

**PHILOSOPHY 130: INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS**  
**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**AUTUMN 2010**

INSTRUCTOR: Alison Duncan Kerr  
OFFICE: 214 University Hall  
OFFICE HOURS: 1:30pm-3:30pm

EMAIL: [kerr.150@osu.edu](mailto:kerr.150@osu.edu)  
LOCATION: 1040 McPherson Lab  
TIME: T/Th, 11:30am-1:18pm

**I. REQUIRED TEXT.**

Rachels, James. (2009) *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. S. Rachels, Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Referred to as [EMP].

Several other articles will be made available on reserve or Carmen.

**II. COURSE WEBSITE:** <https://carmen.osu.edu>

**III. COURSE DESCRIPTION.**

Are moral judgments all relative, and, if so, relative to what? Can moral judgments be made independently of religious considerations? Can they be made independently of cultural considerations? Should we decide what the morally right thing to do is by looking at the consequences of our actions, or are some actions simply right in and of themselves? What's more morally important: the things we do or the reasons for which we do things? Is our character more morally important than our particular actions? Do women and men approach moral problems differently?

We'll spend the first part of the course examining questions like these. Our discussion of these questions will focus, in part, on a specific moral issue: *what we owe to people in other societies whose life prospects are much worse than our own*.

In the time that is left, we'll discuss other pressing moral questions. These topics will be: *animal rights* (What do we owe to animals? Is vegetarianism morally required?) and *abortion* (Is abortion ever morally permissible? Is it always morally permissible?). If time permits, we'll move on to discuss other issues in applied ethics as well.

**GEC Category and Expected Learning Outcomes:**

Philosophy 130 satisfies the Cultures & Ideas subcategory of the Arts & Humanities GEC requirements (2.C.3.). The general goals and expected learning objectives of the Arts & Humanities category of the GEC are as follows.

## **2. C. Arts & Humanities GEC Goals and Expected Learning Outcomes**

### **Goals:**

Students evaluate significant writing and works of art. Such studies develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; interpretation and evaluation; critical listening, reading, seeing, thinking, and writing; and experiencing the arts and reflecting on that experience.

### **Expected Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students develop abilities to be informed observers of, or active participants in, the visual, spatial, performing, spoken, or literary arts.
2. Students develop an understanding of the foundations of human beliefs, the nature of reality, and the norms that guide human behavior.
3. Students examine and interpret how the human condition and human values are explored through works of art and humanistic writings.

The expected learning objectives for the Cultures & Ideas subsection are as follows.

### **2. C. 3. Cultures and Ideas Expected Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students develop abilities to analyze, appreciate, and interpret major forms of human thought and expression.
2. Students develop abilities to understand how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior.

In Philosophy 130, students will read and critically evaluate significant philosophical works that address the foundations of moral judgments, “the norms that guide human behavior.” Students will examine and interpret how human values are explored in both classic and contemporary philosophical writings. Through critical engagement with these works, they will develop their capacity for interpretation and evaluation of philosophical theories and arguments.

## **IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS.**

Your final grade is determined on the basis of participation during class, assignments, quizzes, and two exams. These requirements will be weighed as follows.

### *Participation and Attendance: 10%*

You are expected to attend every class, to have read the assigned readings *before* class, and to bring the readings to class. This course is intended to be significantly discussion-oriented—students are encouraged and expected to take part in discussion in class. Poor attendance will adversely affect your participation grade, but (good) participation in class will improve your participation grade. The quality, not just the quantity, of your participation is very important. I will call on students to answer specific questions about the reading assignments.

*Pop Quizzes: 10%*

There will be 7 pop quizzes throughout the quarter, and the top 6 scores will be counted.

*Exams: 60%*

There will be a midterm and a final exam; each is worth 30%.

*Personal Assignments: 20%*

You will write two personal assignments. The first assignment is a questionnaire that is due at the beginning of the quarter, and the second assignment is due during finals week. We will talk about how to write a philosophy paper, and how to develop a topic, in class. Your papers must be handed in by the end of class on the day that it is due. Anything handed in after class is finished will be considered late. Late assignments are *not* accepted, unless you provide excusing documentation (e.g., a doctor's note).

Note: Failure to complete *any* assignment will result in an automatic failing grade in the course.

## V. READINGS.

We will be reading many of these articles. I'll be announcing what the next class's reading will be at the end of each class. I reserve the right to make changes to the assigned readings, the order, or the due dates of assignments.

TOPIC	READINGS
<b>WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY THINGS ARE RIGHT OR WRONG?</b>	
Introduction	Rachels, "What is Morality?," [EMP], pp. 1-15
Why morality can't be completely different from culture to culture.	Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism," [EMP], pp. 16-34
Why we can't base our moral arguments on religious claims.	Rachels, "Does Morality Depend on Religion?," [EMP], pp. 52-67
<b>WHAT MAKES THINGS RIGHT OR WRONG?</b>	
Utilitarianism: Morality is about the consequences of our actions.	Rachels, "The Utilitarian Approach," [EMP], pp. 89-99
Utilitarianism, cont.	J.S. Mill, selections from <i>Utilitarianism</i>
Utilitarianism, cont.	Rachels, "The Debate Over Utilitarianism," [EMP] pp. 100-116
Application of Utilitarianism: Global Justice	Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
Kantianism: Morality is about doing things for the right reason.	Immanuel Kant, selections from <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>

Kantianism, cont.	Rachels, "Are There Absolute Moral Rules?," [EMP], pp.117-129
Kantianism, cont.	Rachels, "Kant and Respect For Persons," [EMP] pp. 130-140
Application of Kantianism: Global Justice	Onora O'Neill, "Kantian Approaches to Famine Problems"
Virtue Ethics	Rachels, "The Ethics of Virtue," [EMP], pp. 173-190
Application of Virtue Ethics	Andrew I. Cohen, "Famine Relief and Human Virtue"
<b>MORE ISSUES IN APPLIED ETHICS</b>	
Animal Rights	Peter Singer, "All Animals are Equal"
Animal Rights	Michael Pollan, "The Unnatural Idea of Animal Rights"
Abortion	Judith Jarvis Thompson, "A Defense of Abortion"
Abortion	Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"
Abortion	Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"

## VI. EXPECTATIONS.

There is no doubt—philosophy is hard. You will find yourself grappling with ideas and language that are likely to seem quite obscure on the first read. My suggestion is to give the article a quick skim and then go back and read it a second time slowly. This process might sound incredibly time-consuming, but you will find that the ideas sink in much more deeply, and this will save you time and energy in the end.

In general, I expect that you will not interfere with your classmates' ability to learn in the classroom. I expect you to show courtesy and respect to me and to your fellow classmates. While class is in session, please do not send text messages, surf the internet, make or answer phone calls, read things unrelated to the course, listen to headphones, etc. Please try your best to arrive on time for class. If you work or have some other obligation that will regularly cause you to miss class or come in more than fifteen minutes late, I highly recommend that you drop this course.

For discussion to be productive, everyone must participate and be respectful of others. People might feel passionate or sensitive about particular topics that we will discuss. I will try hard, and I ask all of you to try hard, to be sensitive and respectful of each other's feelings. Being respectful, however, is not the same as accepting the views of others uncritically. I respect all of the thinkers whose work we will read this quarter. But, I will be prepared to criticize all of their arguments, and I would do it to their faces if they were here. This is a philosophy class, the sort of environment where we should subject each other's ideas to the same critical scrutiny to which we subject our own ideas. We owe it to each other to point out what we think are flaws in the arguments other people put forward. To do less than that is to patronize them; it is to assume that they can't face the truth, or can't think rigorously. Of course there may be some issues about which, in the end, we think that people can reasonably disagree. But in order to find out which issues those are, we must be ready to pursue the discussion—to do some philosophy.

That said, if you find that you are uncomfortable with the content or tone of the discussion, please let me know as soon as possible.

#### **VII. ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT.**

Academic misconduct—which includes plagiarism and cheating—will not be tolerated. If I suspect that a student is involved in academic misconduct, I am obligated to report it to the university. Penalties are severe and can include failure of the course, academic probation, and even expulsion. It is your responsibility to be familiar with the university's policies on academic misconduct. They can be found here: <http://oaa.osu.edu/coam/home.html>.

#### **VIII. DISABILITIES SERVICES.**

Students who feel that they need special accommodations based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss specific needs. The Office for Disability Services should also be contacted at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to arrange the necessary accommodations. For further information, see: <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.