



# Introduction to Ethics

Philosophy Department  
Fall 2011 PHI 135 9:10-10:00  
Old Main G24 MWF  
3 Credit Hours  
Instructor: Dr. Andy Fitz-Gibbon

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Office Hours: Old Main 140-B, MW 2:30-4:00

## Course Description

### Catalog Description:

(A) Exploration of moral issues found in our daily lives and our special disciplines. Includes problems such as racial and sexual discrimination, abortion, capital punishment, civil disobedience, war, problems in bioethics. (3 cr. hr.)

In this course, we will examine areas of moral agreement and disagreement in contemporary society, and use philosophical concepts to help in our examination. Among other issues of moral import we will consider: euthanasia and sustaining life; sexuality and marriage; poverty and welfare; animal rights and the environment.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- a) Give an account of the major concepts and theories used in moral philosophy (such as deontology, teleology, act and rule utilitarianism, ethical egoism, group ethical egoism, human rights, intrinsic and instrumental value, the categorical imperative etc.).
- b) Apply these concepts and theories to areas of contemporary moral concern.
- c) Construct a reasoned philosophical argument.

## Required Texts

James Rachels and Stuart Rachels. *The Right Thing to Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2007).

James Rachels and Stuart Rachels. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* ((New York: McGraw Hill, 2007).

## Course Requirements

The course has a large discussion requirement, based on the required texts. Set reading and class participation are essential. Classes missed without prearrangement or a medical excuse will have negative consequences on final grade.

Each student will be required to write four 3-4 page take home papers, take part in a group presentation in class with a 3-4 page paper.

Final grade will be based on the following:

Class participation/attendance	10%
Class presentation and paper	18%

One 3-Page paper	18%
One 3-Page paper	18%
Two 3-4 Page papers for final	36%

Self-reflection: 1-page. Due last day of class with three elements:

- a) How many classes you have missed and why?
- b) Grade you would give yourself for participation
- c) 2-3 paragraphs on what you got out of the course

## Papers Due On

**Presentation paper is due on the day of your presentation**

**October 2**

**November 7**

**Final paper due last day of class, December 9**

## The Syllabus

### Week One

General introduction and expectations

What is moral philosophy? Is there a difference between morality and ethics?

Are people moral by nature?

### Week Two

Hume's "is/ought question" and Moore's naturalistic fallacy

Ethical absolutism

Cases of ethical absolutism

### Week Three

No Class Monday: Labor Day

Case study: Euthanasia

Ethical relativism

### Week Four

Cases of ethical relativism

Ethical pluralism

Ways of thinking ethically: deontology

### Week Five

Looking at Kant

The question of sex

Sex continued

### **Week Six**

Presentation #1

Ways of thinking ethically: teleology

Mill's utilitarianism

### **Week Seven**

Ways of thinking ethically: human rights

Human rights cont

No Class Friday Fall Break

### **Week Eight**

Case studies in human rights

Love as a guide to morals

Love as a guide to morals cont

### **Week Nine**

Presentation #2

Ways of thinking ethically: social contract theory

Case Study: poverty in the USA

### **Week Ten**

Case Study: poverty in the USA cont

Case Study: poverty in the USA cont

Ways of thinking ethically: the ethics of care

### **Week Eleven**

Presentation #3

Cases in the ethics of care

Thinking about non-human animals

## **Week Twelve**

Thinking about non-human animals cont

Cases in animals and ethics

Friday is Scholars' day. No Class.

## **Week Thirteen**

Presentation #4

Thanksgiving Break Wednesday and Friday

## **Week Fourteen**

Presentation #5

The challenge of the environment

Ecofeminism

## **Week Fifteen**

Presentation #6

Loose ends

## **Week Sixteen**

Last Day of classes December 9

# **Class Presentations**

Your group task is to choose an area of contemporary moral interest. Examples:

- The Death Penalty
- Gay Marriage
- Abortion
- War
- Terrorism
- \* In vitro fertilization
- Racism
- Sexuality
- World Poverty
- Pollution

In your presentation, you need to incorporate:

- Statistics relevant to your issue
- An understanding of philosophical principles (e.g.. duty, utility, justice, egoism etc.)
- A grasp of the issues: What is the argument? What is at stake in this issue?

- Change over time: how has this moral issue changed?
- Personal experience

Each person in your group should prepare a separate area of research that should last about four to five minutes. As a group, you should design discussion questions for the other groups. You may want to use creative means to get your points across (Movie clips, Powerpoint, an appropriate skit, poetry, a mock debate between two opposing members of your group etc.)

Your presentation should last the whole class.

Each person in the group is required to complete a 3-page reflection on your subject.

## Paper Requirements

### Four 3-4 page Papers

For each of your 3-4 page papers:

- a) Choose one of chapters 11-35 in *The Right Thing to Do*
- b) Explain using philosophical reasoning why you agree or disagree with the argument of the article.
- c) In your reasoning, demonstrate that you understand basic philosophical approaches to moral thinking (e.g. deontology, utilitarianism, ethical egoism, virtue, justice etc.).
- d) You may use outside sources to support your argument.

## Policies and Information

1. SUNY Cortland is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act 1973.

*If you are a student with a disability and wish to request accommodations, please contact the office of Disability Services located in B-40 Van Hoesen Hall or call (607) 753-2066 for an appointment. Any information regarding your disability will remain confidential. Because many accommodations require early planning, requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible. Any request for accommodations will be reviewed in a timely manner to determine their appropriateness to this setting.*

2. **No late work will be accepted unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor.** Such arrangements will be made only under unusual circumstances.

3. Plagiarism. All work submitted must be your own. Ideas either borrowed from others, directly, or through paraphrase, must be well documented through endnotes or footnotes. If plagiarism is suspected the student will be reported to the Provost and can either accept the charge or defend her or himself in the Grievance Tribunal.

4. If you are absent, you are responsible for finding out what went on in class, whether any assignments were given, and for keeping up with your work.

### SUNY Cortland Conceptual Framework

The mission of teacher education at SUNY Cortland is to build upon the foundation of liberal learning in the development of teachers who have exceptional pedagogical knowledge and skills. The foundation of liberal

learning informs the professional education strand in an innovative thematic approach that emphasizes personal responsibility, global understanding and social justice. Graduates of SUNY Cortland's teacher education program will be prepared to think critically, utilize technology, communicate effectively, understand and value diversity, contribute to their communities, and make a difference in the lives of their students.