

Ethics and Moral Philosophy

Azim Premji University | Monsoon 2021

T&W 9:40–10:40; T 10:50–11:50; R 8:30–9:30 | Classroom: B3-1-03

Course Instructor:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

In this course, students will be asked to apply their understanding to challenging social realities in India, especially in the first half where we focus on ethics as applied to concrete ethically troubling contexts within the broader context of India. The course is divided into two units. In the first unit, students will examine the nature of moral judgments. In particular, we'll focus on the question: What motivates us to act in accordance to moral beliefs? In the second unit, students will apply their philosophical knowledge and capabilities to morally troubling situations in their own lives, in the Indian context, and on occasion in an international context. Here are some questions we will discuss: Is sexual consent sufficient for any sexual act to be permissible? Why is it good to forgive? Why is friendship valuable, and is it wrong to need your friends? Are you personally responsible for climate change? Can organisations be moral subjects?

The assignments in this course are designed not only to evaluate students' understanding of the content, but also to develop capabilities like basic research abilities, text interpretation, written and presentation skills, and team-work experience.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

- a. Assess complex ideas about the nature of morality, and create their own original metaethical views;
- b. Describe the relevant details of ethically troubling situations within the Indian context;
- c. Explain when and how philosophical views and arguments underwrite ethical judgments;
- d. Introspect about their own moral assumptions;
- e. Cooperate with those who have different views to deepen their knowledge and capabilities.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 30% Worksheets – in class (mostly)
- 10% Meta-Ethics Essay – Draft
- 20% Meta-Ethics Essay – Final Version
- 10% Ethics in Context Essay – Draft
- 20% Ethics in Context Essay – Final Version
- 10% Participation

Worksheets – in class (30%)

Questions taken up during the Problem class, assessed weekly with feedback during or after the seminar.

There will be 15 worksheets. Each worksheet is worth 3%. The lowest 5 scores will be dropped. Worksheets are due either in class or the following lecture.

Meta-Ethics Essay – Draft (10%)

A draft of **at least 1000 words** to be submitted. Graded on a pass/fail. Feedback given has to be incorporated in the final version.

The paper is on topics 1.1–1.7 (pending instructor’s approval).

Due on **Sept 16, Thursday, by 11:59PM, on Moodle.**

Feedback by Sept 30, Thursday, by 11:59PM, on Moodle.

Meta-Ethics Essay – Final Version (20%)

An essay of **up to 2500 words** graded on the standard philosophy rubric.

Due on **Oct 5, 11:59PM, on Moodle.**

Grade breakdown:

- 5% response to feedback;
- 15% final version.

Ethics In Context Essay – Draft (10%)

Same as “Meta-Ethics Essay – Draft”.

Due on **Nov 18, Thursday, 11:59PM, on Moodle.**

Feedback by Dec 2, Thursday, 11:59PM, on Moodle.

Ethics In Context Essay – Final Version (20%)

Same as “Meta-Ethics Essay – Final Version”.

Due on **Dec 7, 11:59PM, on Moodle.**

Grade breakdown: same as “Meta-Ethics Essay – Final Version”.

Participation (10%)

Participation grade will be based on student’s engagement throughout the course at the instructor discretion. Students can show engagement by participating in lectures, problem classes, and seminars.

Attendance will be taken but do not expect a perfect grade merely for being an organic body.

If there’s anything that prevents you from consistently participating in the course in one of the aforementioned ways, email me **by the end of the third week of classes** to discuss alternative ways to show engagement in the course.

NOTE: Things change – the Fates are fickle. Consequently, information found on this syllabus is subject to revision as we progress through the quarter: Readings and content may be added (or cut) depending on our rate of progress, and it may be necessary to amend the due date of the assignments. Revisions will be announced in lecture and posted online. It is each student’s responsibility to keep informed of any changes.

If you are facing a major medical or another major difficulty that is keeping you from doing well in the class, contact me as soon as you can. I am happy to work with you to find the best course of action and, if possible, to help you complete the course successfully. But I can't help if you don't let me know about your circumstances as soon as they arise.

Please, don't wait until after the last week of classes to let me know about your circumstances. At that point there is virtually nothing I can do to accommodate you.

MATERIALS

- All course materials, information, assignments, etc. will be available on Moodle.
- All communications will be made through your university email ID or announcements on Moodle. Please make sure you check your inbox and Moodle frequently. It is each student's responsibility to keep informed of any changes.

GRADING

The following grading scale will apply: 0-29% U, 30-39% E, 40-49% D, 50-59% C, 60-69% B, 70-79% A-, 80-89% A, 90-100% O

Paper and exams will be graded based on the evaluation criteria you find by clicking on "Philosophy Rubrics" here <https://julianafima.github.io/current>. You'll also find link to videos of Kit Patrick marking an O and a C paper. The QR Code below will give you access to these resources.



COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS

Unit 1 - Meta-ethics (7 weeks)

<i>Week 1</i>	Aug 24–26	Overview of course content & structure & syllabus 1.1 The Moral Problem <i>Reading:</i> Smith, M. (1994) The Moral Problem, Ch. 1.
<i>Week 2</i>	Aug 31– Sep 2	1.2. Error Theory <i>Reading:</i> Mackie, J. (1977). Ethics: Inventing right and wrong
<i>Week 3</i>	Sep 7–9	1.3. Non-cognitivism <i>Reading:</i> Schroeder, M. (2008) Non-cognitivism in ethics, chapter 9.
<i>Week 4</i>	Sep 14–16	1.4. Reductive Naturalistic Realism <i>Reading:</i> Railton, P. ‘Moral Realism’
<i>Week 5</i>	Sep 21–23	1.4. Reductive Naturalistic Realism (cont’ed) <i>Reading:</i> Railton, P. ‘Moral Realism’
<i>Week 6</i>	Sep 28–30	1.5 Cornell Realism <i>Reading:</i> Brink (1989) Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics, Selections from chapters 6 and 7.
<i>Week 7</i>	Oct 5–7	1.6. Moral Motivation <i>Reading:</i> Smith “The externalist challenge”

Midterm Break

Unit 2 - Ethics in context (8 weeks)

<i>Week 8</i>	Oct 19–21	2.1. Section 377 and Sexual Consent (1 week) <i>Talk:</i> Naz Foundation. Morgan, Seiriol. "Sex in the Head." Journal of Applied Philosophy 20.1 (2003): 1-16.
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- Week 9-10* Oct 26–28
Nov 2–4 **2.2. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and Forgiveness (2 weeks)**
Why is it good to forgive? When is it wrong to forgive? Who may forgive?
Reading: Griswold, Charles. *Forgiveness: A philosophical exploration*. Cambridge University Press, 2007, Chap. 2.
Can groups be forgiven? How is group forgiveness the same as individual forgiveness?
Reading: Fact sheet on Khmer Rouge Tribunals
Digeser, P. (2001). *Political forgiveness*. Cornell University Press.
- Week 11-12* Nov 9–11
Nov 16–18 **2.3. Social Media and Friendship (2 weeks)**
Why is friendship valuable, and is it wrong to need your friends?
Readings: Fact sheet on social media and social relations
Should I lie or cheat for my friends?
Reading: Cocking, D., & Kennett, J. (2000). *Friendship and moral danger*. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 97(5), 278-296.
- Week 13* Nov 23–25 **2.4 India, China, and Climate Change (1 week)**
Readings: Fact sheet on China and India's responses to climate change
Reading: Hiller, A. (2011). *Climate change and individual responsibility*. *The Monist*, 94(3), 349-368.
- Week 14* Nov 30–
Dec 2 **2.5. Bhopal Disaster and Organisational Responsibility (1 week)**
Reading: Fact sheet on Bhopal disaster
Extracts from Lucas, John Randolph. "Responsibility." (1995).
- Week 15* Dec 7–9 **2.6. Colonialism (1 week)**
Reading: Fact sheet on India and South Asia
Ypi, L. (2013). *What's wrong with colonialism*. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 41(2), 158-191.

Week 16 Reading Week

The End!