

Department of Anthropology
ANTH 2279G-001 - Ordinary Ethics
COURSE OUTLINE
Winter 2024

Version date: January 23, 2024

Instructor and course information:

Instructor: Dr. Greg Beckett

Email: gbeckett@uwo.ca

Method of delivery: In person

Credit Value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None

Prerequisites: None

Course Description:

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:

Upon successful completion 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):

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 quizzes on the readings, discussion questions and discussion debriefing reports, a short ethnographic analysis, and a final paper.

Quizzes	10%
Discussion Questions and Debriefing	25%
Ethnographic Analysis	25%
Final Paper	40%

I expect you to come to class prepared to engage in discussion of the assigned readings. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for getting notes from another student. I will provide PowerPoint slides after class, but lecture and discussion notes for missed classes will not be provided and there will be no make-up quizzes without approved accommodations from Academic Counselling.

Students may use laptops during class for taking notes or for accessing the readings. Other devices, including cell phones, music players, etc. must be turned off.

Weekly Quizzes – 10%

There will be weekly quizzes during the term. Quizzes are to be completed online in OWL before the start of class. They will focus on the main ideas in the readings for the week and are meant to motivate you to complete all the readings before class and to give us all a starting point for discussion. There will be no make-up quizzes, but the lowest two grades will be dropped.

Discussion Questions – 10%

Students will twice submit discussion questions based on the readings. Discussion questions should be thoughtful and related to the readings (not based on personal opinion). Discussion questions should be sent to me by email before class. Have a look at this useful guide for more information on [how to prepare discussion questions](#). Each student will sign up for two different weeks during which they will be responsible for submitted questions before class and then submitting their debriefing report by the end of the week.

Debriefing Reports – 15%

Students will individually write two short response (1-2 paragraphs) debriefing reports that summarize some key points from the class discussion in response to the discussion questions posed during your week (you will write one report for each of the two weeks during which you submit questions, but your report does not have to deal with your own question—it can report on any aspect of our class discussion). Your debriefing response should include a brief recap of your question(s) and some reflection on an aspect of class discussion in relation to the readings. Debriefing reports are due by email by the end of the week during which you submitted the respective discussion questions.

Ethnographic Analysis – 25%

Students will write a short ethnographic analysis (750 words) that explores how ethical values and judgements emerge and are expressed, contested, or otherwise mobilized. Ethnographic material will come from online sources (more information to be provided in class). Papers should focus on how and why the participants in the interaction think and act the way that they do, and not on a personal evaluation of the case. There are two different due dates for this assignment—you can choose the due date that works best for your own workload. Ethnographic analysis papers are due in OWL Wednesday Feb 14.

Final Paper – 40%

Students will write a final paper (2000 words) that offers a close reading of our main ethnographic text (Brodwin's Everyday Ethics) and additional course readings, in relation to key concepts and approaches developed in the course. More instructions for the final paper will be provided in class and on OWL closer to the assignment date. The final paper will be due during the exam period (date TBD).

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

PLEASE NOTE: *The evaluation methods described in this course outline are essential requirements for the course.*

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 take-home essay exam.

Academic and Accommodation Policies:

Late Policy for Assignments

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.

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).

Within this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments, and perspectives. The use of AI tools may serve as a starting point for exploring a topic, but **all students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources of information and avoiding plagiarism. Essays and writing assignments should reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work.**

Academic Integrity - 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.

Institutional Statements and Policies

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current [Academic Rights and Responsibilities](#) policies in the Academic Calendar. Such items include accommodations for students with disabilities, religious holidays, consideration for medical illness, academic appeals, plagiarism and scholastic offences, and code of student conduct.

Academic Consideration for Student Absences

For students who have missed, or will miss, any course work, whether it be for medical related or non-medical related, please read the details and instructions on "[What is Academic Consideration](#)".

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.

PLEASE NOTE: *The evaluation methods described in this course outline are essential requirements for the course. The midterm and final exam make use of multiple-choice questions to evaluate student learning. The multiple-choice format allows for assessment of students' detailed knowledge of a broad range of concepts, theories, principles, and research that other formats do not permit.*

Accessible Education

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. Please see [Accessible Education](#) for information.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

~ End ~