

PHIL 107: INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS (ONLINE)

Summer 2020

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COURSE DESCRIPTION.

In this six-week online course, we will focus on three major areas of ethics. In the first two weeks, we'll discuss topics in **normative ethics**. Do we have any moral obligations to treat others in a particular way? What does it take to have a good moral character? Our actions often have consequences; how do those consequences bear on the moral status of our actions? These are questions in normative ethics.

In the middle two weeks, we'll discuss topics in **metaethics**. Questions in metaethics are in some sense questions *about* topics in normative ethics; they are "second-order" ethical questions, if you will, and that's what makes them "meta". If we have moral obligations to others, where do those obligations come from? Are moral truths universal or relative to individual societies? These are questions in metaethics.

In the final two weeks, we'll discuss topics in **practical ethics**. Practical ethics takes questions and theories in normative ethics and applies them to real-world issues, and for this reason it is sometimes called *applied ethics*. Is abortion wrong? What about capital punishment? Is economic inequality morally bad? These are questions in practical ethics.

In this course we will spend a good amount of time studying what other people have said about ethical questions and problems, but the primary goal of this course is not to learn who said what. Rather, the primary goal is to use the course readings as the basis for reflection and discussion. Students will be expected to read critically, think carefully, listen charitably, respectfully share their views, and demonstrate their understanding through analytical writing. These are skills that can be honed by practice, and the goal of this course is to give students lots of this sort of practice.

INSTRUCTOR. My name is **Dee Payton** and I'm a graduate student in the Philosophy Department here at Rutgers. **You can call me 'Dee'**. My research focuses primarily on topics at the intersection of analytic feminist philosophy and metaphysics. For me, this means I think a lot about questions like: "What is it for something (like gender) to be socially constructed?", "What is it for something to be social in the first place, rather than biological/natural?"

OFFICE HOURS. My office hours will be held **by appointment over Skype or over the phone** this term. If you would like to set up a meeting with me, send me an email (d.payton@rutgers.edu), and we can set something up!

- **You can ask me about anything course-related during my office hours!** You *do not* have to have your question completely worked out before you come to office hours, and you *do not* have to bring some idea/project/etc. that you think will "impress" me (although if you do, that's cool, too). I've set aside office hours so that you can come to me with anything course-related that you need help with/want to chat about/etc.

COURSE GOALS.

By the end of this course you will be able to . . .

- ⚙ Accurately **summarize** an author's argument, give a **focused objection** to that argument, **anticipate a reply** to that objection, and **offer a response**.
- ⚙ **Defend** a view on a contentious topic by giving a clear, valid argument for the view, defending each premise in turn, and then anticipating and responding to objections.
- ⚙ Give a **general characterization** of three major areas of ethics (normative ethics, metaethics, and practical ethics) and explain a few of the main questions in each of these areas.

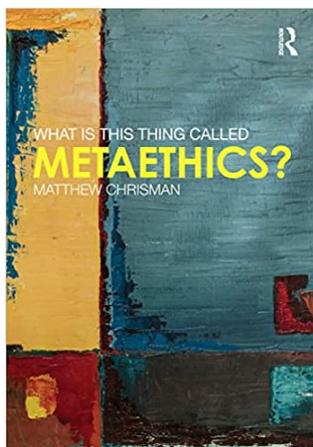
WEBSITE. We will use **Canvas** in this course. Course announcements and reading materials will be posted on the course website. You can access the course website here:

<https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/58576>

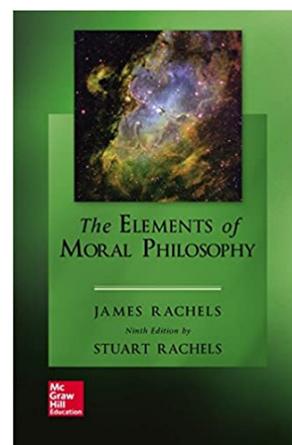
ACCESSIBILITY. Please get in touch with me if you require any accommodations. For further resources, contact the **Office of Disability Services (ODS)**: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

TEXTBOOKS.

In this course we will work primarily from the following two texts. Any other readings will be posted on Canvas. I highly recommend that you get the **e-version** of each text, if possible, because that is much cheaper. Please let me know if you have any trouble acquiring these texts, and we can work something out.



What Is This Thing Called Metaethics?
by Matthew Chrisman



The Elements of Moral Philosophy, 9th Edition
by James Rachels & Stuart Rachels

COURSE REQUIREMENTS.

Reading Quizzes

20%

Every week there will be a reading quiz posted on Canvas with questions about the readings assigned that week. You need to take each quiz by **5pm EDT on Thursday**.

Blog Posts

20%

You are required to make **two** blog posts a week, one on Monday and one on Wednesday. In your post, you should raise a question about or offer a criticism of the reading. These posts should be **100-150 words** long. I will upload a sample blog post to our Canvas site as a reference.

Weekly Questions

10%

Every week, you should upload a question about one of the readings for that week to your private message board by **the end of the day on Thursday**.

On Friday I will record a lecture at 3pm EDT during which I will answer everyone's weekly questions. To get full points on your weekly question, you need to either attend this lecture live or watch the recorded video afterwards.

Writing Assignments

50%

There is no final essay in this course. Instead, you will turn in three writing assignments during the course (see the schedule below for their due-dates). Please see the separate document posted on Canvas for more detailed information about these assignments.

Writing Assignments #1 & #2

In these writing assignments, you should pick an argument offered in one of our course readings, explain it, and provide one original criticism of it. These writing assignments should be between **800-1,000** long.

Writing Assignment #3

In your third writing assignment, you should pick one of your previous two writing assignments and revise it in light of the comments you received on that assignment. This writing assignment should be between **1,000-1,500 words** long.

***Note:** Your grade on writing assignment #3 will *replace* your grade on the writing assignment that you choose to revise.

VIRTUAL CLASSROOM POLICIES.

Late Work	I do not accept late work.
Extra Credit	There is no extra credit offered in this course.
Communication	While I have a no late-work policy in my class, if you get in touch with me <i>as soon as possible</i> to let me know what's going on, I'll be much more amenable than if you wait until the last minute to try to improve your grade. So please, communicate with me! Email me, come to my office hours—let me know what's going on so that we can work together to figure something out.
Respectful Disagreement	In this course, we will work through some topics that will be personal and intimate for many of you, and topics that many of you will have strong personal and/or political views about. And unsurprisingly, there may be disagreement regarding some of these issues among members of our class. I expect that we will each engage each other kindly, conscientiously, and respectfully , regardless of whether we agree with each other.
Academic Honesty	Please adhere to the Rutgers University policies on plagiarism and academic integrity. Penalties for not doing so can be severe: They include an automatic failing grade for the course, and possibly worse. A comprehensive overview of these policies can be found here: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/ .

COURSE SCHEDULE ON NEXT PAGE.

COURSE SCHEDULE

LIST OF WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

Every week you will be responsible for the following assignments:

MONDAYS	Blog Post @11:59pm
TUESDAYS	-----
WEDNESDAYS	Blog Post @11:59pm
THURSDAYS	Quiz @5pm & Weekly Question @11:59pm
FRIDAYS	Lecture @3pm

** On weeks 2, 4, & 6 you will also turn in writing assignments, listed in **red** below

READING FOR WEEK 1: NORMATIVE ETHICS

The Right Thing to Do: Readings in Moral Philosophy (Canvas Reading)

- “A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy”
- “Some Basic Points about Arguments”

The Elements of Moral Philosophy

- Chapter 7: “The Utilitarian Approach”
- Chapter 8: “The Debate over Utilitarianism”

READING FOR WEEK 2: NORMATIVE ETHICS

The Elements of Moral Philosophy

- Chapter 10: “Kant and Respect for Persons”
- Chapter 12: “Virtue Ethics”

Writing Assignment #1 due by 11:59pm EDT on Friday, 6/5

READING FOR WEEK 3: METAETHICS

What is This Thing Called Metaethics?

- Introduction
- Chapter 1: “Four Key Issues”
- Chapter 2: “Nonnaturalism”

READING FOR WEEK 4: METAETHICS

What is This Thing Called Metaethics?

- Chapter 5: “Naturalism”
- Chapter 3: “Expressivism”

Writing Assignment #2 due by 11:59pm EDT on Friday, 6/19

READING FOR WEEK 5: PRACTICAL ETHICS

Abortion (Canvas Reading)

- Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”
- Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”

READING FOR WEEK 6: PRACTICAL ETHICS

Animals (Canvas Reading)

- Singer, “All Animals are Equal”
- Norcross, “Torturing Puppies and Eating Meat”

Writing Assignment #3 due by 11:59pm EDT on Friday 7/3

All done! 😊