

SOC389-000 / REL354R-000: Ethics and Social Context

Fall Semester 2014

Wednesdays 4:00-6:30

Tarbutton 206

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Office Hours: Please use the Sign-Up Sheets posted on my Office Door

COURSE OVERVIEW

This seminar examines the interconnectedness of sociology and ethics. We do this by considering two broad questions:

(1) Agency: Are we free to choose our own actions?

In the first 3 weeks of the course, we begin by understanding main concepts in sociology and ethics. What is **sociology** and how does it help us understand the social constraints on human action? What are **ethics** and how do we determine what is right or wrong? How does our society influence the way we view the world and the choices we make?

(2) Action: What ought I to do?

For the remainder of the course we will apply principles from sociology and ethics to actual ethical dilemmas. We will spend an extended time examining two prominent historical case studies under the lenses of sociology and ethics: the Holocaust and racial discrimination in the 1950's U.S. The last two weeks of the course we will look at two everyday life issues. We will read memoirs and non-fiction accounts from these time periods, as we consider different ethical actions. What would you do in situations when the "social system" you belong to asserts unethical actions and beliefs? How does one act humanely under these conditions?

TWO IMPORTANT NOTES

The purpose of this seminar is to think through and discuss very complex issues. You will read a number of non-fiction books in order to understand the complexities of real people making decisions during difficult times.

1. Sensitive issues

Many of these books and films deal with quite disturbing or sensitive topics. Please be prepared for this.

2. Diverse beliefs

Your reflections on these dilemmas may involve your own personal ethical/moral beliefs. It is fine to share your beliefs in the context of commenting on ethical actions. Please do not try to convince others of your beliefs (no proselytizing), and please respect others beliefs when they diverge from your own.

BLACKBOARD SITE

<https://classes.emory.edu>,

Log in, then click on: **Soc389/REL354R: Ethics and Social Context – Fall 2014**. This site will include all materials that we hand out in class (the syllabus, instructions for written assignments, etc.), as well as outlines of any lectures. Any important announcements will also be posted on this site.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Weekly Discussion (25% of final grade)

Group Discussion: The core of this course will be discussion of the ethical case studies in the books and films. Because discussion is fundamental to this course, you **must be able to attend the class each week**. (If you must miss a class due to emergency circumstances, please notify me as soon as possible.)

***Note that your discussion grade will be based on **quality not quantity**.

2. Weekly Reflection Memos (8 memos at 5% each = 40% of final grade)

You will write weekly reflection memos (3 pages long) on the books & films (8 in total) in order to prepare you for class discussions. These memos will be structured around key questions that I will provide in a separate handout. You will hand in the memos at the start of the class, which covers that reading/film.

***Memos will be graded on a pass (+-) /fail basis.

3. Final Reflection Paper (35% of final grade)

You will write a final reflection paper (10-12 pages long) about the readings/films and the discussions. Instructions will be handed out separately. The paper is due on Wednesday, Dec 17, 7:00pm, via email.

REQUIRED READINGS

Weeks 2 & 3: Various book chapters. These are posted on BlackBoard.

Weeks 4-14: (See list below and course schedule)

The books (and films) are central to this course. You must have completed books prior to the date that they are listed on the syllabus. (The films will be shown during class time.)

BOOKS

These are available at Emory's Barnes & Noble Bookstore.

1. Sereny, Gitta. 1983. *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience*. 1st Vintage Books ed. Vintage.
 2. Opdyke, Irene. 2004 (reissue edition). *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer*. Laurel Leaf.
 3. Wiesel, Elie. 1998. *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*. Revised, expanded ed. Schocken.
 4. Howard-Pitney, David. 2004. *Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1950s and '60s: A Brief History with Documents*. Bedford/St. Martin's.
 5. Moody, Anne. 1968 [2004]. *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. Reprint Ed., Delta - will be provided!
 6. Walls, Jeannette. 2006. *The Glass Castle: A Memoir*. Scribner.
 7. Lewis, Michael. 2010. *Liar's Poker*. Reprint ed. W. W. Norton & Company.
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OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Accommodating Disabilities

If you have or acquire any sort of condition that may require special accommodation(s), please inform me AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (e.g., not the day of an exam) so that we may make the appropriate arrangements. Proper documentation from the Office of Disabilities Services will be required. Please contact their office to get more information on available services and accommodations, as well as documentation requirements. They can be reach at 404-727-6016 or via the web at <http://www.ods.emory.edu>.

Academic Conduct

Emory College has established an Honor Code outlining an appropriate code of conduct with respect to academic honesty and plagiarism. The code of conduct can be found at: <http://conduct.emory.edu/conduct.php> or at the Office of Student Conduct in Suite 239E of the Dobbs University Center. Information on Emory's Honor code can be accessed at: http://www.college.emory.edu/current/standards/honor_code.html. Your Campus Life Handbook provides additional information.

It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the policies and procedures of the university, and violation of these policies will result in referral to the Honor Council. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. You must ensure that you cite references appropriately in your written work. When you paraphrase from others, cite their work in the text, and reference the citation in your bibliography. When you use direct quotes from others, be sure to insert quotation marks around the borrowed text and cite appropriately.

Honor Code Statement: I pledge to pursue all academic endeavors with honor and integrity. I understand the principles of the Emory College Honor System, and I promise to uphold these standards by adhering to the Honor Code in order to preserve the integrity of Emory College and its individual members.

General Conduct

Please be mindful of the general code of conduct that you would use in any classroom setting. I expect us all to be respectful of one another. Please do not arrive late to class. Once in class, please refrain from carrying on private conversations with your neighbor(s). This is distracting for everyone else in the room. Please refrain from texting, checking Facebook, or any other non-class activities during all class meetings. If you are found to be engaging in these activities, you will be asked to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class.

The use of cell phones is not permitted in this class. Please turn OFF your phones before entering the classroom.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Aug 27): Introduction and Course Framework

Week 2 (Sept 3): Ethics

Selections from: Panza C. & Potthast A. 2010. *Ethics for Dummies*. Wiley Publishing Inc.
(See p.5 of this syllabus for specific selections and explanations for these selections.)

Week 3 (Sept 11): Social Context (Social Structure & Culture)

Fine, Gary Alan. 2012. *Tiny Publics*. Chapters 1-4.

Week 4 (Sept 17)

Film: *Hitler's Children (2013)* & Class Discussion following (NO MEMO for this)

Week 5 (Sept 24)

Sereny, Gitta. 1983. *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience*. Vintage.

Week 6 (Oct 1)

Opdyke, Irene. 2004 (reissue edition). *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer*.

Week 7 (Oct 8)

Wiesenthal, Simon. 1998. *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*. Revised, expanded ed. Schocken.

Week 8 (Oct 15)

Film: *Four Little Girls (2001)*

Week 9 (Oct 22)

Discussion of *Four Little Girls*

Week 10 (Oct 29)

Howard-Pitney, David. 2004. *Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1950s and '60s: A Brief History with Documents*. Bedford/St. Martin's.

Week 11 (Nov 5)

Moody, Anne. 1968 [2004]. *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. Reprint Ed., Delta.

Week 12 (Nov 12):

Film: *TBA* & Class Discussion following (NO MEMO for this)

Week 13 (Nov 19): The World of Family: You can't choose your parents

Walls, Jeannette. 2006. *The Glass Castle: A Memoir*. Scribner.

Nov 26: CLASS CANCELLED

Enjoy Thanksgiving!

Week 14 (Dec 3): The World of Work: You can choose the work culture?

Lewis, Michael. 2010. *Liar's Poker*. Reprint ed. W. W. Norton & Company

READING SELECTIONS FROM:

Panza C. & Potthast A. 2010. *Ethics for Dummies*. Wiley Publishing Inc.

(These are posted on BlackBoard under "Reserve Readings.")

I. Basic Background to Ethics

For basic background I have given you all of:

Part I: Ethics 101: Just the Basics, Please

Chapter 1: Approaching Ethics: What Is It and Why Should you Care?

Chapter 2: Butting Heads: Is Ethics Just a Matter of Opinion?

II. Different Ethical Traditions (very brief overview)

Next, I give you the beginning pages of a few chapters which cover different ethical traditions or theories. I have not scanned the whole chapters as we will not be discussing these in detail. This is more to give you an idea of differing theories.

Chapter 4: Exploring the Connections between Ethics, Religion, and Science (pp. 55-58)

Chapter 6: Virtue Ethics (pp. 94-98)

Chapter 7: Utilitarian Ethics (pp. 120-124)

Chapter 8: The Ethics of Principle (pp. 143-148; 158)

Chapter 9: Ethics as Contract (pp. 171-173)

Please read these selections for main points - don't worry too much about details. We'll discuss more in class.

III. The Golden Rule Tradition

Finally, I have given you the whole chapter for one key theory, because it is a common one that many people know and use in everyday life.

Chapter 10: The Golden Rule: Common Sense Ethics

Please read these selections for main points - don't worry too much about details. We'll discuss more in class.