

Philosophy 219: Case Studies in Applied Ethics

Whitman College – Fall 2019

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Course Description

Questions of moral value are absolutely unavoidable. Nearly every decision that we make, individually and collectively, is a reflection of our views about what is or isn't valuable, how those values should be prioritized, and how they should or shouldn't be pursued.

But questions of value are also very difficult – and very difficult to discuss. Our society is increasingly polarized, and increasingly segregated – by race, by economics, by culture, and by other factors. As a result, we seldom discuss values with others who don't already share our perspectives.

I think that's a serious problem, for at least two reasons. First, that leads to bad decision-making processes, where people or groups do whatever they want without serious engagement with others. Second, it leads to bad decisions, because they're made without considering all of the relevant information, ideas, and perspectives. By contrast, having genuine dialog across great differences of background and perspective, is both intrinsically worthwhile and can often lead to better conclusions.

That's the work that we're going to try to carry out in this course. There are four specific cases that we'll focus on, which reflect issues that are pressing in contemporary lives and societies. I hope that we'll make progress toward resolving those cases. But I also hope that we'll make progress in developing skills and habits to carry out those kinds of discussions productively, which could then be used to address other topics with other groups of people beyond this class.

Materials to be Used

There are two books that will provide the foundation of our work this semester:

- * Julia Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals* (Blackwell Publishing, 2007)
we'll be reading most of this book, and so it's important for every student to have a copy
- * Steven Cahn & Andrew Forcehimes, eds., *Principles of Moral Philosophy: Classic and Contemporary Approaches* (Oxford University Press, 2017)
each student will be reading different chapters from this book, and so you might find it helpful to buy – but all of the relevant chapters have been scanned and uploaded to the shared google-drive

Other materials will be chosen by the students of each group, to address the particular questions and issues that they think are most relevant and helpful for addressing the cases.

There's Lots of Support Available: Take Advantage of It!

As the top of this syllabus makes clear, this is a team effort. Any and all of us would be very happy to talk with you, both about the course-material and about your thoughts and feelings throughout the semester. Don't just turn to us when you have specific questions or problems that you need help with. Think of us as resources to help you deepen your thinking and process your experiences.

Summary of Requirements and Grading

Participation in Class Discussions — 40% of your total grade

The heart of this course will be the discussions you have each week in your groups. While I will help provide the foundation and structure for the course, and while there will be a number of us available to help each week, I hope that you will consider yourselves largely responsible for how productive the meetings are. Simply put, this is not a course that will take place in front of you; rather, it is something that the entire group will work actively together to construct.

That will require careful preparation and reflection in between our meetings, and then consistent participation in the discussions during class. You should be willing to share your views, and to explain and defend them to the extent that you're able. You should also remain open-minded, and be willing engage with others whose views are potentially very different. And you should be willing to contribute even when you are unsure what your views are – thinking out loud, raising questions that might seem basic, offering ideas that might seem uncertain, proposing links and analogies that might seem thin, making arguments that might seem sketchy, and otherwise taking intellectual risks. These are very difficult issues and cases, and our class will only succeed to the extent that we're all willing to struggle through them together.

More specific ground rules and expectations for our discussions will be developed by the group as a whole, at our first meeting together.

Weekly Journal — 30% of your total grade

Throughout the semester, the weekly journal will provide an opportunity for you to reflect individually on the issues, readings, in-class discussions, and your personal experiences – and then to receive my responses to those reflections, in the spirit of ongoing conversation. Each journal entry will be required to engage in a substantive way with the course material and cases, articulating some of your evolving thoughts about applied ethics. You will also be strongly encouraged to include a second part to each entry, where you can write about any other thoughts and feelings that are prominent to you at the time, to help you process all aspects of the course and situate it within whatever broader contexts are most significant to you.

Journals will standardly be due by **Fridays at noon**. I have shared a google-doc with each of you individually, to facilitate the process of your writing the entries and my adding responses. If you have a strong preference for some other format (including handwriting), and/or if the Friday deadline creates particular difficulties at any point, please just talk with me and we'll see what other arrangements we can work out.

Public Forum — 15% of your total grade

Toward the end of the semester, there will be an event held within the security-perimeter of the Penitentiary, but open to 30+ guests. At that event, a different pair of groups will briefly discuss each of the main cases, developing their alternative views and arguments, and posing questions and potential counterpoints to each other. There will also be two esteemed members of the Whitman and Walla Walla communities who will pose questions to the groups and offer feedback. More details about the format and logistics for the forum will be provided later in the semester.

Case Write-Up — 15% of your total grade

At the end of the semester, each student will compose a brief write-up of your own views about one of the three main cases that your group didn't discuss at the Public Forum. The write-up will include a summary of the relevant facts of the case, an overview of the ethical framework that will be used to resolve it, an explanation of how that framework should be applied to the case, and a response to some alternative approach. More details about the write-up will be distributed later in the semester.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT <i>to be completed <u>before</u> that meeting</i>
Sep. 3 (Reid 207)	course introduction how can this class itself be ethical? overview of course logistics & security procedures with campus students	read Ivan Illich, “To Hell With Good Intentions” read James Davis III, “Caught Somewhere Between...” ⇒ class visit by WSP security personnel
* <i>Fri Sep. 6</i>		* <i>first journal-entry due</i>
Sep. 10	community-building, setting ground rules introduction to utilitarianism introduction to Kantian ethics discuss first practice case	read Driver, ch. 3 read Driver, ch. 5 read the case about “The Anti-Vax Tax”
Sep. 17	introduction to virtue ethics discuss second practice case introduction to social contract theory	read Driver, ch. 8 read the case about “Composting Corpses” read Driver, ch. 6
Sep. 24	introduction to rule-utilitarianism introduction to feminist ethics begin discussing first main case	read “When Values Clash” (handout) read Driver, ch. 4 <i>or</i> ch. 9 – split within each group read the case about “Legalization of Recreational Drugs”
Oct. 1	deeper understanding of the frameworks begin discussing second main case	read “Creative Problem-Solving in Ethics” (handout) readings from blue textbook, split within each group read the case about “Making Voting Mandatory”
* <i>Oct. 8</i>	<i>NO CLASS – “Place Safety Muster”</i>	
* <i>Fri Oct 11</i>		* <i>no journal-entry due</i>
Oct. 15	deeper understanding of the frameworks begin discussing third main case	readings from blue textbook, split within each group read the case about “Using Genealogy to Solve Crimes”
* <i>Thu. Oct 17</i>	deeper understanding of the frameworks begin discussing the fourth main case	readings from blue textbook, split within each group read the case about “Drones in the ‘War on Terror’”
Oct. 22	continue discussing the first main case: “Legalization of Recreational Drugs”	readings determined by each group

Oct. 29	continue discussing the second main case: “Making Voting Mandatory”	readings determined by each group
Nov. 5	continue discussing the third main case: “Using Genealogy to Solve Crimes”	readings determined by each group
Nov. 12	continue discussing the fourth main case: “Drones in the ‘War on Terror’”	readings determined by each group
Nov. 19	preparation for public forum	work determined by each group
* <i>Fri Nov 22</i>		<i>last journal-entry due</i>
THANKSGIVING WEEK – NO CLASSES		
Dec. 3	preparation for public debate	work determined by each group
* MONDAY, DEC. 9: PUBLIC FORUM		
Dec. 10	debriefing from public forum semester wrap-up	
<i>Fri Dec 13</i>		* <i>case write-up due by noon</i>

NOTE: All cases have been adapted from the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl competitions, as follows:

- “The Anti-Vax Tax” is based on 2015 regionals, case #6.
- “Composting Corpses” is based on 2015 regionals, case #7.
- “Legalization of Recreational Drugs” is based on 2016 regionals, case #8.
- “Making Voting Mandatory” is based on 2018 nationals, case #15.
- “Using Genealogy to Solve Crimes” is based on 2018 regionals, case #4.
- “Drones in the ‘War on Terror’” is based on 2017 nationals, case #3
and also the Independent Colleges of Washington 2017 case #1.