

Ethics and the Media Professions

Fall 2021

Time: T-Th 5:00–5:55pm
Location: 010 CH
Instructor: Augie Faller
Office: 529 HL
Office Hours: W 2-3pm on Zoom
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Roger Rosena
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Office hours: M 11–12pm & T 3–4pm on Zoom

Course Description

Should reporters strive for objectivity? Should you publish an important story even if it puts a source at risk? Is it ok for your brand to tweet in Black English, even though it doesn't have any connection to Black culture? These are just a few of the ethical problems faced by media professionals every day. This course takes on these challenges by presenting some of the main ethical theories in the Western tradition and applying them to specific cases. Readings are drawn from diverse sources including philosophy, sociology, law, and the Internet. Guest speakers will diverse and insider perspectives on the issues we discuss. Students will complete a variety of assignments that encourage creativity, critical thinking, and clarity of prose.

Learning Outcomes

1. Learn some of the major considerations concerning what makes an action right or wrong.
2. Produce writing that is based on a careful analysis of arguments and real world scenarios, implementing logical tools presented early in the semester.
3. Learn to discern the underlying structure of arguments, particularly with regard to identifying chains of logical dependence, areas of vulnerability, and effective modes of response.

Evaluation

Some of the assignments for this course will be graded on completion. A complete assignment must:

1. Respond to the prompt (i.e., you can't submit a paper on the wrong topic, it must be close to the minimum page count, etc).
2. Demonstrate some understanding of the reading (i.e., you can't just ignore what we have been reading and discussing in class).

3. For in-class quizzes, a "complete" will be given to quizzes earning over 50%.

Participation 10% of grade.

Most weeks there will be short assignments or quizzes completed in class. These will be graded on completion, and will count toward your participation grade.

Discussion posts 20% of grade

Starting in Week 2, you will be asked to write a **short** post about the assigned reading, graded on completion. The posts should be between 50 and 150 words in length. The post should focus on a particular question, concept, claim, or argument from the reading and discuss it critically and from your own point of view, with the aim of either:

a) deepening our understanding of the reading by raising the question, concept, claim, or argument *or*

b) communicating an objection to a claim or an argument.

Please do not merely summarize the reading but try to raise a useful question or to persuade us to see it, or the problems it discusses, in a certain way. Think of the post as your contribution to a philosophical discussion on the topic of the reading.

Posts are due by 11am on Wednesday, on your section's Blackboard page.

If you have to miss class, you still need to submit a post. The posts cannot be made up without permission. One lowest grade will not be counted toward the final course grade. No post due week 12 or 13.

Short Assignments: 20% of grade

You will be given two short analytical writing assignments, the first due 9/17, the second due TBA.

Midterm: 20% of grade

There will be a take-home midterm assignment consisting of short answer questions during week 12.

Final paper: 4–5 pages, 30% of grade

You will be asked to write an essay on a single topic based on a list of prompts (you may also choose your own topic with permission of your section leader).

Inclusiveness Guidelines

Racially inclusive behavior avoids assuming someone's racial or ethnic identity as well as knowledge or characteristics based on identity. Race- and gender-inclusive language uses words that recognize and affirm how people describe, express, and experience their race and gender. Gender-inclusive language avoids assuming a male speaker ('freshman', 'upperclassman', 'mankind', etc.), erasing non-binary gender identifications ('men and women'; do use 'Latinx' instead of 'Latino/a'), and conflating biological sex with gender expression ('women have a uterus'). Race-inclusive language avoids using racially-loaded terms except when explicitly discussing the term itself (and even then please be mindful of how your speech affects

other students).

Here are some helpful guidelines for how to be more inclusive in our speech and writing:

<https://content-guide.18f.gov/our-style/inclusive-language/>

Following these guidelines is essential to fostering an inclusive environment at Syracuse.

Students with a Disability

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit their website at <https://disabilityresources.syr.edu>. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

Tutoring:

Syracuse University is committed to your success. To that end, there are several tutoring centers on campus, including the Tutoring & Study Center (TSC), the Writing Center, and the Athletics Academic Services Center. I encourage you to use these services. All schedules and locations are posted on the TSC website: <http://tutoring.syr.edu>.

Religious Observation:

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. SU does not have non-instructional days for any religious holidays; however, 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.

Notes on Academic Integrity

Plagiarism: Any work you submit must be wholly your own. If you are unsure whether something you've done might count as plagiarism, please consult one of your instructors.

This class will use the plagiarism detection and prevention system **Turnitin**. You will have the option to submit your papers to Turnitin to check that all sources you use have been properly acknowledged and cited before you submit the paper to me. I will also submit all papers you write for this class to Turnitin, which compares submitted documents against documents on the Internet and against student papers submitted to Turnitin at SU and at other colleges and universities. I will take your knowledge of the subject matter of this course and your writing level and style into account in interpreting the originality report. Keep in mind that all papers you submit for this class will become part of the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

Course Materials

All readings will be available through the Blackboard site.

Tentative Schedule of Readings

Readings and assignments should be completed by the day at which they are listed.

Week 1: Introduction

Tues 8/31:

Russ Shafer-Landau, Introduction to *The Fundamentals of Ethics*
Perry et al, "Logical Toolkit"

Thurs 9/2:

David Enoch, "Why I'm an Objectivist about Ethics"
Daniel Hale's Testimony

Week 2: Egoism and Consequentialism

Tues 9/7:

Russ Shafer-Landau, Chapter 8, "Ethical Egoism"

Thurs 9/9:

John Stuart Mill, selections from *Utilitarianism*
Russ Shafer-Landau, Chapter 9, "Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions"

Week 3: Consequentialism Continued

Tues 9/14:

Russ Shafer-Landau, Chapter 10, "Consequentialism: Its Difficulties"
Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (short story)

For discussion section:

Joshua Keating (for Foreign Policy), "Is it wrong to care more about 4 deaths in Boston than 80 in Syria?"

David Folkenflik (for NPR), "Is there a hierarchy of the importance of death in the news business?"

Thurs 9/16:

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

***** Short Assignment 1 Due by 8pm Friday 9/17 *****

Week 4: Doxing and Hate Speech

Tues 9/21:

David M. Douglas, "Doxing: A Conceptual Analysis"

Emma Betuel (for The Markup), "Should Doxing Be Illegal?"

Vegas Tenold, "To Doxx a Racist"

For discussion section:

Bella Rios, "Doxxing or Due Diligence?" (Case Study)

N. K. Jemisin, "The Ones Who Stay and Fight" (short story)

Thurs 9/23:

Jeremy Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Chapter 4 (focus on section "Assurance" and what follows)

Electronic Frontier Foundation, "Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act"

ProPublica, "Twenty-Six Words Created the Internet. What Will It Take to Save It?"

Week 5: Privacy

Tues 9/28:

James Rachels, "Why Privacy Is Important"

For discussion section:

NYT Opinion, "You're Being Watched Right Now" (video)

Try out the Electronic Frontier Foundation's "Cover Your Tracks" tool

Thurs 9/30:

Julia Angwin, *Dragnet Nation* Chapters 1 and 15

Week 6: Privacy and Authenticity

Tues 10/5:

Andrei Marmor, "Privacy and Social Media"

Thurs 10/7:

April Kae visits

Bio: April Kae (Instagram: @aprilkae.nyc) is an influencer, musician, and a writer originally from Austin, Texas and currently based in Harlem in New York City. Known for her authentic voice and unapologetic dedication to her community, she is a champion for LGBTQ+ and women's issues, particularly mental health and self-care. For three years, April worked full-time as editor-in-chief of a digital publication covering social justice issues in public education. Currently, she is a graduate student at Silberman School of Social Work and is researching the effectiveness of depression treatments for Black adolescents at McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research at NYU Silver School of Social Work. April also performs regularly around the city with her band, Imanigold.

Week 7: Kantianism I

Tues 10/12:

Russ Schafer-Landau, Chapter 11, "The Kantian Perspective: Fairness and Justice"
Optional: Immanuel Kant, excerpt from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

For discussion section:

The View from Somewhere (Podcast), "Truth and Vietnam" (note: this discusses violence and trauma)

Thurs 10/14:

Christine Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie"

Week 8: Kantianism II

Tues 10/19:

Russ Schafer-Landau, Chapter 12, "The Kantian Perspective: Autonomy and Respect"
Onora O'Neill, "Between Consenting Adults" (start)

For discussion section:

Jina Moore, "Five Ideas on Meaningful Consent in Trauma Journalism"

Thurs 10/21:

Onora O'Neill, "Between Consenting Adults" (continued)

Week 9: Cultural Appropriation and Social Identities in the Media

Tues 10/26:

C. Thi Nguyen and Matthew Strohl, Cultural Appropriation and the Intimacy of Groups

For discussion section:

Hanif Abdurraqib (for Stereogum), "The White Stripes Turn 20"

Allegra Frank (for Vox), "Scarlett Johansson defends her desire to play any person, any race, or "any tree" she wants"

Thurs 10/28:

NYT, "The White Internet's Love Affair With Digital Blackface" (video)

Aria Dean, "Poor Meme, Rich Meme" (*Real Life Mag*)

manuel arturo abreu, "Online Imagined Black English" (*Arachne*)

Week 10: Propaganda and Ideology

Tues 11/2:

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, Chapter 1 and Afterward

For discussion section:

Noam Chomsky: The Mass Media Machine (Al Jazeera "Media Theorized" series)

BBC interview with Noam Chomsky

Thurs 11/4:

Jared Millson, "Conspiracy Theories," *1,000-Word Philosophy*

C Thi Nguyen, "Escape the echo chamber" in *Aeon*

Leon Yin and Alfred Ng (*The Markup*), "Facebook Said It Would Stop Pushing Users to Join Partisan Political Groups. It Didn't"

Week 11: Objectivity

Tues 11/9:

Media Ethics Initiative, "Objectivity in Journalism: Ethical Requirement or Impediment?"

For discussion section:

Edward Said: The Politics of Stereotypes in the News (Al Jazeera "Media Theorized" series)

Sarah Li (for Teen Vogue), "Journalistic Objectivity Isn't Realistic, Young Reporters Say"

Steve Rose (for the Guardian), "'Death to the infidels!' Why it's time to fix Hollywood's problem with Muslims"

Thurs 11/11:

Midterm review

Week 12: Gamification

Tues 11/16:

Sue Robinson and Kathleen Bartzen Culver, "When White reporters cover race: News media, objectivity and community (dis)trust"

For discussion section:

TBA

Thurs 11/18:

C. Thi Nguyen, "How Twitter Gamifies Communication"

Optional:

C. Thi Nguyen, *Games as Art* Chapter 9, "Gamification and Value Capture"

Week 13: Thanksgiving Break

Tues 11/21:

No class

Thurs 11/28:

No class

Week 14: Epistemic Injustice

Tues 11/30:

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapters 1 and 2

For discussion section:

TBA

Thurs 12/2:

Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, and the Epistemology of Prejudice"

Week 15:

Tues 12/7:

Leon Yin (The Markup) visits

Bio: Leon Yin is an investigative data journalist at The Markup, a non-profit newsroom focused on tech accountability. He builds datasets, runs experiments, and audits algorithms.

His work centers around the effects of commercial content moderation and market dominance. Before joining The Markup, Leon was on a research scientist working alongside political scientists at NYU, and a research affiliate at Data & Society. He started his career writing Fortran code to analyze oceanographic data at NASA.

Thurs 12/9:

Wrap up

***** Final paper due 8pm Monday 12/13 *****