

COURSE OUTLINE

Anthropology 4409G/9229B

Anthropology of Ethics and Morality

Winter 2020

Lectures: Wednesdays, 10:30am–1:30pm

Classroom: SSC-3102

Instructor: Dr. Greg Beckett

Office: SSC-3409

Office hours: Please refer to the course site in OWL.

Email: gbeckett@uwo.ca

Credit value: 0.5 credit

Course Description: This course develops an anthropological approach to the study of ethics and morality that explores how value and meaning are socially, culturally, and historically produced. The course does this through a range of ethnographic case studies that explore how ethical and moral values operate in a variety of contexts, ranging from everyday talk to international humanitarian intervention.

Prerequisites: By application. To be considered, undergraduate must be registered in fourth-year in any Anthropology module and have a minimum grade average of 80%, or permission of the instructor.

Antirequisites: None.

Course Syllabus:

This course focuses on anthropological approaches to the study of ethics and morality. We will begin by rejecting the false binary of universal values and moral relativism and focus, instead, on how an ethnographic study of ethics and morality in action offers a new approach to understanding the complexities of moral decisions and ethical reasoning. A key goal of the course will be to show where ethics and morality come from, how they arose historically as part of human social and cultural life, and how ethical and moral values are deeply embedded in even the most banal aspects of social life. We will then explore how such values give

rise to historically, socially, and culturally constituted ways of knowing, thinking, and acting, rather than as universal ideals that we contemplate. The examples explored will show how our ideas of the right and the good emerge out of, and are often challenged by, everyday social encounters and interactions.

We will draw on a wide range of ethnographic and historical cases from around the world to provide a range of perspectives on ethics, morality, meaning, and action. We will also explore social encounters in which alternative or competing ethical registers come into contact or conflict. Topics may include the following: virtue, character, and care; gifts and reciprocity; charity, volunteerism, and affective labor; agency and responsibility; rights, dignity, and respect; medical intervention and service-work; and global humanitarianism.

A full course schedule including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings will be available on the course's OWL site before the first day of class.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Summarize and discuss key debates in the anthropology of ethics and morality;
- Identify and apply key concepts and theoretical formulations in the anthropology of ethics and morality;
- Analyze ethnographic arguments and identify key terms and theoretical approaches and apply those terms and approaches to other case studies;
- Compare the meanings and values associated with ethics and morality across cultures;
- Explain how ethics and morality are situated in cultural and historical contexts;
- Explain ethical and moral values in relation to other aspects of social, economic, and political life by using key concepts in anthropological theory; and
- Work collaboratively with a group of peers to develop a shared understanding of the course readings and to prepare regular presentations on those themes.

Course Materials:

Readings are available on the course OWL site. The following books are also available for purchase at the Western Bookstore (note, they may be available at lower prices elsewhere):

Erica Bornstein. 2012. *Disquieting Gifts: Humanitarianism in New Delhi*. Stanford University Press.

Paul Brodwin. 2013. *Everyday Ethics: Voices from the Front Line of Community Psychiatry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Michael Lambek, ed. 2010. *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Evaluation:

Student evaluation for this course will be based on weekly participation, an analytical paper on the course material, and a final research paper. We will conduct this seminar using the Melbourne Method (see handout). Student participation in the Melbourne Method along with regular participation in class discussion will form a key component of the final grade.

Participation in Class Discussion and Melbourne Method Seminar – 25%

This class will run as a seminar. That means all students are expected to complete the assigned readings before class and to come to class prepared to engage with the material through in-class discussion. Students must also participate in the Melbourne Method seminar groups, which will involve regularly leading discussion and providing questions and responses to the readings. Grades for seminar participation will be based on: three in-class presentations of course material; three written discussion questions; and three written responses to discussion questions.

Analytic Paper – 25%

Students will write an analytic paper on the course material. This paper will explore the course readings in relation to a chosen theme. Your analysis should offer both a deep reading of the texts and a clear and cogent synthesis that explores those themes in relation to broader questions from the course. The Analytic paper is due on in class on Wednesday February 26th.

Final Essay – 50%

Students will write a final research paper that builds on the themes of the course and applies key concepts and frameworks from the course material to a topic of their choosing. Students should come to office hours to discuss their topic with the instructor. The final essay will be due Monday April 6th.

More information on writing assignments will be made available to students on the course OWL site.

Course Specific Conditions Required to Pass this Course

In order to pass this course students must submit all writing assignments and receive at least a passing grade on their final essay.

Course Specific Statements and Policies:

Statement on Seeking Special Accommodations:

No accommodations will be granted retroactively more than 10 days after an assignment's due date or a missed quiz or test. Please see your academic counsellor immediately if you will be seeking accommodations based on medical or compassionate grounds.

Statement on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing. It is also a scholastic offence to submit the same work for credit in more than one course. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

Policy on Laptops and Cellphones in Class:

Laptops are permitted for note-taking in class but if it is observed that students are on social networking sites, they will be asked to close the laptop and will not be permitted to use it for the remainder of the class. Be sure that all cellphones are turned off at the beginning of class.

Policies on Written Work

All written assignments must be submitted electronically. Essays should be formatted for 8.5x11" paper, have 1" margins on all sides, and be written in a double-spaced, 12-point font. All papers must include your first and last name and a title.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is

subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com).

Late Penalties

Unless a student receives accommodation for illness through Academic Counselling, late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 5% of the assignment grade per day late for up to a total of 5 days (including weekends) following the due date. Late assignments will not be accepted after 5 days.

Institutional Statements and Policies

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current academic policies regarding accessibility, plagiarism and scholastic offences, and medical accommodation. [These policies are outlined with links to the full policies on the Anthropology website.](#)