

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

**Course Information**

Instructor: Professor Nancy S. Jecker  
Website: [UW Faculty Website](#)

Email: [nsjecker@uw.edu](mailto:nsjecker@uw.edu)  
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 review:

[UW, School of Medicine, and Department of Bioethics Policies](#)

*Department of Bioethics & Humanities, Grading Policy*  
*Instructor, Missed Class Policy*

Please note: the department advises students who might need Disability Resources for Students (DRS) services to register with DRS at the beginning of the quarter. The Department's policy is that all students in a class will be held to the same class policy absent a written accommodation directive from DRS.

**Class Schedule:** Prior to joining a live zoom meeting or submitting an assignment, complete all assigned electronic materials (available at the "E-Materials" link on the home page of the course website).

## I. Metaethics

### A. Introduction

October 1 **Live Zoom Meeting:** 2:30-4:20 PM, <https://washington.zoom.us/j/8503204846>,  
 Meeting ID: 8503204846  
**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)  
**Streaming Media:** 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  
**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  
 PAPER PROPOSALS DUE (Graduate Students Only)

## II. Normative Ethics

### A. Teleological Theories

#### 1. Utilitarianism

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

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

October 22 **Recorded Lecture:** Contemporary Critiques of Utilitarianism  
**Readings:** Nielsen, "Against Moral Conservatism" Mackie, "The Ethics of Fantasy"  
**Canvas Assignment:** DRAFT PAPERS FOR PEER REVIEW DUE (Graduate Students Only)

- October 27 **Live Zoom Meeting:** 2:30-4:20 PM, <https://washington.zoom.us/j/8503204846>,  
Meeting ID: 8503204846  
**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:** 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*  
**Canvas Assignment:** COMPLETED PEER REVIEW DUE (Graduate Students Only)
- November 3 **Readings:** Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 382-399; *Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 399-405  
**Canvas Assignment:** PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 5 DUE
- November 5 **Recorded Lecture:** Perfectionism, Contemporary Perspectives  
**Readings:** Nagel, *Equality and Partiality*, chapters 12-13 (pp. 87-102); *Recommended:* Parfit, "Overpopulation and the Quality of Life"  
Examination 1 Review Sheet Available Online
- November 10 Exam 1 Review  
**Canvas Assignment:** PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 6 DUE
- November 12 Exam 1 Available (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  
**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 **Recorded Lecture:** Contemporary Critiques of Kantian Ethics  
**Readings:** Holmes, "Kantianism;" Taylor, "Compassion;" Held, "Feminist Ethical Theory;" *Recommended:* Wong, "Ren and Li as Relational Values"

### **2. Ross's Ethics**

- November 26 Thanksgiving (UW Holiday)
- December 1 **Recorded Lecture:** Ross's Theory of *Prima Facie* Duties  
**Readings:** Ross, "What Makes Acts Right?"  
 Examination 2 Review Sheet Available Online  
**Canvas Assignment:** PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION 9 DUE
- December 3 **Live Zoom Meeting:** 2:30-4:20 PM, <https://washington.zoom.us/j/8503204846>,  
 Meeting ID: 8503204846  
**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  
**Canvas Assignment:** EXAM 2 REVIEW SESSION
- December 8 Exam 2 Available (12:01 Am)  
**Canvas Assignment:** EXAM 2 DUE (11:59 PM)
- December 10 **Canvas Assignment:** GRADUATE STUDENT PAPERS DUE