

## Sample Syllabus: Introduction to Ethics

**Course Description:** This 10-week course serves as an introduction to philosophy through a number of central issues in moral philosophy. We sometimes say that an action is morally right or wrong. In this course we will ask a number of questions about such claims in order to better grasp the nature of morality. With respect to all of the questions we will investigate competing answers and critically engage with them to examine their strengths and weaknesses. First, we will ask what we are doing when we say that an action is wrong: are we expressing a negative emotional reaction to it, offering our personal opinion, or making an objective claim about the action that it is possible to be mistaken about? Second, we will ask what makes actions right or wrong: is it the consequences of the action, or whether or not we have a duty to perform the action, or whether or not good people characteristically perform those actions? Lastly, we will consider how these different views of the rightness or wrongness of action might give us guidance on a number of contemporary moral issues. Is it wrong to eat meat? What should society do with people who commit horrific crimes? Is abortion morally permissible?

**Course Requirements:** Three 3-page papers and one final exam.

### *Section 1: Metaethics*

#### Week 1: Introduction to Philosophy and Assessing Arguments

#### Week 2: Expressivism and Subjectivism

Readings: Ayer, "Critique of Ethics and Theology"  
Harman, "What is Moral Relativism?"  
Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?*, selections

#### Week 3: Objectivism

Readings: Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?*, selections  
Williams, "Interlude: Relativism"

### *Section 2: Ethical Theories*

#### Week 4 and 5: Utilitarianism

Readings: Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, selections  
Bentham, "Push-Pin versus Poetry"  
Nozick, "The Experience Machine"  
Rawls, "Classical Utilitarianism"  
Williams, "Consequentialism and Integrity"  
Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"  
Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality"  
Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World*, selections

### Week 6: Deontology

Readings: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, selections  
Nagel, "War and Massacre"

### Week 7: Virtue Ethics

Readings: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, selections  
Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, selections  
Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error"

### *Section 3: Applied Ethics*

### Week 8: Animal Rights

Readings: Singer, *Animal Liberation*, selections  
Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights"  
Anderson, "Animal Rights and the Values of Nonhuman Life"

### Week 9: Justifications of Punishment

Readings: Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, selections  
Hampton, "The Moral Education Theory of Punishment"  
Nozick, "Retributive Punishment"

### Week 10: Abortion

Readings: Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"  
Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion"