitive Science of Folk Intuitions," pp. 685-702.
Précis due.
- April 28 Joshua D. Greene, "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul," pp. 703-724.
Quiz 11.
- May 3 *MORALITY AND SOCIAL POLICY.*
Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," pp. 731-742.
Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral," on Canvas.
Précis due.
- May 5 Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," pp. 750-758.
Richard Miller, "Beneficence, Duty and Distance," pp. 759-773.
Review and reflection.
Second paper due in class. Upload via SafeAssign on Canvas.
No quiz, no précis.

LAST DAY OF CLASSES: May 9
READING DAYS: May 10-12
FINAL EXAM: TBA