Intro to Ethics: Ethics and Social Media

Jordan Stewart-Rozema   Phil 115 - 000
j.m.stewart-rozema@emory.edu   Spring 2017
Office: Bowden 112   TU/TH 1:00-2:15
Hours: TU 12:00-12:45, 2:15-3   Bowden 116

Description

This course will explore ethical concepts such as happiness, the good, moral responsibility, and the just treatment of others. Students will become familiar with some of the key classical texts in ethics, as well as gain an appreciation for the complexity and scope of ethical issues. The first half of the course will focus on Aristotelian virtue ethics and feminist care ethics, exploring the concept of "the good life" and relationships with others. The second half of the course will discuss Kant's deontological ethical framework and Mill's utilitarianism, touching on issues of rights, obligations, and universality.

Because philosophical theory can be abstract, we will consistently apply what we are learning over the course of the semester to the domain of online social networks. As social networks increase in popularity, importance, and ubiquity, ethical issues arise and play themselves out in these arenas just as much as they do in the offline social landscape. It is clear that social networks can be harnessed for widespread good (think viral charity campaigns, or to increase awareness of social justice issues) and for harmful purposes (the spreading of false information, or recruitment for violent causes). On a smaller scale, social media affects our relationships with friends and family, our happiness, and our very sense of self.

Assignments will include reading responses, two short essays, and a semester-long Wikipedia editing and reflection project in which students will improve ethics and social media related articles as contributing members in the Wikipedia editing network.

Course Objectives

Throughout the course, you will engage in discussion and assignments where you will:

1. Improve your ability read well through close reading of challenging texts; this also means developing the ability to ask relevant, interesting questions and connect ideas between passages, thinkers, and themes.

2. Develop writing skills across varying lengths and formats (including encyclopedic writing, exegetical essay, and summary), providing clear theses, well-supported claims, and effective organization in each style.

3. Practice effective communication in various modes by presenting information digitally, orally, and textually.

4. Gain a general introduction to several of the most prominent philosophers, texts, and ideas in Western philosophical ethics.

5. Think critically about the connection between ethics and online social networks.

Required Texts

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Translated by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann, Introduction by Christine Korsgaard) ISBN: 978-1107401068

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Hackett, second edition) ISBN: 978-0872206052

All other readings will be provided electronically.

Assignments and Grading Details

1. Attendance and Participation

This will be a participation-heavy class. Because this class will be primarily structured as a seminar, I expect participation from each and every student. This means you come to class having read the assigned text and are prepared to discuss it in class. I require you to bring printed versions of all class texts, **and to have marked up** the printed text before coming to class. I expect each student to engage in dialogue throughout the semester and will approach you if I think you are not speaking up enough. Please do not hesitate to come talk to me if this is a particular challenge for you, and we can identify strategies for making this aspect of class more manageable.

You are allowed to miss **three classes** throughout the semester without penalty for things such as illness, travel, holidays, etc. After the third absence, each unexcused absence will count as 1% off your participation grade. Excused absences for things such as prolonged illness may be obtained by ADSR or by contacting the Office of Undergraduate Education in White Hall Room 300. Please arrive on time to class. If I notice a pattern of tardiness, I will approach you about the problem. If tardiness persists, I will mark each late arrival as an absence from then on. If this problem is widespread, I will adopt this policy for the entire class.

There will be one informal group presentation that will count toward your participation grade. If you are absent on this day, you must get in touch with me to receive an alternate assignment or you will receive a zero on this graded portion of participation.

Throughout the semester, we will have large-group and small-group discussions, as well as small-group activities. An "A" participation effort includes speaking up during these discussions and staying focused during the group work, giving adequate time and effort to the assigned task.

2. Short Essays

Over the course of the semester you will write two 3-4 page papers (minimum of three *full* pages) that will respond critically and directly to the course texts. There will be a rubric and further details to come. You will also write a short, one-paragraph author's note to accompany each paper that evaluates your writing process and the strengths and weaknesses of the paper. This is a required portion of the paper. More details regarding the author's note will also be made available. Papers should be either MLA or Chicago formatting, double-spaced, with 12 pt. Times New Roman font and one-inch margins.

The papers will be graded on the A-F scale, and a grading rubric will be provided.

3. Reading Responses

Every class day on which there is a * on the schedule you will turn in a "3-2-1" reading response (typed, in 12 pt. Times New Roman Font and one-inch margins) in which you will record the following about the reading:

3 – Record three **main points** of the reading that you think are the most important, and why. These should be the fundamental concepts, claims, problems, or evidence presented in the reading. You must paraphrase the information – *do not merely copy down quotes!* – but you must also include specific page or passage references to where these points are addressed in the text. Don't forget to include justification for your choices.

2 – Pose two **questions** that you have after reading the text. These should be thoughtful, interesting, and critical questions that respond to the text, using page number citations to indicate which passages the question is coming from *and* which passages might aid us in answering it. I encourage you to pose questions that relate back to previous texts as well, or to issues outside the scope of our in-class texts (as long as they remain relevant to the ideas and themes of the course).

1 – Write one **difficulty** you are having in understanding the text, and how this impacts your understanding of the rest of the text or of other key passages. Please be specific as to what is impeding your understanding and, as always, include citations to the passage(s).

* There are 12 days on which 3-2-1 responses are due. You are allowed to skip 4 responses without penalty, turning in a total of 8 over the course of the semester. If you are absent on a day that you wish to turn in a response, you may email it to me *by the start of class* and it will still count as turned in.

Reading responses will be graded on a scale of 1-5, with "5" being exceptional work and "3" being satisfactory work. A grading rubric will be provided along with a sample "5" quality response. If you receive a grade of 2 or lower, you may replace this grade with the grade of an *additional* response in a future week, and you may use this option a maximum of two times. (In this case, you would turn in responses for 10 of the 12 sessions, with 8 of them graded and the two "2" scores dropped.)

4. Wikipedia Project

Because this class awards four credit hours and meets for only three credit hours per week, there will be an ongoing online component to supplement our in-class time that will count for the last credit hour. This component will take the form of a multi-part Wikipedia editing project where you will be contributing to the knowledge database of Wikipedia, improving the complexity and accuracy of information on the site. This project is designed for you to:

1. Develop different and complementary writing skill sets based in factual reporting to the typical college analytical or argumentative essay.

2. Practice evaluating articles for missing information, messy organization, unreliable sources, and biased perspectives.

3. Participate in the production of knowledge in a lasting, public, and impactful way on one of the most utilized sources on the internet, within a social network of other "Wikipedians."

4. Reflect on the *ethics* of information access, editor demographics, and the representation of certain viewpoints or populations in Wikipedia's coverage, as well as have the chance to directly impact such ethically-fraught issues in your editing.

The project will kick off in our third week of class, running through to the end of the semester. There will be an online dashboard where assignment details, trainings, and instructions will be located. Further details of the project will be provided, but it will include:

- writing short pre- and post-project reflection papers,
- reading articles about ethical issues facing Wikipedia,
- completing a number of tutorials on how to edit Wikipedia according to the community's guidelines and standards,
- evaluating Wikipedia articles,
- making small edits to one or two Wikipedia articles,
- providing a peer critique,
- and substantially editing, adding to, or creating one Wikipedia article as your "final project."

I will be working with a representative from the Wiki Education Foundation to select appropriate articles for you to choose from for your final project. Although I will provide a list of possible articles, you will also have the option to select an appropriate topic, cleared with me in advance.

Grading

Grading Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation	20 %
3-2-1 Responses	25 %
Essay #1 (3-4 Pages)	15 %
Essay #2 (3-4 Pages)	15 %
Wikipedia Project	25 %

Grading Scale:

A	93-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-92	C	73-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-72
B	83-86	D+	67-69
B-	80-82	D	60-66

Other Policies

Late Policy:

Late work will not be accepted. If you are absent on the day an essay is due or on a day you intend to submit a 3-2-1 response, you may email it to me **by the start of class**. If it is any later than the start of class, it will not be accepted. If you need an extension for one of the essays, please talk to me **at least 3 days in advance** of the due date and this can be arranged. There will be no extensions for 3-2-1 responses. I will consider granting an extension for various components of the Wikipedia assignment, but this is less likely. Again, please speak to me well in advance if you anticipate needing extra time for any element of the Wikipedia project or for your two essays, with a minimum of 3 days before the due date.

Extra Credit:

There may be opportunities to accrue extra credit during the semester by attending philosophy department colloquia or other Emory events that are related to our class themes and writing a short summary of the lecture/screening/or other event. I will keep you posted about all such opportunities. If you are concerned about your grade, you may propose or work with me to design an extra credit assignment. Extra credit awarded will not exceed 5% of your total grade.

Disability Accommodations:

If you need any accommodations, please let me know during the first week of class and I will work with you to make sure the course and its requirements fit with your abilities. Under Emory policy, for an accommodation to be officially considered, a student must register with the Office of Access, Disability Services, & Resources at http://www.ods.emory.edu/. They can be reached by phone at (404) 727-9877 (voice) or (404) 712-2049 (TDD). They are located in the Admin. Building Suite #110, which is most accessible through the entrance at the side of the building.

Honor Code:

All students are expected to abide by Emory's official Honor Code policy. Emory's honor code can be found here: http://catalog.college.emory.edu/academic/policy/honor_code.html.

Weekly Schedule

I. Introduction (2 weeks)

TU 1/10   Introductions, Syllabus
TH 1/12   What is Ethics?

TU 1/17   What is Ethics?, cont. & Ethics in Social Networks
              Reading: Shannon Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues*, Introduction (13 pgs)
TH 1/19   Ethics in Social Networks, cont. & Wikipedia Project Orientation

II. Happiness, Friendship, and the Good Life (6 weeks)

Virtue Ethics

TU 1/24 *   What is the good life?
              Reading: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.1-5, 7-10, 13 (22 pgs) & Book
              X.6-8 (10)
TH 1/26   Social Networks and Happiness
              Reading: "Facebook Tinkers with Users Emotions in News Feed Experiment Stirring
              Outcry"

TU 1/31 *   What is virtue?
              Reading: Aristotle, *NE* Book II.1-9 (21 pgs)
TH 2/2 *   What is virtue?, cont.
              Group Activity: Virtues of Character presentation preparation
              Reading is one of the following, to be assigned: Aristotle, *NE* III.6-9 (courage, 9
              pgs); III.10-12 (temperance, 6 pgs); IV.1-2 (liberality/magnamity, 11 pgs); IV.3-4
              (pride/honor, 8 pgs); IV.5-8 (good temper, obsequiousness, boastfulness, tact, 10
              pgs); V.1-2 (justice, 7 pgs) – as well as a corresponding section in Vallor, Ch. 6

TU 2/7   Specific Virtues
              Virtues of Character Group Presentations
              Optional Reading: *NE* VI.1, 3-8
TH 2/9 *   Social Networks and Virtue
              Reading: Vallor, Ch. 7 "New Social Media and the Technomoral Virtues" (28 pgs)

TU 2/14 *   Aristotelian Friendship and Relation to Virtue
              Reading: Selections TBD from Aristotle, *NE* Books VIII, IX
TH 2/16   Friendship and Social Networks
              Readings: "Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?"
              "Brave New World of Digital Intimacy"

Care Ethics

TU 2/21   Intro to Care Ethics & Care Ethics and Friendship
              Readings: "Care Ethics, Friendship, and Facebook" (10 pgs)
              Selections TBD from Nel Noddings, *Caring*
TH 2/23 *   What is Care?
              Reading: Nel Noddings, *Caring*

TU 2/28 *   What is Care?, cont.
              Reading: Joan Tronto, "An Ethic of Care"
TH 3/2   Caring and Social Networks
              Reading: Puotinen, S., 2011, "Twitter Cares? Using Twitter to Care About, Care
              for and Care With Women Who Have Had Abortions," *International Review of
              Information Ethics*, 16: 79–84.
              Due: Essay #1

SPRING BREAK

III. Moral Responsibility, Decision-Making, and Actions (6 weeks)

Deontology

TU 3/14   Review Day & Introduction to Deontology
TH 3/16 *   Kantian Deontological Ethics
              Reading: Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface, Part I (17 pgs)
              Optional: Christine Korsgaard's Introduction

TU 3/21   Lying and Social Media
              In-Class Screening: *Catfish* (2010, 84 min.)
TH 3/23   Lying and Social Media, cont.
              Discussion: *Catfish*, Amelia Ulman "Excellences & Perfections," Fake News
              Readings: "Facebook Mounts Effort to Limit Tide of Fake News"
              "Amalia Ulman is the First Great Instagram Artist"

TU 3/28 *   Kantian Deontological Ethics, cont.
              Reading: Kant, *Groundwork*, Part II (32 pgs)
TH 3/30   Kingdom of Ends?: Supply Chain and Invisible Labor Responsibility
              Readings: "The Laborers Who Keep Dick Picks and Beheadings Out of Your Facebook Feed"
              "The Cobalt Pipeline"

Consequentialism

TU 4/4 *   Introduction to Consequentialism/Utilitarianism
              Reading: Mill, Selections TBD from *Utilitarianism*
TH 4/6 *   Mill's Utilitarianism
              Reading: Mill, *Utilitarianism*

TU 4/11 *   Mill's Utilitarianism, cont.
              Reading: Mill, *Utilitarianism*
TH 4/13   Maximizing Good in Social Media
              Discussion: Viral Charity/"Slacktivism," Algorithms, Effective Altruism
              Readings: "Effective Altruism"
              "Facebook Organic Reach Decline Called 'Catastrophic' For Nonprofits As News Feed Visibility Vanishes"
              "What Happens to #Ferguson Affects Ferguson: Net Neutrality, Algorithmic Filtering and Ferguson"
              Optional: "Algorithmic Harms Beyond Facebook and Google"

TU 4/18   Weaponized Social Media & Social Media Monitoring/Censorship
              Readings: "Who's Responsible When Extremists Get a Platform?"
              "War Goes Viral: How Social Media is Being Weaponized Across the World"
              Optional: "The 'Cuban Twitter' Scam is a Drop in the Internet Propaganda Bucket"
TH 4/20   Wrap-up/Overview, Wikipedia Discussion, Evaluations
              Due: Essay #2