

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 2020  
MW 8:30-10:20  
Gould 440

**Professor:**  
Mark Purcell  
Gould 410F  
mpurcell@uw.edu

**Office Hours:**  
By appointment—just check with me!

**Course website:**  
on Canvas

### 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, each student must also complete a narrative evaluation of his/her 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.
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	35	Every class (and outside class)
Reading assignments	35	Almost every class
Final Essay Check-in	5	March 4
Final Essay	20	March 17
Final Essay Discussion/Debate	5	March 17
Self-evaluation	0	March 23
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	

### **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**

In the Course Reader, available at Rams Copy Center, 4144 University Way NE, (206) 632-6630.

## **Academic honesty**

The University takes the offenses of cheating and plagiarism very seriously, and so do I. Cheating is taking advantage of the work of others. Plagiarism is representing the work of others as your own, without giving appropriate credit. If you are unsure what is OK or *not* OK, make sure to ask me!

## Class Schedule

<b>Week 1:</b>	
Monday, January 6	Introduction to Course, Finalizing Course Design
Wednesday, January 8	<b>Topic:</b> Introduction to Consequentialist Approaches <b>Reading:</b> Almeder, R. (2000) <i>Human Happiness And Morality: A Brief Introduction to Ethics</i> , Amherst, NY, Prometheus Books., pp. 23-49 <b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #1
<b>Week 2:</b>	
Monday, January 13	<b>Topic:</b> Introduction to Deontological Approaches <b>Reading:</b> Almeder, pp. 49-89 <b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #2
Wednesday, January 15	<b>Topic:</b> Platonic Ethics <b>Reading:</b> Plato, selections from <i>Gorgias</i> ; all of <i>Euthyphro</i> (the introductions to both are included and recommended) <b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #3
<b>Week 3:</b>	
Monday, January 20	<b>MLK Day – No Class</b> <b>Required Reading:</b> King, “Letter From Birmingham Jail” <b>Optionally Watch:</b> video of “I Have A Dream” speech
Wednesday, January 22	<b>Topic:</b> Virtue Ethics <b>Readings:</b> Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I (the Crisp introduction to Aristotle is included and recommended) <b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #4
<b>Week 4:</b>	
Monday, January 27	<b>Topic:</b> Virtue Ethics <b>Readings:</b> Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II <b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #5
Wednesday, January 29	<b>Topic:</b> Natural Law <b>Readings:</b> St. Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> , First Part of the Second Part, Questions 90-108 (the McDermott introduction is included and recommended) <b>Assignments:</b> Reading Assignment #6

<b>Week 5:</b>	
Monday, February 3	<p><b>Topic:</b> Consequentialist Ethics</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>, Chapters 1-2 (the Pojman introduction to Mill is included and recommended)</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #7</p>
Wednesday, February 5	<p><b>Topic:</b> Deontological Ethics</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> 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><b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #8</p>
<b>Week 6:</b>	
Monday, February 10	<p><b>Topic:</b> Deontological Ethics</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals</i>, Chapter 2, pp. 80-113; Chapter 3 (pp. 114-131)</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #9</p>
Wednesday, February 12	<p><b>Topic:</b> Emotivist Ethics</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Hume, <i>Treatise of Human Nature</i>, Book 3, Part 1, Sections 1 &amp; 2 (both the Pojman and Rachels introductions to Hume are included and recommended)</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #10</p>
<b>Week 7:</b>	
Monday, February 17	<p><b>Presidents' Day – No Class</b></p> <p><b>Optional Reading:</b> the Emancipation Proclamation</p> <p><b>Optional Reading:</b> <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i></p> <p><b>Optionally Watch:</b> <i>12 Years a Slave</i></p> <p><b>Optionally Watch:</b> <i>Lincoln</i></p>
Wednesday, February 19	<p><b>Topic:</b> Nietzschean Ethics</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>, Preface and Part 1 (the Welchman introduction to Nietzsche is included and recommended)</p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #11</p>
<b>Week 8:</b>	
Monday, February 24	<p><b>Topic:</b> Nietzschean Ethics</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> 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><b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #12</p>
Wednesday, February 26	<p><b>Topic:</b> Feminist Ethics</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> 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 various approaches in FE]</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Reading Assignment #13</p>

Week 9:	
Monday, March 2	<p><b>Topic:</b> Feminist Ethics  <b>Readings:</b> Gilligan, Selections from <i>In a Different Voice</i>  <b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #14</p>
Wednesday, March 4	<p><b>Topic:</b> Feminist Ethics  <b>Readings:</b> Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"  <b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #15, Final Essay check-in</p>
Week 10:	
Monday, March 9	<p><b>Topic:</b> Feminist/Queer Ethics  <b>Readings:</b> Butler, <i>Precarious Life</i>, "Chapter 5: Precarious Life"  <b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #16</p>
Wednesday, March 11	<p><b>Topic:</b> Feminist/Mestiza Ethics  <b>Readings:</b> Anzaldua, "<i>La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness</i>"  <b>Assignment:</b> Reading Assignment #17</p>
Exam Week	
Tuesday, March 17 8:30-10:20am Same Room	<p><b>Topic:</b> Retrospective  <b>Readings:</b> None  <b>Assignment:</b> 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 both learn from each other's essay arguments, and try to make sense of the overall lessons we have learned about ethics.</p>

## Reading Assignments

### *Overview*

For each discussion, you will prepare yourself by reading the text and preparing a written assignment. The idea of the assignment is to provide you an opportunity to develop a better critical understanding of a particular reading and to prepare you to discuss the reading effectively.

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 (for reference, the following paragraph is about 175 words long...).

Part Two: Write a discussion question that asks your peers to discuss what you feel is the most 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*. 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. For the purposes of these discussion questions, *ask*, don't tell.

Good, genuine questions can be descriptive. These 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?” Good, genuine questions can also be normative. 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. You can ask either descriptive or normative questions for your discussion question.

### *Format*

In order to make reading these easier for me, some standardization helps. The reading assignments must be ***typed*** and turned in on paper during class on the day they are due.

Make sure your ***name*** and the ***assignment number*** is on the page. You should try to fit it all onto ***one*** page. If you find yourself going over one page you are writing too much.

### *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 asking a genuine question that is likely to get discussion going.

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.

### **Discussion Facilitation: Point Persons**

We will not use the traditional system of discussion facilitation where one or two students is responsible for a given facilitation. Instead, we will use an “organic” model in which everyone facilitates each discussion collectively. For each class, the whole group is responsible for initiating discussion, for asking questions to keep the discussion going, and for getting the discussing back on track when it wanders.

Of course the danger with this approach is that sometimes the group will struggle to facilitate well as a collective. To mitigate that danger, for each discussion there will be a “point person” (or persons) who 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 hope the point person will not be needed, and the group will facilitate itself effectively. Since the goal is for them to do nothing, this is not a graded assignment. It is, rather, a responsibility that rotates among the members of the group.

### **Final Essay (15 points)**

The idea of this assignment is to practice linking the ideas of the course to concrete ethical questions, and also to practice articulating those links in both a written essay and in oral arguments. The main activity of this assignment is for you to write a compelling essay about the relationship between one (or *maybe* more) of the ideas in the course (e.g. Mill's Greatest Happiness Principle) and a concrete ethical question. Each of you will decide individually which course idea to examine, but everyone will use the *same* concrete ethical question. In making the link, your essay can go either way; that is, you can either show how the concrete question helps us think differently about the idea from the course, or you can show how the idea from the course helps us make good decisions in the concrete ethical case. Either way, the essay will need to both effectively describe the relevant aspects of the concrete case 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 connected.

During the quarter, we will decide collectively what the shared concrete ethical question will be, and we will decide on a shared resource that everyone will use to get information about that ethical question.

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 2,000 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 *case* clearly and in a way that best speaks to the ethical ideas 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 case.

### **Final Essay Check-in (5 points)**

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 idea from the the course you plan to use and some idea of the argument you plan to make about how that idea is linked to the concrete ethical question. 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 ideas and the details of the case. If you just throw an idea 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.

### **Final Essay Discussion (5 points)**

During the exam period on March 17, we will have a discussion/debate in which we talk about the shared concrete ethical question. During this discussion/debate, each of you will adopt the perspective you have argued for in your essay. In this way, everyone will be able to hear and learn from the work others have done in their essay.

## **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](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?