

1889-
1951



“If a [person] could write a book on Ethics which really *was* a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world.”

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Lecture on Ethics”

CEP 461 A&B: ETHICS AND IDENTITY

Final Syllabus

Winter 2021

MW 8:30-10:20

Remotely on Zoom!

Professor:

Mark Purcell

mpurcell@uw.edu

Office Hours:

By appointment—just schedule something with me!

Course website:

<https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1432063>

Introduction

There are two main aims in this course. The first is to help you develop *critical literacy* in the major debates about ethics and morality. This means being aware of, really understanding, and critically evaluating the various arguments that people make about ethics and morality. The second aim is to help you gain experience developing, articulating, applying, and defending your ethical arguments as a member of a larger community.

Course Goals

- Develop critical literacy in key arguments about ethics and morality.
- Gain experience articulating those arguments and negotiating them together with other people.
- Develop a better understanding of how those arguments work in everyday practice.
- Improve academic communication, reading, writing, and analytical skills.
- Form a viable and sustainable learning community among ourselves.

Student Responsibilities

In CEP, students have significant responsibilities, and the success of the course ultimately depends upon how well those responsibilities are met. Your first responsibility is to one another and to one another's education. In this class you and your classmates will generate knowledge through discussion, deliberation, and debate. In order for the class to be successful, *you* must be an active participant in both teaching and learning. In class, each of you will participate by contributing, discussing, listening, facilitating, and analyzing the material, while outside of class, each of you will participate by reading the material and carefully completing each assignment and turning it in on time.

At the end of the quarter, students must also complete a narrative evaluation of their performance in the course.

In order to meet the above requirements, of course, you must attend. I expect each student to attend and participate fully in every class. Attendance will be noted at all scheduled meeting times, and participation will be evaluated for every class. Part of this means ***arriving on time***. This means *at or before* 8:30. Not *around* 8:30.

Instructor Responsibilities

I play several roles in the class and can be relied upon to provide the following:

1. **A safe and rigorous learning context:** My first job is to set the learning context for the course. In this case that means establishing much of the structure of the course. Setting the context also means that I will work to make sure that the learning environment is a safe, respectful, and productive environment for all of us. As a community, the class should maintain these standards by regulating itself, but if a student continues to feel that these standards are not being met then he or she should speak to me so that we can find ways to resolve the problem.

Of course, this quarter's learning context will be really unusual, since we are meeting remotely. We are going to try to approximate as closely as possible on zoom what we would have done in person. But of course we will not be together in the same context (a classroom) but in a whole range of different contexts. If anything about your situation is making it hard for you to fully participate, please let me know, so we can brainstorm solutions. This "anything" could include your time zone, your internet connection, your home life... and there could be any number of things besides. Just let me know.

2. **Timely feedback, advice, and instruction on course assignments and other course requirements:** Students should expect me to provide timely and considered feedback on course assignments and projects. I will also be available to answer questions about the material, provide advice and information, and otherwise aid students in their learning.
3. **Assigning final credit for the course:** I will be responsible for assigning final course grade consistent with the grading basis (numerical grade or CR/NC) you have selected.

Assessment

Your final assessment in this course will be based on your performance on the following:

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Date Due</i>
Class Participation	30	Every class (and outside class)
Reading Assignments	35	Almost every class
Final Essay Check-in	5	March 3
Final Essay	20	March 16
Discussion Facilitation	10	March 16
Self-evaluation	0	March 23
Total	100	

For those of you taking the course CR/NC:

University guidelines state that the instructor must determine the minimum performance level that can earn a grade of credit. In this course, the minimum level is 75 percent. In other words, if you earn between 75-100 percent of the points possible in the course, you will receive a grade of “credit.” If you earn less than 75 percent you will receive a grade of “no credit.”

For those of you taking the course for a standard numerical grade:

I will similarly follow all university guidelines, but in your case that will result in a numerical grade rather than CR/NC.

Course Readings

Are available in a PDF document on the canvas site.

Academic honesty and integrity

The University takes academic misconduct – cheating and plagiarism – very seriously. So do I. Both are violations of the university’s Student Conduct Code, and so I am required to report them immediately to the university’s office of Community Standards & Student Conduct. Sadly, such violations do happen in CEP, and they are reported.

Cheating is using the work or ideas of others to write your assignments instead of doing the work yourself. Plagiarism is representing the work of others as your own without giving appropriate credit. If you are unsure what is OK or not OK, don't hesitate to ask!

Class Schedule

Week 1:	
Monday, January 4	Introduction to Course, Finalizing Course Design
Wednesday, January 6	Topic: Introduction to Consequentialist Approaches Reading: Almeder, R. (2000) <i>Human Happiness And Morality: A Brief Introduction to Ethics</i> , Amherst, NY, Prometheus Books., pp. 23-49 Assignment: Reading Assignment #1
Week 2:	
Monday, January 11	Topic: Introduction to Deontological Approaches Reading: Almeder, pp. 49-89 Assignment: Reading Assignment #2
Wednesday, January 13	Topic: Platonic Ethics Reading: Plato, selections from <i>Gorgias</i> ; all of <i>Euthyphro</i> (the introductions to both are included and recommended) Assignment: Reading Assignment #3
Week 3:	
Monday, January 18	MLK Day – No Class Required Reading: King, parts of “Letter From Birmingham Jail” Optionally Watch: video of “I Have A Dream” speech Optionally Read: King, “Martin Luther King Jr. on the Vietnam War” (https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/02/martin-luther-king-jr-vietnam/552521/)
Wednesday, January 20	Topic: Virtue Ethics Readings: Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I (the Crisp introduction to Aristotle is included and recommended) Assignment: Reading Assignment #4
Week 4:	
Monday, January 25	Topic: Virtue Ethics Readings: Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II Assignment: Reading Assignment #5
Wednesday, January 27	Topic: Natural Law Readings: St. Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> , First Part of the Second Part, Questions 90-108 (the McDermott introduction is included and recommended) Assignments: Reading Assignment #6

Week 5:	
Monday, February 1	<p>Topic: Consequentialist Ethics</p> <p>Readings: Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>, Chapters 1-2 (the Pojman introduction to Mill is included and recommended)</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #7</p>
Wednesday, February 3	<p>Topic: Deontological Ethics</p> <p>Readings: Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals</i>, Preface; Chapter 1; Chapter 2, pp. 74-80 (the Pojman introduction to Kant is included and recommended)</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #8</p>
Week 6:	
Monday, February 8	<p>Topic: Deontological Ethics</p> <p>Readings: Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals</i>, Chapter 2, pp. 80-113; Chapter 3 (pp. 114-131)</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #9</p>
Wednesday, February 10	<p>Topic: Emotivist Ethics</p> <p>Readings: Hume, <i>Treatise of Human Nature</i>, Book 3, Part 1, Sections 1 & 2 (both the Pojman and Rachels introductions to Hume are included and recommended)</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #10</p>
Week 7:	
Monday, February 15	<p>Presidents' Day – No Class</p> <p>Optional Reading: The Emancipation Proclamation</p> <p>Optional Reading: <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i></p> <p>Optionally Watch: <i>12 Years a Slave</i></p> <p>Optionally Watch: <i>Lincoln</i></p>
Wednesday, February 17	<p>Topic: Nietzschean Ethics</p> <p>Readings: <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>, Preface and Part 1 (the Welchman introduction to Nietzsche is included and recommended)</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #11</p>
Week 8:	
Monday, February 22	<p>Topic: Nietzschean Ethics</p> <p>Readings: Nietzsche, from <i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i>, Preface and First Essay (the Ansell-Pearson introduction to <i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i> is included and recommended)</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #12</p>
Wednesday, February 24	<p>Topic: Feminist Ethics</p> <p>Readings: Noddings, <i>Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics</i>, Introduction and Chapter 4 [Optional Reading: Tong, <i>Feminist Ethics</i> (a good intro to the many approaches in FE)]</p> <p>Assignments: Reading Assignment #13</p>

Week 9:	
Monday, March 1	<p>Topic: Feminist Ethics</p> <p>Readings: Gilligan, <i>In a Different Voice</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 1-23 • Selections from Chapter 2, pp. 312-319 <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #14</p>
Wednesday, March 3	<p>Topic: Feminist Ethics</p> <p>Readings: Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #15, Final Essay check-in</p>
Week 10:	
Monday, March 8	<p>Topic: Feminist/Queer Ethics</p> <p>Readings: Butler, "Bodily Vulnerability, Coalitional Politics"</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #16</p>
Wednesday, March 10	<p>Topic: Feminist/Mestiza Ethics</p> <p>Readings: Anzaldua, "<i>La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness</i>"</p> <p>Assignment: Reading Assignment #17</p>
Exam Week	
Tuesday, March 16 8:30-10:20am Same Zoom	<p>Topic: Retrospective</p> <p>Readings: None</p> <p>Assignment: Final Essay</p> <p>Note: we do not have an exam during this period. We do, however, have <i>class</i>, probably our most important class, in which we make sense of the overall lessons we have learned about ethics.</p>

Reading Assignments

Overview

For each class discussion, you will read the text and then you will prepare a written assignment. The idea of this assignment is to help you develop a better critical understanding of the reading and prepare you to discuss it effectively. For each reading assignment, you must do *both* Part One and Part Two.

Part One: You will answer a specific question (or questions) that I pose about the reading. Each reading is different, and so each has a specific question tailored to it. The questions for each reading are available on the course website under the “Assignments” tab. In general, Part One should not be more than 200 words.

Part Two: For this part you must choose to do *one* of three tasks below. Each reading will probably affect you differently, and so for each reading you should choose the task that best fits your experience with that reading.

Task A: Discussion Question

Write a discussion question that prompts your peers to discuss what you feel is a pressing issue in the reading. Your question should be written in a way that generates discussion. Good discussion questions are “open-ended.” They have a complex answer and/or a range of possible answers. They are usually not “closed-ended,” meaning that there is a particular, discrete answer. Good discussion questions are also genuine. That means you have not already made up your mind what the answer is. For example if you ask, “Is rational thought the best way to do ethics?” and you really have not made up your mind whether rational thought is the best way or not, your question is genuine. You are really *asking*, and so you are likely to generate really good discussion. If, on the other hand, you ask, “Kant can’t really believe rational thought is the best way to do ethics, can he?!” you have made up your mind that rational thought is *not* the best way to do ethics. You are really *telling*, not asking. People are less likely to respond. So, for the purposes of these discussion questions, *ask*, don’t tell. Moreover, your questions can be either descriptive or normative. *Descriptive* questions ask about what actually is happening in the reading, or in the world. Examples: “Does Hume mean to say...?” or “What does Mill mean by higher pleasure?” *Normative* questions ask what *should* be going on in the readings or in the world. For example, the genuine question above about whether we should use reason to do ethics is normative. Normative questions open up the issue of values, of what people think the world should be like.

Option B: Reflective Journal

This task depends on you, on the reading, and on how those two things interact. You should reflect on the reading in the way that you find most productive. You might discuss aspects of the reading you found enlightening, or inspiring, or infuriating, or confusing, or particularly useful for formulating your own ethical identity. The primary intention of this task is for you to think more about your ethical identity, but that does not *have* to be the topic. As long as your reflections here are genuine, and they connect with the readings, you are doing it right. The length of this component is up to you, but I will give you an optional maximum of 300 words. Of course, if you are really on to something, and you need more words here, that is fine.

Option C: Real-World Application

In this task, you bring the reading into conversation with a concrete (real-world) ethical case. You can use the case to elucidate the reading, or the reading to elucidate the case. Both ways are fine, as long as you discuss seriously how the two are related in a meaningful way. The length of this component is up to you, but I will give you an optional maximum of 300 words.

Format

The reading assignments must be typed and uploaded to the canvas site. In order to make these easier for me to parse, some standardization helps. So please label each part. For example:

Part One

Your text here

Part Two, Option C

Your text here

Grading

The entire assignment will be graded on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). The grading for Part One will be very much like it was in CEP 301: do you effectively answer the question concisely? For Part Two, I will want to see you carrying out the task in a genuine and serious way.

No late work will be accepted *for credit*, but I am always happy to read and give feedback on late work to help you in your effort to understand the material, so don't hesitate to turn an assignment in if you have completed it but it is after the deadline.

Class Participation

Participation makes up a significant portion of your course grade. It is important. And there is no way around participating. As the syllabus lays out, each of you has a *responsibility* to others in the class to share your ideas and insights. The way this happens is by you speaking during class. If you do not actively listen and share your questions and ideas with everyone, they can't benefit from what you have to offer. Each of you has important questions and ideas to share that we can all learn from. Therefore, since you all have something important to contribute, you all have a responsibility to contribute it.

You will be graded on participation class-by-class. Effective participation in a given class period is not measured by amount. If you consistently share your ideas and questions and concerns in an honest effort to explore the material in the spirit of intellectual curiosity, you will receive a good grade for participation.

So, the strategy for participation is this: do not hesitate to share your thoughts. Do not think that they have to be fully formed and 100% defensible before you offer them. Do not think that they have to be brilliant or dazzling. Do not think you should remain quiet because you have different ideas about a topic than most others in the class (that's when we need you most). And, most importantly, do not think that you have to *know* before you speak. *Honest questions and true struggles within yourself that you have not yet resolved are the best way to contribute.*

Remember also that *listening* is as important as talking. Asking *genuine* questions (for which you have not already decided on an answer) is a good way to listen. If you ask a question that you do not already have an answer for, you will genuinely want to *hear* what your classmates have to say. The worst thing for discussion is a series of unrelated monologues. What we are shooting for are true *dialogues* in which you engage the comments and questions of others rather than following them up with unrelated comments and questions. Be *curious* about what others have to say.

I understand that oral participation in class is a struggle for some. I am willing to explore any and all ways to help you participate. If you feel uncomfortable with speaking in class, for whatever reason, you should come see or e-mail me so we can think of ways to make it more comfortable. I stand ready to help you find ways to speak, but the responsibility for participating is yours.

As you know only too well, this quarter is very unusual. We will be conducting our discussions over zoom. This is not ideal, but it can actually be really effective as long as everyone is focused and engaged. If this is going to work, though, we really are going to need to be able to *see* each other, just like we would have in person. So, as a rule, your camera needs to be on. Of course, things that come up and here and there you will need to turn your camera off for a minute. That is fine, just make sure to let me know by private chat why you need to do so. But as a default, please leave your camera on when you are in class. Of course, zoom also has a chat feature. Some limited use of the chat *can* be effective, but we do not want two streams of conversation going, one in voice/video and one in chat. Please use the voice/video feature to participate orally in discussion, and use the chat feature almost never. If there is something really important, like a link, or something that makes sense in written form, you can use the chat for that.

Discussion Facilitation:

Point Persons and Case-Study Briefs

We will not use the traditional system of discussion facilitation where two or three students facilitate a given discussion. Instead, we will use an “organic” or “distributed” model in which *everyone* is responsible for facilitating each discussion. For each class, the each person is responsible for initiating discussion, for asking questions to keep the discussion going, for connecting the readings to concrete empirical cases, and for getting the discussing back on track when it wanders.

In this organic model, we hope discussions of concrete empirical cases will arise naturally. However, fearing they may not, we will assign a *point person* for each discussion that will prepare a *brief*, or short summary description, of a concrete ethical case that they think is a good pair for the ethical arguments in the reading for that day. The brief should give a clear, concise description of the case and the ethical question(s) involved, as well as some indication of how the point person sees the connection between the case and the reading for that day. The brief should be no more than a page long. The point person must post their brief on the canvas site at least *24 hours before* the class they are pointing, so that all of us have time to read it before our discussion begins.

In addition, during discussion the point person will be responsible for stepping up and facilitating discussion should the group struggle to do so. The point person(s) will not take over and do most of the talking. Rather they will be there to:

- ask open questions that prompt discussion when the conversation stalls
- get the discussion back on track when it wanders
- manage the balance of voices when the group does not do this organically

We expect that the point person will not need to do any of these latter tasks, because the group will be effectively facilitated by everyone together.

Grading

The point person will not be graded on whether they step up during discussion, since we expect that they won't have to. They will just be graded on their brief. Here I will want to see a brief that 1) gives a clear, concise description of the case and the ethical question(s) involved, and 2) effectively communicates how the point person sees the connection between the case and the reading for that day.

Final Essay

The idea of this assignment is to bring the ethical arguments in the readings into conversation with some other “thing.” You have three choices as to what that other “thing” is:

- A) A concrete ethical case in the “real world”
- B) Some element of your own ethical identity
- C) A tradition of ethical thought not explored in the course readings

The idea of this assignment is for you to write a compelling essay about the relationship between one (or *maybe* more) of the arguments in the course (e.g. Mill’s argument for the Greatest Happiness Principle) and the “thing” you have chosen. In analyzing that relationship, your essay can go either way: you can either show how the “thing” helps us think differently, and better, about the argument from the course, or you can show how the argument from the course helps us think differently, and better, about the “thing.” Either way, the essay will need to both effectively describe the relevant aspects of the “thing” you have chosen and give a thorough and skillful account of the ethical idea from the course. And it must also offer a compelling *argument* about how they are related.

To give you a sense of how long the essay should be, so you don’t worry about that issue, let’s set the word maximum at 2,500 words. Please use a sane 12pt font, double-space, one-inch margins, number the pages, put your name on it, and have a title.

Grading

In grading your essay, I will be particularly interested in how you handle the *ethical ideas*. But I will also look to see if you communicate the details of the “thing” clearly and in a way that best speaks to the ethical argument you want to address. Lastly, I will evaluate whether you have made a clear and compelling *argument* about the relationship between the ethical ideas and the “thing.”

Final Essay Check-in

In Week 9, you will “pitch” an idea for an essay to me, in writing (no more than a page). This pitch will articulate what your “thing” is, what argument from the course you plan to address, and some idea of the argument you plan to make about how your “thing” relates to the argument from the course. The idea of this check-in is both to compel you to start early on your essay, and to give you the opportunity to have an informed preview audience (me) who can give you feedback that will help you improve the final product. So, for this check-in to be successful you will need to have done most of the legwork so that you have a solid grasp of the course argument and the details of your “thing.” If you just throw a paragraph together at the last minute, you will have missed the point of this exercise, and your final paper will be less successful as a result.

Some Concrete Ethical Cases (also available on the “Case Studies” page on Canvas)

Here are some examples of ethical issues that are currently being debated in U.S. society. These might help prompt some ideas for your final essay, but mostly I am including them here as cases we might consider throughout the quarter as we try to connect the ethical ideas in the course to concrete ethical questions. There are, of course, many other cases we might discuss as well.

Cities and Urban Planning

What rules should govern how police use violence against citizens?

Is gentrification OK if it is generating economic growth? Why/not?

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2014/12/27/373284989/icymi-2014-soccer-field-standoff-highlights-gentrification-tension>

Is it OK for planners to tell people how to live/ behave (by setting planning rules), if it is for their own good?

Should the government control liquor sales, or should it be left to the free market?

Should the City expand space for bicycles and pedestrians even if it reduces space for cars and worsens traffic?

(Inter)national

Should the government use torture if it will help thwart terrorist plots? Why/not?

Virtue Ethics: what kind of country do we want to be?

Deontology: are there rules we may not break even if doing so would have good consequences?

Consequentialism: what are the pluses and minuses of the CIA program?

Emotivism: what does your ‘breast’ tell you about torture?

Should the government spy on personal communications to thwart terrorist plots? Why/not?

Is it ok for one government to hack another?

Is hacking OK more generally? If so, when?

Should the government pay to get hostages back?

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/28/world/middleeast/the-cost-of-the-us-ban-on-paying-for-hostages.html?_r=0

Should the U.S. government use deadly force to combat ISIS?

Should the U.S. government use deadly force to depose Assad and bring peace to Syria?

Should the U.S. government have summarily executed Osama Bin Laden?

Should the U.S. government use drones to summarily execute other (probable) enemies?

Science/Technology

Should we manipulate the genes of non-human species? What about humans?

Should we try to use gene therapy to cure diseases in humans?

Should we aim to eradicate cancer? Disease in general? What if we need them somehow?

Should we give large tech corporations access to our data in exchange for the conveniences their services provide?

Social

Should parents have liberty to discipline their children as they see fit?

Should others intervene in cases of domestic violence? If so, how and why? If not, why not?