**Pols 402 Ethics and politics**

Spring 2017

TTW 674

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**Course Description**

Ethics is not equal to morality in more than two senses: **i)** As a mode of principled conduct, ethics is situated, while morality can be isolated from socio-historical conditions in such a way that it can be universalized to apply to all cases under all circumstances. Morality consists of a set of rules that can be determined a priori – either through reason, through religious belief or through customs and mores. In moral approaches, the conditions under which justice shall hold can be hypothetically established in the form of a series of commands (ex: truthfulness is a rule that must be applied without exception; justice means giving each her due under all circumstances, etc.) As such morality is law-like and works through models. Ethics, in contrast, can at best enumerate guiding principles, the correct approximation of which is never entirely within the power of either institutions or individuals. Ethics is less concerned about the *motives* of an act than the ways in which the act is carried out and the consequences that ensue. As such **ii)** ethics concerns modes of life rather than normative rules regulating the actions of individuals or of society. Ethical principles are: a) relational, b) relative to circumstances; c) involve active interpretation, judgment of particulars, adjustment, compromise and also innovation and creativity. As distinct from the causes or motives of action, ethics is interested in in-betweens, i.e., the modes of collective life induced by regularized patterns of acting.

The setting in which ethics is to be considered in this course can be called “post-totalitarian.” This basically denotes a general condition marked by the loss of a distinguishing line between truth and falsehood. No truth, not even religious truth, can escape doubt, perversion or cynicism. As Nietzsche has remarked: “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers?”

The most striking feature of this predicament, however, is “defactualization,” that is, the growing insignificance of facts and/or a deliberate disregard for facts. Metaphysical truths have long been put to the test of reason: the Enlightenment was a plea against religious dogma and unquestioned belief. 19th century positivism replaced “belief” by “science,” declaring the trustworthiness of “objective” facts over “subjective” convictions. Now, it seems, we have also lost facts. Post-totalitarian modes of life are based instead on images, which are neither faithful representations nor conceptual accounts of reality. The contemporary war over images (a war that is itself fought through images) severely reduces the possibility of attaining or maintaining determinate positions vis-à-vis reality. How can my image adequately represent reality if others are disseminating exactly the opposite image? For instance, if a group is exercising its legitimate right to oppose the government in my opinion, but is stigmatized as “terrorist” by others, i.e., if my image of “resistance” is countered by others’ image of “terrorism”, who is to decide which of the opposing imaginaries is valid? How can my image adequately represent reality if others are disseminating exactly the opposite image? How can my interpretation of what I take to be “facts” become the basis upon which I will chose my line of action if totally contradictory interpretations are circulating in the public sphere? How am I to judge the moral value of my actions if my image of integrity is considered as outright immoral by others? Who is right and who is wrong?

The problem is further complicated (if not caused) by the dominance of neoliberalism as a global socio-economic condition. Neoliberalism not only transforms all values into exchange values, it also causes the metamorphosis of everything into its opposite. It operates through deterrence, abstraction, disconnection and deterritorialization. A natural disaster becomes the very ground for profitability; militarized conflicts that are purportedly fought for ideals transform into strategies for capital accumulation; the discourse of security breeds insecurity; and what seems to be a social gain turns out to be exploitation moved to a higher, more sophisticated level. Nothing appears to stand in the way of the chain of equivalences that advanced capitalism produces at a constant rate. What is morally wrong (benefitting from the suffering of others in order to make lucrative gains) may be right in utilitarian terms, given specific developmental targets or market standards. Moral wrongs are shadowed by the “rights” of markets, governments, corporations, local, national or global stakeholders, etc. The discourse of “security” also legitimizes extra-legal and extra-moral measures for the sake of efficiency. This discourse based on fear and suspicion clears the way for citizens to accept the curbing of basic rights and freedoms. Every issue can be cloaked under the term “security”: human security, national security, food security, environmental security, etc. Even such a grand-scale humanitarian crisis as in the case of Syrian refugees gets framed in terms of security. Our duty towards fellow human beings plays second fiddle to concerns over numbers, the infiltration of fundamentalists into Europe, or economic absorption capacities. The era of humanitarian ideals and the universality of the declaration of rights of man and citizen is over, it seems.

So the question is whether reinvigorating the discourse of rights, universal standards or humanitarian values can effectively reverse the current tendency. Classical normative theory has been attempting for centuries to introduce a universal model of right standards for human action. Although it is customary to cite Kant and neo-Kantians in this respect, Marx does not propose an alternative paradigm either. He rather operates within the same universalizing discourse. Classical normativism is implicitly or explicitly based on the assumption of sovereignty. The moral individual (or group or society) is modeled after the state whose principle function is law making. The Kantian subject establishes her own laws or principles of action through the use of reason; the socialized individual in Marx’s ideal society establishes (albeit in cooperation with others) her own needs and the means through which she will satisfy them. Control over resources, over the modes of regulating interactions between individuals, and thereby over the future are what characterize such normative approaches. Their common denominator is the architectonics of order and the idealization of unity. Even those approaches that claim to embrace differences of worldview and/or identity and that attempt to formulate a situated normativity based on mutual recognition, necessarily assume Sameness. In the words of Deleuze, “difference becomes an object of representation always in relation to a conceived identity, a judged analogy, an imagined opposition or a perceived similitude.”

On the one hand, we have the post-totalitarian/neoliberal condition marked by a radical immanentism. This means that in our contemporary world, it has become extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find an Archimedean point beyond the actual state of affairs through which to distinguish true from false, right from wrong. On the other hand, we shall problematize all forms of transcendental normativity that seek to establish such an Archimedean point. To state the problem differently, we are wary of the eclipse of Truth, but we do not want to erect ourselves into new deities who can dictate the conditions under which Justice shall hold. We shall refuse to become gods. We shall rather explore what it would mean to reconcile ourselves with non-sovereign thinking. We shall problematize the “I” of subjecthood. We shall even shed doubts on the notion of “being human.” This would entail espousing multiplicity and turning away from any idea of efficient cause or finality. We shall refuse to be trapped by the threat implied by the dichotomy “universalism versus relativism.”

**Course Requirements**

Class attendance and reading the assigned material before coming to class are strictly necessary in order to succeed in this course. The evaluation will be based on:

1. Three response papers: %75
2. In-class reading checks (pop quizzes are not excluded): %25

The evaluation criteria for the response papers are as following:

1. Correct and relevant use of readings and in-class discussions;
2. Satisfactory analysis of case;
3. Originality and/or personal contribution.

**Required readings**

**Part I: The ethical problem in politics**

(Feb. 7-March 1)

Max Weber, “Politics as a vocation” in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, p. 115-128 (excerpt).

Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, New York, Penguin Books, 1993, Chp. 1: “The Gap Between Past and Future”, p. 3-15.

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958, Chp. 1, p. 7-11.

Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, New York, Penguin Books, 1993, Chp. 4: “What is Freedom?”, p. 143-171.

Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics” in *Between Past and Future,* New York, Penguin Books, 1993, 227-264.

Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza, Expressionism in Philosophy*, New York, Zone Books, 1990, Chp. 14: “What Can A Body Do?” and Chp. 16: “Ethical Vision of the World”, p. 217-234 and p. 255-272

**Part II: Totalitarian destruction of the possibility of ethics**

(March 7-29)

Hannah Arendt “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility” in Jerome Kohn (ed), *Hannah Arendt. Essays in Understanding*, New York, Harcourt Brace & Co, 1994, p. 121-132.

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, New York: Viking Press, 1963, Chp. 3: “An Expert on the Jewish Question”

Alexandre Koyré, “The Political Functions of the Modern Lie”, *Contemporary Jewish Record*, Vol. 8 (3), 1945, p. 290-300.

Robert Conquest, *The great terror: Stalin's purge of the thirties*, New York: Macmillan, 1968, Chp. 11: “The Great Trial” (excerpts)

Vaclav Havel, *Living in Truth*, London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989, Chp. 2 (excerpt): “The Power of the Powerless”

Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, New York: Vintage International, 1990, Chp. 1: “The Pill of Murti-bing”

Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of memory: essays on the denial of the Holocaust*,New York : Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 18-31.

Kerem Öktem, “Incorporating the time and space of the ethnic ‘other’: nationalism and space in Southeast Turkey in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 10 (4), 2004, p. 559-578.

**Part III: Hypocrisy and Image-making**

(April 4-27)

Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics”, *Crises of the Republic*, New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, p. 3-23 and 33-43 (excerpts)

Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1973, chp. 2: “The Social Question”, p. 88-109 (excerpt).

Judith Butler, “Introduction: Precarious Life, Grievable Life”, *Frames of War. When Is Life Grievable?*, London, Verso, 2009, p. 1-32.

David Beer, “Algorithms: the villains and heroes of the ‘post-truth’ era”, Jan. 3, 2017:

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/digitaliberties/david-beer/algorithms-villains-and-heroes-of-post-truth-era>

Jan-Werner Müller, “Capitalism in One Family”, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 38 (23), Dec. 1, 2016:

<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n23/jan-werner-muller/capitalism-in-one-family>

Jo-Marie Burt, “‘Quien Habla Es Terrorista.’ The Political Use of Fear in Fujimori’s Peru.” *Latin American Research Review* 41, 2006, p. 32-62.

Zeynep Gambetti, “ ‘I’m no terrorist, I’m a Kurd’: Societal violence, the state and the neoliberal order” in Z. Gambetti and M. Godoy-Anativia (eds.), *Rhetorics of Insecurity: Belonging and Violence in the Neoliberal Era*, New York, SSRC/New York University Press, 2013, p. 125-152.

**Part IV: Truth-telling and its dilemmas**

(May 2-10)

Michel Foucault, *Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia*, Six Lectures at the University of California at Berkeley, Oct-Nov. 1983, p. 2-5:

<http://foucault.info/documents/parrhesia/>

William Davies, “The Age of Post-Truth Politics”, Aug. 24, 2016:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/opinion/campaign-stops/the-age-of-post-truth-politics.html?_r=0>

The Economist editorial: “The Art of the Lie”, Sep. 10, 2016:

<http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21706525-politicians-have-always-lied-does-it-matter-if-they-leave-truth-behind-entirely-art>

Ece Temelkuran, “Truth is a lost game in Turkey. Don’t let the same thing happen to you”, Dec. 15, 2016:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/15/truth-lost-game-turkey-europe-america-facts-values>

<http://www.anesi.com/fscale.htm>

<http://personality-testing.info/tests/RWAS/>

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**Response Paper Guidelines**

A response paper is not descriptive but investigative. It is neither a free-style opinion essay, nor a research paper. You are not asked to use any supplementary material or do research on the issue that you are writing about. But it is **absolutely necessary** to refer to the texts and concepts studied in this course. Every concept can become a “problem” or a “puzzle” that needs to be elaborated, justified, resolved or criticized.

You must choose a **hypothesis** to defend or a problem to solve for each assignment. The hypothesis can involve something that you want to problematize in the various approaches to ethics that we have reflected upon during the course. Or you can use one of those approaches to analyze one of the movies, literary work, or real-life cases listed below. You are expected to reflect upon the following ethical dilemmas by basing yourself on knowledge obtained from this course:

* Defiance vs. compliance
* Plurality vs. monism
* Dogma vs. openness
* Hypocrisy vs. integrity
* Lying vs. truth-telling
* Individual vs. collective responsibility

**Tips:**

* References to texts studied are absolutely required.
* No internet resources are acceptable except ones you need to describe your case. Any supplementary material must be from the university library.
* Personal opinions are appreciated as long as you base your ideas on knowledge.

**Length:**

5-7 pages, 12 font, 1½ spaced.

**Deadlines**:

RP 1: The ethical problem in politics – March 14

RP 2: The totalitarian destruction of ethics – April 11

RP 3: Hypocrisy, image-making, truth-telling – May 22

**Works or cases to be analyzed in response papers**

Literature:

Herman Melville, “Billy Budd”

Franz Kafka, “Before the Law”

Franz Kafka, *The Castle*

Sophocles, *Antigone*

Yuri Dombrowsky, *The Faculty of Useless Knowledge*

George Orwell, *1984* (film or novel)

Dostoyevsky, “The Grand Inquisitor”

Movies:

Costa-Gavras, “Music Box”

Costa-Gavras, “Amen”

Costa-Gavras, “I as in Icarus”

Özer Kızıltan, “Takva”

Alan Pakula, “Sophie’s Choice” (or novel by William Styron)

George Orwell, “1984” (film or novel)

Margaretta von Trotta, “Hannah Arendt”

Steven Speilberg, “Schindler’s List”

Joshua Oppenheimer, “The Act of Killing”

Marco Bellocchio, “Good Morning, Night”

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío, “Strawberry and Chocolate”

Michael Haneke, “Caché”

Mark Herman, “The Boy in the Striped Pajamas”

Deborah Hoffmann, Frances Reid, “Long Night’s Journey into Day”

Terry George, “Hotel Rwanda”

Cases:

Palestinian suicide bombers vs. Israeli reactions

Theodor Adorno-Herbert Marcuse controversy: http://www.critical-theory.com/letters-adorno-marcuse-discuss-60s-student-activism/

Thomas Mann- Frank Thiess controversy on “inner emigration”

Trump vs. Muslim immigrants controversy

Other:

*\* Please consult me during office hours! \**

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**Academic Honesty**

The Department of Political Science and International Relations has the following rules and regulations regarding academic honesty.

1. Copying work from others or giving and receiving answers/information during exams either in written or oral form constitutes cheating.
2. Submitting take-home exams and papers of others as your own, using sentences or paragraphs from another author without the proper acknowledgement of the original author, insufficient acknowledgement of the consulted works in the bibliography, all constitute plagiarism. For further guidelines, you can consult: <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/provost/pdf/AvoidingPlagiarism.pdf>
3. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and will result in:
4. an automatic F in the assignment or the exam,
5. an oral explanation before the Departmental Ethics Committee,
6. losing the opportunity to request and receive any references from the entire faculty,
7. losing the opportunity to apply in exchange programs,
8. losing the prospects of becoming a student assistant or a graduate assistant in the department.

The students may further be sent to the University Ethnics committee or be subject to disciplinary action.

**A Statement on Plagiarism**

Using someone else's ideas or phrasing and representing those ideas or phrasing as our own, either on purpose or through carelessness, is a serious offense known as plagiarism. “Someone else” can mean a professional source, such as a published writer or critic in a book, magazine, encyclopedia, or journal; an electronic resource such as material we discover on internet; another student at our school or anywhere else; a paper-writing “service” (online or otherwise) which offers to sell written papers for a fee. The examples below were originally written by the writing center staff at an esteemed college; that institution has asked us to remove its name from this Web page.

**The original text**

from Elaine Tyler May's “Myths and Realities of the American Family”:

Because women's wages often continue to reflect the fiction that men earn the family wage, single mothers rarely earn enough to support themselves and their children adequately. And because work is still organized around the assumption that mothers stay home with children, even though few mothers can afford to do so, child-care facilities in the United States remain woefully inadequate.

Here are some possible uses of this text.

**Version A:** Since women's wages often continue to reflect the mistaken notion that men are the main wage earners in the family, single mothers rarely make enough to support themselves and their children very well. Also, because work is still based on the assumption that mothers stay home with children, facilities for child care remain woefully inadequate in the United States.

Plagiarism. In Version A there is too much direct borrowing in sentence structure and wording. The writer changes some words, drops one phrase, and adds some new language, but the overall text closely resembles May’ s. Even with a citation, the writer is still plagiarizing because the lack of quotation marks indicates that Version A is a paraphrase, and should thus be in the writer's own language.

**Version B:** As Elaine Tyler May points out, “women's wages often continue to reflect the fiction that men earn the family wage” (588). Thus many single mothers cannot support themselves and their children adequately. Furthermore, since work is based on the assumption that mothers stay home with children, facilities for day care in this country are still “woefully inadequate.” (May, 589).

Plagiarism. The writer now cites May, so we're closer to telling the truth about our text's relationship to the source, but this text continues to borrow too much language.

**Version C:** By and large, our economy still operates on the mistaken notion that men are the main breadwinners in the family. Thus, women continue to earn lower wages than men. This means, in effect, that many single mothers cannot earn a decent living. Furthermore, adequate day care is not available in the United States because of the mistaken assumption that mothers remain at home with their children.

Plagiarism. Version C shows good paraphrasing of wording and sentence structure, but May's original ideas are not acknowledged. Some of May's points are common knowledge (women earn less than men, many single mothers live in poverty), but May uses this common knowledge to make a specific and original point and her original conception of this idea is not acknowledged.

**Version D:** Women today still earn less than men—so much less that many single mothers and their children live near or below the poverty line. Elaine Tyler May argues that this situation stems in part from “the fiction that men earn the family wage” (588). May further suggests that the American workplace still operates on the assumption that mothers with children stay home to care for them (589). This assumption, in my opinion, does not have the force it once did. More and more businesses offer in-house day-care facilities.

No Plagiarism. The writer makes use of the common knowledge in May's work, but acknowledges May's original conclusion and does not try to pass it off as his or her own. The quotation is properly cited, as is a later paraphrase of another of May's ideas.