**Philosophy 106-02   
Current moral and social issues RVCC Spring 2022 Sorensen**

Dates: 1/19-5/3

Location: Somerset Hall S246

Sessions: MW 10:00-11:20

Instructor: Professor David Sorensen  
email: [david.sorensen@raritanval.edu](mailto:david.sorensen@raritanval.edu)

Office hours: Mondays 3-4 (Zoom) or by appointment

**Textbook:**   
The Ethical Life by Russ Shafer-Landau, 4th or 5th edition. ISBN: 9780190631314

Additional readings will be made available online.

**Course description:** This will primarily be a course on applied ethics, though we will discuss political, social, legal, scientific, and metaphysical issues as well. We regularly form judgments about what is right and wrong and about who is and isn’t a good person. While we may have strong views about moral and social issues, what kinds of arguments and reasons do we have for holding them? Are our moral beliefs rational?

We will start with looking at meta-ethical and normative ethical theories. With an understanding of the different theoretical standpoints, we will then move forward to applying these theories to the real world. Throughout the course, we will read and discuss articles written by not only moral philosophers, but journalists, academics, and scientists as well. Among many others, we will ask ourselves the following questions:

* Do animals have rights?
* What is the moral status of a human fetus?
* Is there an important moral difference between killing and letting someone die?
* Do we have obligations to help the poor?
* Should we recycle, drive electric cars, travel less?
* Do gun control laws violate individual rights?
* Is it morally permissible to discriminate on the basis of vaccination status?
* What might future generations condemn us for?

***Specific Learning Objectives:***

-to develop critical thinking skills

-to properly articulate and defend/critique arguments and viewpoints

-to understand the source of moral disagreements and how to resolve them

-to understand the relationship between philosophy, science, religion, and the law

-to become a clear, concise, and effective writer

**Expectations of students:**

Students are expected to carefully read the syllabus, regularly attend (online) class, do the readings, and complete all course assignments. Students should also regularly check your email (every day), and log onto Canvas to check for course updates or revised deadlines. If any problems arise, you should contact me ASAP.

**Course Requirements:**

**1.** Course readings:

**(a)** Textbook: *The Ethical Life* by Russ Shafer-Landau, 4th or 5th edition (scanned copies of **some** of the textbook readings will be available on Canvas)

**(b)** Supplementary readings available on Canvas (go to “pages” and then “reading and homework”)

**1)** You are expected to read the assigned articles and chapters **before** the class session the readings are scheduled for. However, I recommend doing the readings both before and after the class session, as the material may at times be difficult, unclear, or confusing the first time reading it. After having a session discussing the reading, with plenty of opportunity for questions and clarity, the material should be much easier to understand. The tests will assume that you have understood the readings. If you do not understand them, please send me an email or visit me during office hours.

**(c)** Powerpoints will be made available on Canvas

**2.** Course evaluation:

(a) Homework: Canvas quizzes (based on lecture and readings), discussion posts. (b) Paper: There will be one (6-8 page double spaced) paper due at the end of the semester. The paper may be on any of the issues discussed in class. I will provide a list of possible paper topics, but you are free to send me an email or meet with me during office hours to present a topic of your own

(c) Exams: Midterm and Final. Essay-based exams.

**Course grade breakdown:**   
Reading Quizzes and Homework: 25%  
Midterm exam: 25%  
Paper: 25%  
Final exam: 25%

**Course format:** Combination of lecture (Powerpoint), discussion/debate, and small group activities.

**Detailed course schedule: Please complete the readings in the order listed (do not pay attention to the numbers). Unless stated otherwise, the readings will chapters be from the course textbook (Shafer-Landau).**

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| Date | Topic | Reading(s) |
| 1/19 | Course introduction | Course syllabus |
| 1/24 | Moral reasoning and objectivity |  |
| 1/26 | The origins of morality | *The Biological Basis of Ethics* | Singer  *Euthyphro* | Plato |
| 1/31 | Cultural Relativism | 17. Cultural Relativism  Optional: *The Challenge of Cultural Relativism* (Canvas) |
| 2/2 | Culture and Toleration: Case Studies | Excerpts from *The Evil Within*, Jeske |
| 2/7 | Ethical Egoism | *The Ring of Gyges,* Plato  *Egoism and Moral Skepticism* (Canvas) |
| 2/9 | Utilitarianism | *Utilitarianism*, Mill  *The Experience Machine*, Nozick |
| 2/14 | Kantianism | Rachels readings |
| 2/16 | Euthanasia: part 1 |  |
| 2/21 | Euthanasia: part 2 | Rachels on Euthanasia |
| 2/23 | Euthanasia: part 3 |  |
| 2/28 | Midterm Exam |  |
| 3/2 | Abortion I | *Is Abortion Morally Wrong*? | Stich and Donaldson |
|  | Abortion II | Judith Jarvis Thomson, A Defense of Abortion |
|  | SPRING |  |
| 3/14 | BREAK |  |
| 3/16 | Abortion III | On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion, Warren  Don Marquis, Why Abortion Is Immoral |
| 3/21 | Ethics in 2100 | Kwame Anthony Appiah *What Will Future Generations Condemn Us For?* |
| 3/23 | Extreme Poverty | The Singer Solution to World Poverty |
| 3/30 | Extreme Poverty II: Critiques to the Singer Solution | Onora O'Neill A Kantian Approach to Famine Relief\*  More Than Charity: Cosmopolitan  Alternatives to the “Singer Solution”  Response from Singer |
| 4/4 | Extreme Poverty III: Effective Altruism and its critics | Temkin MacAskill |
| 4/6 | Animal ethics: The argument from suffering | Vegetarianism | Rachels  27. Peter Carruthers Against the Moral Standing of Animals |
| 4/11 | Animal ethics II: The cocamone argument | 28. Puppies, Pigs, and People |  Norcross |
| 4/13 | Animal ethics III: The argument from marginal cases | *Excerpts from Dialogues on Vegetarianism* (Canvas) |
| 4/18 | Climate Change I | The Puzzle of Inefficacy Tristan McPherson |
| 4/20 | Climate Change II | The Public and Private Morality of Climate Change *Broome* |
| 4/25 | Public health ethics |  |
| 4/27 | The ethics of lockdowns | [Selective lockdowns can be ethically justifiable – here's why (theconversation.com)](https://theconversation.com/selective-lockdowns-can-be-ethically-justifiable-heres-why-171769) |
| 5/2 | The ethics of vaccine mandates | <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/24/are-covid-vaccine-mandates-ethical-heres-what-medical-experts-think.html> |
|  | Final exam |  |

**Expectations of students:**

Students are expected to regularly attend class, do the readings, keep notes, and collect handouts or additional materials distributed in class. If any problems arise, you should contact me ASAP.

Policy on electronic devices: Laptops will be permitted only for notetaking or reading course materials (e.g. assigned readings, syllabus). Phones may be used for research purposes when permission is granted.

COVID-related policies:

**Effective immediately, as an important protective measure, face masks are required in all RVCC buildings.**

**In the event that the college closes temporarily or permanently due to COVID or some other emergency, we will shift to a remote synchronous format. The lectures will take place during the same time as the in-person sessions. Additionally, exams will be taken remotely rather than in person.**

**Unexplained absences and missing assignments:**

Under most circumstances, if you do not report to me, in advance, that you will be absent or unable to submit an assignment on time, then you will not receive full credit. Assignments and problem sets that are not complete by May 4th will receive zeros.

**Academic integrity:**

RVCC’s policy on plagiarism:

*Raritan Valley Community College requires independent, honest work on the part of its students, and students are expected to conduct themselves with scholarly integrity. Each confirmed incident of academic dishonesty, cheating or plagiarism must be reported by the faculty member, in writing, to the Dean of Academic Affairs. Violations of academic dishonesty and cheating include, but are not limited to:*

1. *Copying graded homework assignments from another student.*
2. *Working together on an assignment without being authorized by the faculty member to do so.*
3. *Looking at another student’s paper during an exam.*
4. *Copying another student’s computer program or class project and submitting it as one’s own.*
5. *Stealing or borrowing all or part of an exam’s questions or answers.*
6. *Entering a computer file without authorization.*
7. *Giving someone answers to exam question while the exam is being given.*
8. *Giving or selling a term paper, report, drawing, or computer program to another student for submission to the faculty member.*
9. *Deceiving a faculty member to improve one’s grade.*
10. *Falsifying data or a source of information.*
11. *Use of any technology to gain access to test answers, test questions or prohibited materials such as notes, online databases and websites during a test.*
12. *Submitting work for a grade that was executed in another class or previous semester without the instructor’s permission.*

**Accommodations for students with disabilities**RVCC’s policy:

*The College recognizes that the legal rights and responsibilities that affect students with disabilities in a college setting are different than in a high school setting and responds to those differences in compliance with all state and federal laws. Questions about these differences or any other issues affecting students with disabilities should be directed to the Office of Disability Services, College Center 143, (908) 526-1200, extension 8418 or e-mail* [*disabilityservices2@raritanval.edu*](mailto:disabilityservices2@raritanval.edu)*.*

**Useful resources:**   
<https://plato.stanford.edu/> *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*  
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/> *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy*