



PHI 107:  
Introduction to Ethics  
with Dr. Sarah Vincent



Course Description

The advertised course description is as follows: “How should I live? What makes an action right or wrong? How can we justify answers to moral questions in the face of disagreement? In addressing questions like these, we will weave together ethical theories with specific applications of those theories. Theories to be discussed may include, but need not be limited to, Cultural Relativism, Subjectivism, Egoism, Social Contract Theory, Virtue Ethics, Kantianism, and Utilitarianism. We'll consider how such theories inform our moral commitments in contexts like the criminalization of drugs, sexual morality, gender equality, racial justice, animal rights, and more.”

To elaborate on the general description above, we will begin this course with an overview of various ethical theories. Some of these –relativism, moral nihilism, subjectivism, and egoism – present challenges to identifying or defending universal ethical norms. Others – virtue ethics, Kantianism, utilitarianism, and social contract theory – try nevertheless to do just that. Thus, engaging these theories collectively will help us to recognize what's difficult about doing ethics without needing to concede that normative ethics is hopeless. With this theoretical landscape sketched, we'll turn to applied ethics. Specifically, we will read and engage articles related to recreational drug use, sexual consent, gender policing, racial justice, and non-human animals.