

University of Washington School of Medicine
Ethical Theory (BH 402/502 & PHIL 412)
Autumn 2020

Course Information:

Instructor: Professor Nancy S. Jecker

Email: nsjecker@uw.edu

Website: [UW Faculty Website](#)

Virtual Office Hours: By apt (email to schedule)

**This is a 100% remote learning environment. All instruction is online.*

Learning Goals: By the end of the quarter you will be able to: (1) distinguish normative and non-normative approaches to ethics; (2) identify teleological and deontological ethical theories; (3) demonstrate knowledge of normative ethical theories, including Kantian ethics, utilitarianism, and perfectionism; (4) demonstrate knowledge of metaethical theories, including relativism, subjectivism, objectivism, absolutism, nihilism, and skepticism; (5) deploy philosophical methods of analysis and argument; (6) display awareness of social, cultural and historical assumptions embedded in ethical analyses; (7) appeal to ethical theories and principles to justify alternative viewpoints; (8) serve as peer reviewers for colleagues (graduate students); (9) prepare a research paper (graduate students).

Course Description: This course introduces you to some of the most influential ethical theories to date and, with a critical eye, studies the source and ground of their influence. Readings will be from historically prominent Western philosophers, such as Bentham, Mill, Nietzsche, and Kant, as well as from contemporary scholars. Cross-cultural perspectives are incorporated throughout, with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia.

Course Requirements:

Undergraduate Student Requirements apply to students who have not completed a bachelor's degree.

- Group Projects (25 points each, 100 total points, 25% of course grade)
- Philosophical Reflections (10 points each, 100 total points, 25% of course grade)
- Exams (100 points each, 200 total points, 50% of course grade)

Graduate Student Requirements apply to students who have completed a bachelor's degree

- Group Project: (25 points each, 100 total points, 20% of course grade)
- Philosophical Reflections: (10 points each, 100 total points, 20% of course grade)
- Exams: (100 points each, 200 total points, 40% of course grade)
- Graduate Student Research Paper (100 points total, 20% of course grade)

Group Projects are peer learning activities that invite you to team up with classmates to debate a contemporary ethical problem, develop arguments, prepare slides, & present to the class live on Zoom.

Philosophical Reflections are journaling activities that invite you to formulate your own ethical view in a 250-500 word posting. Full credit for reasonable quality and no credit for unsatisfactory work.

Exams test mastery of material using a combination of multiple choice & essay. Review sheets will be posted online and the class prior to the exam will include a discussion board review session.

Graduate Student Papers are 8-10-page research papers dealing in more depth with a topic discussed in class. Students must submit a proposal to the instructor for approval and a draft paper to colleagues for structured peer review prior to submitting the final paper.

POLICIES: Please familiarize yourself with School, Department, and Instructor policies that apply to this class (below). The Department of Bioethics & Humanities advises students who might need Disability Resources for Students (DRS) services to register with DRS at the beginning of the quarter. This class complies with Department's policy requiring that all students in a class be held to the same class policy absent a written accommodation directive from DRS.

UW, School of Medicine, and Department of Bioethics Policies
Department of Bioethics & Humanities, Grading Policy
Instructor, Missed Class Policy

Class Schedule: Prior to joining live zoom meetings or submitting assignments, review electronic materials (follow the "E-Materials" link on the homepage) and lectures (follow the "Panopto" link on the homepage).

I. Metaethics

A. Introduction

October 1 **Live Zoom Meeting:** 2:30-4:20 PM, <<https://washington.zoom.us/j/8503204846>>, Meeting ID: 8503204846, Passcode: bh402502
Recorded Lecture: Introduction to Ethics & the Study of Ethics

B. Ethical Relativism

October 6 **Recorded Lecture:** Ethical Relativism
Readings: Benedict, "A Defense of Ethical Relativism;" Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (pp. 1-5, Sections 2.1-2.3)
Podcast: "Philosophy Bytes: Moral Relativism"
Canvas Assignment: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 1 DUE

October 8 **Readings:** Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (pp. 5-12, Sections 2.4-2.7); Williams, "Vulgar Relativism;" Midgley, "Trying Out One's Sword"

October 13 **Live Zoom Meeting:** 2:30-4:20 PM, <<https://washington.zoom.us/j/8503204846>>, Meeting ID: 8503204846, Passcode: bh402502
Streaming Media: Video: Countering Myths about FGM/C (14 min)
Readings: WHO, "Female Genital Mutilation: Key Facts;" *Recommended:* Duivenbode "Female Genital Cutting and the Cultural Boundaries of Medical Practice"
Canvas Assignment: GROUP PROJECT #1: The Practice of FGM/C in the U.S. (ZOOM)
Canvas Assignment: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 2 DUE

II. Normative Ethics

A. Teleological Theories

1. Utilitarianism

October 15 **Recorded Lecture:** Utilitarianism: Jeremy Bentham
Readings: Bentham, "The Principle of Utility"
Streaming Media: Video: "Wireless Philosophy: Consequentialism" (5 min)

October 20 **Recorded Lecture:** Utilitarianism John Stuart Mill
Readings: Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapters I-IV (pp. 1-61); *Recommended:* Darwall, "Utilitarianism"
Canvas Assignment: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 3 DUE

Canvas Assignment: PAPER PROPOSALS DUE (Graduate Students Only)

- October 22 **Recorded Lecture:** Utilitarianism: Contemporary Critiques
Readings: Nielsen, "Against Moral Conservatism" Mackie, "The Ethics of Fantasy"
- October 27 **Live Zoom Meeting:** 2:30-4:20 PM, <<https://washington.zoom.us/j/8503204846>>,
 Meeting ID: 8503204846, Passcode: bh402502
Readings: Ross, Prisoners as Living Donors: A Vulnerabilities Analysis; *Recommended:* Barry, "Cultural Taboos Surrounding Organ Donation"
Canvas Assignment: GROUP PROJECT #2: The Organ Donor
Canvas Assignment: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 4 DUE
- 2. Perfectionism**
- October 29 **Recorded Lecture:** Perfectionism: Nietzsche's *Übermensch*
Readings: Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 406-408; *The Antichrist*, pp. 409; *Birth of Tragedy*, *Homer's Contest*, *The Will to Power*
- November 3 **Readings:** Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 382-399; *Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 399-405
Canvas Assignment: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 5 DUE
Canvas Assignment: DRAFT PAPERS FOR PEER REVIEW DUE (Graduate Students Only)
- November 5 **Available:** EXAM 1 Review Sheet
Recorded Lecture: Perfectionism: Contemporary Perspectives
Readings: Nagel, *Equality and Partiality*, chapters 12-13 (pp. 87-102); *Recommended:* Parfit, "Overpopulation and the Quality of Life"
- November 10 **Available:** EXAM 1 Discussion Board
Canvas Assignment: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 6 DUE
Canvas Assignment: COMPLETED PEER REVIEW DUE (Graduate Students Only)
- November 12 **Available:** EXAM 1 (12:01 AM)
Canvas Assignment: EXAM 1 DUE (11:59 PM)

B. Deontological Theories

1. Kantian Ethics

- November 17 **Live Zoom Meeting:** 2:30-4:20 PM, <<https://washington.zoom.us/j/8503204846>>,
 Meeting ID: 8503204846, Passcode: bh402502
Readings: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface; O'Kelly, "The Impact of Culture & Religion on Truth Telling at the End of Life"
Streaming Media: Video: "Wireless Philosophy: Deontology Vs. Utilitarianism" (4 min)
Canvas Assignment: GROUP PROJECT #3: Asian & Muslim Approaches to Truth Telling
Canvas Assignment: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 7 DUE
- November 19 **Recorded Lecture:** Kantian Ethics: Deontology, Good Will, & Categorical Imperative
Readings: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ch 1-selection ch 2 (pp. 5-26); *Recommended:* Behrens, "A Critique of the Principle of Autonomy Grounded in African Thought"
- November 24 **Readings:** Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, selection ch. 2 (pp. 26-40);

Feldman, "On Treating People as Ends-In-Themselves"
Canvas Assignment: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 8 DUE

November 26 **UW Holiday:** Thanksgiving

December 1 **Recorded Lecture:** Kantian Ethics: Contemporary Critiques
Readings: Holmes, "Kantianism;" Taylor, "Compassion;" Held, "Feminist Ethical Theory;"
Recommended: Wong, "Ren and Li as Relational Values"
Canvas Assignment: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 9 DUE

2. Ross's Ethics

December 3 **Available:** EXAM 2 Review Sheet
Recorded Lecture: Ross's Theory of *Prima Facie* Duties
Readings: Ross, "What Makes Acts Right?"

December 8 **Available:** EXAM 2 Discussion Board Open
Live Zoom Meeting: 2:30-4:20 PM, <<https://washington.zoom.us/j/8503204846>>,
Meeting ID: 8503204846, Passcode: bh402502
Readings: Shue, "Torture;" Amnesty International, *No End in Sight: Torture & Forced Confessions in China*
Canvas Assignment: GROUP PROJECT #4: Waterboarding
Canvas Assignment: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 10 DUE

December 10 **Available:** EXAM 2 (12:01 AM)
Canvas Assignment: EXAM 2 DUE (11:59 PM)

December 11 **Canvas Assignment:** GRADUATE STUDENT PAPERS DUE