

## AI 209 Ethics After the Fall

DePaul University – School for New Learning

### Course Syllabus: ETHICS AFTER THE FALL

#### General Information

Fall 2009

There are two courses meeting this quarter – one at the Loop and one at Naperville.

The Loop course meets Thursdays from 6:00 – 9:00 PM

The Naperville course meets Tuesdays from 6:30 – 9:00 PM

This syllabus is for both courses.

Faculty: Dr. Rebecca Armstrong

Email: rarmstr1@depaul.edu

Phone: 847-707-1781

#### 1. Course Description

“*What were they thinking?!*” If you’ve asked yourself this question after reading the headlines or watching the evening news, you’re not alone. Starting with the collapse of Enron in 2001 and moving through the corporate crises, banking meltdowns, real estate fiascos and political scandals of the past years, it appears as if the real bankruptcy in this country is *moral*. Is our current crisis merely the result of “a few bad apples” in positions of power, or is it the inevitable result of decades of moral decline in society? Everyone is asking the question. In this class we will seek some answers.

What would Plato have to say about this? What about Kant or Locke or Nietzsche or Karl Marx? Does gender play a role? What would moral philosophers Martha Nussbaum, Mary Midgeley, Ayn Rand, Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah Arendt or Simone de Beauvoir think about our current moral morass? Is it a problem specific to American, capitalist culture? Would the ethical insights of indigenous philosophers like Ramachandra Gudra, Medha Patkar or Eduardo Mendieta shed light on our predicament? Could ancient mythologies help us reframe this modern mess? What do *you* think is at the root of this national crisis?

This course serves as an introduction to moral philosophy, using current events as a modern morality play upon which to turn the lens of historical and contemporary analysis. Using award-winning films and documentaries such as *Enron: Smartest Guys in the Room* and *The Corporation*, creative classroom dialogue and exercises, political cartoons, blogs, protest songs, and short excerpts of important moral treatises, this course will enable students to recognize the inherited belief systems and their contradictions which have fueled the moral crisis of the last decade. Having the language to express and analyze major ethical theories and historical schools of thought will enable students to understand their own moral perspective and fine-tune the “moral muscle” that allows for discernment in the face of moral choice.

## 2. Competencies

**H2X** (Human Community: Institutions & Organizations) student/faculty written

Institutions and organizations are an important part of everyday life that change over time in the intensity and nature of their influence. This section emphasizes abilities that will help individuals understand and interact with institutions and organizations.

**A3X** (Arts and Ideas: Reflection & Meaning) student/faculty written

This subcategory invites students to explore fundamental questions about their experience of the universe. It challenges them to reflect critically and appreciatively on their basic assumptions about the meaning, purpose, and values of their lives. Since they are not the first to ponder these questions, the subcategory also asks students to relate their interpretations to the insights of significant thinkers and cultures from around the globe. Philosophers, theologians, ethicists, artists, mystics, prophets, and sages throughout history have created distinctive worldviews that students can examine in relationship to their own. By interacting with these different interpretations of the world, students can develop a deeper understanding of their own experience and the choices they face.

**A4** (Arts and Ideas: Ethics in the Contemporary World)

Can analyze a problem using two different ethical systems.

1. Identifies and describes an ethical issue or problem
2. Describes the distinctive assumptions of two different ethical systems
3. Analyzes the problem by comparing and contrasting how these two different systems would apply to that particular ethical issue or problem.

Students demonstrate this competence by applying two ethical systems to a particular issue or problem that permits substantial ethical examination (for example, business practices, uses of technology, reproductive rights, class structures, institutional racism, sexual behavior, etc.). Students may choose any ethical system that is associated with particular thinkers. Students may consider the choices these thinkers identify, and the standards or measures by which these choices are made to obtain desired outcomes.

**FX** (Focus Area) student/faculty written

SEE ME IF YOU ARE USING THIS COMPETENCY

## 3. Required Texts

*Permission to Steal: Revealing the Roots of Corporate Scandal* by Lisa A. Newton

Additional Readings will be made available on Blackboard as the class proceeds:

#### **4. Faculty Bio**

Rebecca Armstrong has graduate degrees from the University of Chicago Divinity School, where her focus was on ethics and the history of religions; Meadville-Lombard (Unitarian seminary) where she received her Masters of Divinity; and Chicago Theological Seminary where she earned her doctorate in the field of contemporary spirituality. She has taught as an adjunct faculty member at Mundelein College, National Lewis University, Prairie State College, and Purdue University and maintains a private practice in ministry and counseling in Chicago.

#### **5. Learning Methodology**

This course relies heavily on reading, reflective writing (see description below) and classroom dialogue. Readings assigned for each class must be read prior to the class meeting as adequate preparation. Several films will also be used to add context and contrast to the subject. Students will be directed to a variety of internet resources for current analysis of topics related to the course.

#### **6. Criteria for Assessment**

The following are criteria for receiving a passing grade:

- You participate consistently and constructively by completing the readings (approximately 20-30 pages per week) and assignments by their due dates. A writing assignment will be given in each of the first five class sessions for the subsequent week's readings and students will be asked to write a 2-3 page reflective response to those readings, to be handed in at the opening of the next class session.
- You submit your final paper by the due date. Note: Students have the option of either writing a research paper or doing a final presentation. Students contracting for an "A" will be asked to do both.
- You consistently, actively, and in a timely fashion participate in classroom discussions. You will receive periodic comments from the instructor, regarding your assignments and your level of participation in the course.

### *Assessment Criteria for Classroom Discussion Participation*

- In discussions, you clearly and consistently link what you are learning in the course to your readings, relevant life experiences and your written reflections.
- You regularly demonstrate good “listening” skills and active inquiry skills in the classroom discussions. This means that you pay attention with openness to the commentary of others and you offer constructive and interested commentary, whether in the form of questions or statements.
- You contribute your own original ideas to the classroom discussion in ways that facilitate learning for other people.
- You discuss critically, give support to your peers, provide your own ideas and experiences, challenge ideas of others and receive challenges with good humor.

### *Assessment Criteria for Writing Assignments*

The five smaller assignments should be in the reflective or Writing-To-Learn mode. The Final Paper is in the Writing-to-Transact mode. As explained in the recent set of guidelines from DePaul:

Writing-to-learn involves exploring, engaging, and making sense of course content and critical ideas. Transactional writing (or writing-to-transact) has a more rhetorical purpose, where writers work to persuade or inform readers within specific contexts. In the introduction to their seminal work on Writing Across the Curriculum (*Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*), Toby Fulwiler and Art Young elaborate on these distinctions: Writing to communicate--or what James Britton calls "transactional writing"--means writing to accomplish something, to inform, instruct, or persuade. . . . Writing to learn is different. We write to ourselves as well as talk with others to objectify our perceptions of reality; the primary function of this "expressive" language is not to communicate, but to order and represent experience to our own understanding. In this sense language provides us with a unique way of knowing and becomes a tool for discovering, for shaping meaning, and for reaching understanding. A key component of writing- to-learn is reflection. In *The WAC Casebook*, Chris Anson writes that “Reflection, or ‘reflective practices’ is a process of thoughtfully interrogating what we do in a particular activity. Successful experts in various fields are constantly experiencing their work, standing back from it and assessing its effectiveness, thinking and hypothesizing about how to improve it, then applying these ideas and insights to their ongoing work.”

(For additional information see Writing in the Liberal Studies Program on the DePaul website)

For your Final Paper/Project it is important that:

- the topic has been approved by your course instructor;
- it demonstrates that you can apply knowledge learned from the texts and discussions to your topic;
- you have organized your supporting evidence into relevant paragraphs that address your subject;
- it takes into account a variety of points of view;
- it demonstrates your ability to express differing points of view about the values and philosophies that form the basis of your topic;
- it demonstrates that you are able to integrate the evidence derived from your chosen sources in standard English, using proper grammar, syntax and vocabulary. Please run a spell check before turning the final paper in;
- it uses proper quotation form, including introduction of your quotation as well as your commentary following the quotation;
- it has an introduction and a conclusion;
- it contains a thorough review of literature, uses sourced references and a bibliography at the end of the paper. References can be sourced in the body of the paper using author and year in parentheses, e.g. (Jones, 2003);
- it uses the proper APA or MLA citation form for in-text references as well as for the bibliography;
- Final paper should be approximately 8 -10 typed pages in length (3500 – 5000 words), double-spaced. Weekly essays should be 2-3 typed pages in length. Students seeking an “A” in the class may be asked to write additional or lengthier papers and to do both a final paper and an oral report.

## **7. Course Grading Policy**

This course offers students the opportunity to engage in a Learning Contract.\* This means that each student decides what grade he or she wants from the investment in the class and draws up a learning contract with the instructor for the grade of “A,” “B,” or “C.” The breadth and depth of involvement and productivity in the class and assignments justifies the grade earned. Specific objectives, strategies, outcomes and evidence will be tailored to each learning contract.

\*[One of the most significant findings from research about adult learning (e.g., Tough, 1979) is that: When adults go about learning something naturally (as contrasted with being taught

something), they are highly self-directing. Evidence has accumulated, that what adults learn on their own initiative they learn more deeply and permanently than what they learn by being taught (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Therefore, by participating in the process of assessing personal goals, deriving objectives, identifying resources, choosing strategies and evaluating accomplishments the learner develops a sense of ownership of and commitment to the planned learning. Learning contracts also are a means for making the learning objectives of any field or practical experience clear and explicit for both learners and facilitators.- Dr. Roger Hiemstra]

## **8. Class Schedule**

### Session One

The Language of Ethics – opening lecture introducing key terms and history of the field; who’s who and what’s what; a timeline

### Session Two

Right, Wrong and Reason – How we *think* we think about ethics and latest research findings; exercising moral decision-making and what’s really involved; ethics and identity; the human animal with its limitations and glory

### Session Three

The “old boys school” of classical ethics – The Greeks; film segment from Enron:Smartest Guys in the Room

### Session Four

When in Rome, do as the Romans – Cultural Relativism vs. Absolutism; morality tales from different cultures; more on Enron

### Session Five

Thou Shalt Not & the Golden Rule – Religious Values and Social Behavior; The Bible’s effect on morality in the West; final clip from Enron

### Session Six

We take these truths to be self-evident: Ethics and Natural Rights – Origins of the American dream and its moral demands; film segment from The Corporation

### Session Seven

What’s Good for the Goose: the moral assumptions and requirements for capitalism – Individual vs. the Society ;more on The Corporation

### Session Eight

Am I my Brother’s Keeper? – The Moral Community; Gender and the moral compass; relationship vs. freedom; final clip from The Corporation

### Session Nine

Student Reports and class presentations

Session Ten

Student Reports and class presentations; final lecture: Character, Culture and Ethics

## **9. Attendance and Participation**

A typical four credit hour “face to face” course at SNL involves three hours of classroom meeting per week in addition to three to six hours of study and homework per week. This class will require two hours of reading and two hours of writing each week. The research paper is additional time. Please schedule sufficient time and resources for your involvement in the class.

It is not possible to receive a passing grade without consistent attendance and participation. If you know you will be on an extended leave of absence for health or personal reasons, you must contact the instructor. Missing more than three classes jeopardizes your chances of earning a passing grade.

## **10. Academic Integrity Policy**

All members of the DePaul community are bound by the University’s guidelines on academic integrity found in the Student Handbook at (<http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/handbook/code16.html>).

The Handbook’s definition of plagiarism is as follows:

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a major form of academic dishonesty involving the presentation of the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

- The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's.

Copying of any source in whole or part with only minor changes in wording or syntax, even with acknowledgement.

- Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment that has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency.

- The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.

Plagiarism, like other forms of academic dishonesty, is always a serious matter. If an instructor finds that a student has plagiarized, the appropriate penalty is at the instructor's discretion. Actions taken by the instructor do not preclude the college or the university from taking further punitive action including dismissal from the university.

## **11. University Incomplete Policy**

The intent of the Incomplete grade is to allow students extra time to complete their final assignments. This need arises because, in the closing weeks of the course, they have an event of significant magnitude (think “Hurricane Katrina”) adversely impact their ability to complete the course. You must request an incomplete grade in writing two weeks before the end of the quarter. Incomplete grades will be considered only after you have satisfactorily completed at least 75 percent of the coursework, and you have an event of “Katrina” magnitude that prevents you from completing your course. Do not assume that you will qualify for an incomplete. Students who are failing the course at the point where they request an incomplete will not receive one, nor will they be granted after the end of the quarter. Incomplete grades are given at the discretion of the instructor.

If you do receive permission from the instructor to take an incomplete in the course, you will be required to complete a contract with the instructor, specifying how you will finish the missing work within the next two quarters. Incompletes not finished by the end of the second quarter will automatically become an F grade on your transcript.

## **12. Special Needs**

If any student knows that he or she has special needs that would make the learning strategy or assessment – as outlined above – unreasonably difficult, please advise your instructor at the first session so that accommodations can be made that will make your participation in the class enjoyable and profitable for you. You are entitled to any and all reasonable accommodations, but you must ask!