PHI 293 Ethics and the (*Entertainment*) Media Professions Spring 2024

Department of Philosophy

Syracuse University

Lecture: T/Th 12:30-1:25pm   Life Science Building 105

All Required Discussion Sections Meet on Wednesdays:

002:	9:30-10:25	Heroy Geology Building 013
003:	10:35-11:30	Smith Hall 330
004:	12:45-1:40	Newhouse 2 345
005:	11:40-12:35	Hall of Languages 201

PHI 293 *Ethics and the Media Professions. Great traditions in ethical theory; application to television, film, new media. Role of ethics in program and content development; and in business practices. Ethical issues arising from social networking, globalization, and new trends in the media. Priority given to Newhouse students*.

Instructor: *William G. Osborne III* wgosborn@syr.edu (Meetings by appointment.)

Discussion Sections: **002, 003:** *Liam Lieblein*   **004, 005:** *Austin Fraser*

Required Text: Weston. *Rulebook for Arguments* (Hackett) 978-1624666544

All other required readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Learning Outcomes:

Students who successfully complete PHI 293 will demonstrate:

- understanding of the major western approaches to moral philosophy
- the ability to use a basic philosophical toolkit to reason about and communicate clearly on moral topics and situations
- a familiarity with ethical issues in the entertainment media professions
- creative application of ethical insights to projects drawn from the entertainment media professions

Ways to do well in PHI 293:

- Attend lecture and discussion section regularly
- Give yourself plenty of time to complete reading, written, and creative assignments
- Be well-prepared for in-class quizzes (make-up only with *official* SU or medical documentation)
- Don't let your technology distract you in the classroom
- Communicate with us if anything comes up
- Abide by all Academic Integrity regulations (including no use of AI etc. in any PHI 293 assignments); any academic violation will be reported; assignment will receive a zero.

Course Assessment Criteria: PHI and EICDI

While most of you are Newhouse majors, this is a *PHI* course in the Department of Philosophy. As such, it meets *Philosophy Student Learning Outcomes*.

PHI Learning Outcomes	PHI 293 Course Objectives	Ethics, Integrity, and Commitment to Diversity & Inclusion	PHI 293 Assignments
1. Explain core philosophical concepts and theories and their historical development	• understanding of the major western approaches to moral philosophy • a familiarity with ethical issues in the entertainment media professions		• In-class Quizzes • Case Communication Assignments
2. Critically evaluate philosophical theories and arguments	• the ability to use a basic philosophical toolkit to reason about moral topics and situations	2. Evaluate cases of systemic social injustice that explain inequities and inequalities today 4. Evaluate real-world situations in the context of ethical frameworks that work to promote integrity in action.	• Media Review Assignments • Case Communication Assignments • Semester Reflection
3. Write clearly and concisely, and organize their writing effectively	• communicate clearly on moral topics and situations		• Media Review Assignments • Case Communication Assignments • Semester Reflection
4. Conduct independent research on a philosophical topic by finding, assessing, and employing relevant literature	• creative application of ethical insights to projects drawn from the entertainment media professions	3. Examine and apply values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in different contexts	• Collaborative Project • Semester Reflection

Course Overview: *Media Ethics, Moral Philosophy, and PHI 293*

This course is designed to give Newhouse students the ability to navigate ethical issues in the entertainment media professions: film, television, recording, gaming, online and social media. As shorthand we can call this topic 'media ethics'. Ethics itself is the philosophical study of good and bad, the values involved in judging whether our actions deserve praise or blame. Investigating what it is exactly that makes an action good or bad is the business of professional moral philosophers doing what we might think of as "pure philosophy". These experts investigate very abstract concepts. There is mostly widespread agreement among these experts when it comes to basic moral facts, but their individual emphases and explanatory approaches vary, and the devil as they say is in the details. Another more concrete dimension of moral philosophy includes how norms of good and bad are *applied* in our lives. This is also a concern of professional philosophers, but it is more clearly of great immediate importance to all of us living in the world, such as the future entertainment media professional like yourself.

PHI 293 is a philosophy class for the non-philosopher—or, better yet, a class for the 'new philosopher'. As a new philosopher, you may want to know that 'philosophy' is a word from ancient Greece, literally meaning 'the love of wisdom'. What this means in practice is that philosophers are truth-seekers. To accomplish this task, a philosopher uses reason and logical argumentation to weed out poor arguments and unsupported claims in order to endorse conclusions best supported by reason, evidence, and argument. You will do the same.

As you are new philosophers, we will accordingly assume no background or expertise in the study of philosophy, and so will begin (in Unit I) with the basics of philosophical method in order to give everyone the tools needed to do well—both in the course and out in the world. These basics will give you an intellectual toolkit to help you think through the ethical ideas, arguments, and tricky situations featured in the course. That toolkit will enable you to understand established theories of moral philosophy, evaluate ethical claims made by others, and offer well-supported arguments, including creative media-based solutions, in response to tough moral situations. We will then (in Unit II) look at some historical challenges to philosophical explanations of ethics. These challenges can be seen as capturing some of what people "on the street" might suggest is going on when we ask about good and bad. Some dimensions of these challenges are well-intentioned or connected with important human traditions. Others appear from a contemporary perspective to fall short of our basic moral intuitions. Seeing the logical problems each of these challenges face will help us see (in Unit III) the value of the four most significant approaches to ethics: *Social Contract Theory*, *Consequentialism*, *Kantian Deontology*, and *Virtue Ethics* (the last including a look at feminist ethics as well).

We will each week consider a single test case drawn from professional entertainment media practice and connected to important ethical questions. These test cases are good experiments for thinking, or 'thought experiments'. You don't have to be Ava DuVernay to ask a question that begins "What if I were Ava DuVernay and..." Fictional scenarios like these allow us to think through some tough situations without having to create the hazardous situation itself. This is analogous to building a computer model of a bridge and testing it virtually without having to devote resources to a real full-scale bridge you're just going to try to knock down. Your ability to understand the abstract principles at play in these test cases will play a pivotal role in accomplishing the learning outcomes of the course. The creative projects and assignments in the course are designed to help you do just that.

Assignments/Grading:

Grading Scale:

> Grading is on a traditional A-F scale, with plus/minus; 94-100=A, 90-93=A-, 87-89=B+, 84-86=B and so on; "rounding up" will occur above the margin of XX.67 when calculating final grades, e.g.: 86.67 would become 87, a B+, while 86.66 would remain a B.

All Assignment Details Posted on Blackboard; All Assignments Submitted via Blackboard

30% Quizzes   *10%* Ethical Philosophical Toolkit

                    10% Kneejerk Reactions

                    10% Big Four

40% Brief Writing Assignments:

> Half of this 40% (20%) is comprised of Media Review Assignments:

> > *5%* Media Autobiography

> > *5%* Argument Assignment

> > *5%* New Media Review Assignment

> > *5% Trumbo* Assignment

> The other half of that 40% (20%) is comprised of four Case Communications Assignments

> > *5%* Social Contract Theory Tweet

> > *5%* Consequentialism vs. Kantian Deontology Inner-Office Group Memo

> > *5%* Virtue Ethics Inner-Office Group Email

> > *5%* Semester Reflection/Projection (focused on a specific case of student's choosing)

Note: Non-TRF students have the option to write a 6-8 page philosophical research paper on an approved topic (20%) in place of the four "case communications assignments"; topics must be approved by the instructor no later than the end of unit II. Philosophy majors are expected to take this option.

20% Creative Collaborative Projects (75% prospectus/final project/documentation; 25% presentation; Students must fill out peer evaluation form to receive credit for group project)

10% Discussion Section Grade (at discretion of the TA: see section syllabus for details)

Add date Jan 23; any student who adds class after the first class day must attend at least one office hour session with their TA as soon as possible. (The TA is at liberty to require further visits.) Failure to do so will result in removal from the course

**All Assignment Details Posted on Blackboard; All Assignments Submitted via Blackboard

**Late Assignments Will be Deducted 10% per each 48 hours late

**Quizzes may be made up only with *legitimate* medical emergency documentation or *official* University excuse; Skipping class to leave early for vacation will result in a zero for example.

Course Schedule:

Introduction:

Jan

T 16   Introductions and Course Overview

(W17)   ****Due Media Autobiography Assignment (Wednesday before Discussion Section)****

Unit I: Ethical Philosophical Toolkit: Reason, argument, impartiality, and the big picture

Th 18   Ethics and Media: How to Keep your Job (*and Hopefully Get Promoted!*)

Philosophical Basics and the Legacy of Socrates

Reading: Rulebook for Arguments (Introduction: *xiii-xvi*; I-V: *1-38*)   ****Reading****

T 23   *Reading: Rulebook for Arguments* (VI & VII: *39-59*; Appendixes *87-100*)   ****Reading****

Th 25   Arguments/Philosophical Toolkit (continued)

T 30   *Blackboard Reading: Carrie Figdor "Is Objective News Possible?*   ****Reading****

(W)   ****Due: Argument Assignment (Wednesday before Discussion Section)****

Feb

Th 1   Introducing Key Approaches to Ethics (Minimum Conception and "The Big Four")

T 6   Review Unit I: Ethical Philosophical Toolkit

Th 8   *Quiz #1: Ethical Philosophical Toolkit*   ****Quiz Day: Laptop Needed****

Taken in-class on laptop; extra time provided for students with CDR accommodations.

Weeks Five Through Eight: Some Knee-Jerk Reactions to Ethics

Unit II: Some initial reactions to moral claims: Dismissing relativism, religion, egoism, subjectivism

Subjective/objective distinction

T 13   Intro to Kneejerk Reactions (intuitions and arguments, subjective and objective)

Th 15   Relativism

T 20   Subjectivism

(W)   ****Due: New Media Review Assignment****

Th 22   Ethical Egoism

T 27   Religion and Ethics

Th 29   *Flex Catch-up Day* (including historical cases)

Mar

T 5   Review Unit II: Kneejerk Reactions

Th 7   *Quiz #2: Kneejerk Reactions*   ****Quiz Day: Laptop Needed****

Taken in-class on laptop; extra time provided for students with CDR accommodations.

~~T 12~~   *Spring Break*   ~~Th 14~~   *Spring Break*

Weeks Ten through Thirteen: The Big Four

Unit III: The Big Four: Duties, Consequences, Rights, Character

T 19   Ethical Objectivity

         Reading: David Enoch "Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (+Why You Are, Too)" ****Reading****

Th 21   Social Contract Theory

T 26   Consequentialism/Utilitarianism

(W)   ****Due: Social Contract Tweet****

Th 28   Kantian Deontology

Apr

T 2   Ethics of Care, Feminist Critique of Ethics of Obligation

(W)   Assigned into Project Groups   **Due: Util/Cons vs. Kant Inner-Office Group Memo **

Th 4

T 9   Review Unit III: The Big Four

(W)   **Due: Virtue Ethics Inner-Office Group Email**

Th 11   *Quiz #3: The Big Four*   **Quiz Day: Laptop Needed**

Taken in-class on laptop; extra time provided for students with CDR accommodations.

T 16   In-Class Screening *Trumbo* (2015)   **Due :Collaborative Media Project Proposal**

Th 18   In-Class Screening *Trumbo* (2015)

T 23   Project Workshop Day   **Due: *Trumbo* Assignment**

(W)   **Final projects presented in-progress (Discussion Section) for feedback (25% of project grade)**

Th 25   Semester Wrap-up and Review: *How Not to Get Fired*

         That's all! Be good!

Final Exam Week:

Tuesday May 7   **Due: Semester Reflection/Projection Assignment**

                                           Due: Final Projects and Peer Evaluation

Final Projects Due at Scheduled Time of Final Exam: Tuesday May 7

Submit a PDF of Final Creative Collaborative Project via Blackboard

(There is no individual exam.)

For specific COVID-19-related content, please see the information at this link: https://provost.syr.edu/important-syllabus-reminders/

Academic Integrity, Religious Observance, Disability-Related Accommodations:

"The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort." For more information and the complete policy, see http://academicintegrity.syr.edu

"SU's religious observances policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

For more information see: http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm,

Disability-Related Accommodations:

"In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students who require disability-related accommodations must have a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to provide to the instructor. The accommodations that are

authorized in the letter should be discussed and agreed upon with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations at the beginning of the semester is necessary."

(For more information see Office of Disability Services.)