

**Required texts**

1. James Rachels and Stuart Rachels. (2014). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, (8th edition). New York, NY: McGraw Hill. ISBN: 978-0078119064. Available on Kindle. [EMP]
2. James Rachels and Stuart Rachels. (2014). *The Right Thing to Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy*, (6th edition) New York, NY: McGraw Hill. ISBN: 9780078038235. Available on Kindle. [RTD]

Other reading materials will be made available on reserve.

**Course Description**

This course provides an introduction to problems of *moral* philosophy, or ethics. We will be asking the following questions: 1. Where does morality come from? 2. What do we do when we make a moral judgment? 3. What should morality be like? 4. What does morality do for us? 5. Why should we be moral? In attempting to answer these questions, we will examine and scrutinize various views, theories, and arguments. For instance, we will look at the popular view of Cultural Relativism (“What’s right is whatever my culture says is right”), examine the role of religion in morality (e.g., “What’s right is just what God says is right”), and, most importantly, attempt to understand the role of *reason* in morality with views like Social Contract Theory, Kantian Ethics, and Utilitarianism. We will work with historical as well as contemporary texts and look at the ways in which they attempt to provide systematic procedures for answering questions about right and wrong. In addition, we will discuss a variety of specific moral issues such as assisted suicide, racial biases, and drug policies and drug addiction among others. Our discussion will also draw on empirical data pertaining to these issues. Throughout the course we will seek not so much to form judgments about specific moral issues—most of us do that on our own anyway, though with varying degrees of certitude—but to improve our thinking about the considerations that may count as reasons for and against the moral judgments we are tempted to make.

**Course Schedule****Week 1 Introduction - What is Ethics?**

EMP Ch. 1 – What is Morality?

RTD Ch. 1 – A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy, Ch. 2 – Some Basic Points About Arguments

**Week 2 Moral Authority**

EMP Ch. 2 – The Challenge of Cultural Relativism

Wilson, "What's culture got to do with it? Excising the harmful tradition of female circumcision" *on reserve*

Plato, *Euthyphro*

EMP Ch 4 – Does Morality Depend on Religion?

**Week 3 'Personal' Ethics**

EMP Ch. 3 – Subjectivism in Ethics

EMP Ch. 5 – Ethical Egoism

RTD Ch. 10 – Master and Slave Morality, Friedrich Nietzsche

**Week 4 Social Contract Theory**

EMP Ch. 6 – The Social Contract Theory

Plato, *Crito*

RTD Ch. 32 – Letter from the Birmingham City Jail, Martin Luther King Jr.

### **Week 5 Utilitarianism**

**EMP** Ch. 7 – The Utilitarian Approach, Ch. 8 – The Debate Over Utilitarianism

**RTD** Ch. 3 – Utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill, Ch. 4 – Utilitarianism and Integrity, Bernard Williams, Ch. 5 – The Experience Machine, Robert Nozick

### **Week 6 Kantian Ethics**

**EMP** Ch. 9 – Are There Absolute Moral Rules?, Ch. 10 – Kant and Respect for Persons

**RTD** Ch. 8 – The Categorical Imperative, Immanuel Kant

### **Week 7 Virtue Ethics**

**EMP** Ch. 12 – Virtue Ethics

**RTD** Ch. 9 – The Virtues, Aristotle

*The Person and the Situation* excerpts, Ross and Nisbett *on reserve*

### **Week 8 Feminist Ethics**

**EMP** Ch. 11 – Feminism and Ethics of Care

**RTD** Ch. 11 – Caring Relations and Principles of Justice, Virginia Held  
*A Vindication of the Rights of Women* selections, Mary Wollstonecraft

### **Week 9 Racial Justice**

**RTD** Ch. 33 – Is Racial Discrimination Arbitrary?

"Racial Cognition and the Ethics of Implicit Bias", Daniel Kelly and Erica Roedder

["Fact Sheet: The State of African American Women in the United States"](#), Center for American Progress

### **Week 10 War on Drugs and the Opioid Crisis in the U.S.**

**RTD** Ch. 27 – America's Unjust Drug War, Michael Huemer

"The Prescription Opioid and Heroin Crisis: A Public Health Approach to an Epidemic of Addiction", Kolodny, et al. *on reserve*

["It's time to decriminalize drugs, commission report says"](#), Amanda Holpuch

"Addiction, habits, and blame" excerpts, Tim Schroeder and Nomy Arpaly *on reserve*

### **Week 11 Sexual Ethics**

Thomas Mappes, "Sexual Morality and the Concept of Using Another Person" *on reserve*

Howard Klepper, "Sexual Exploitation and the Value of Persons" *on reserve*

### **Week 12 Assisted Suicide**

**RTD** Ch. 37 – The Morality of Euthanasia, James Rachels, Ch. 38 – The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia  
Screening *How to Die in Oregon* [documentary]

### **Week 13 Summing Up and Future Directions**

**EMP** Ch. 13 – What Would A Satisfactory Moral Theory Be Like?