**Course Description**

What is a good life? What should we do? How should we treat others?

These are basic questions of ethics. In this class, we will be thinking through these and related questions using historical and contemporary resources in philosophy. Ethics is concerned with both thought and conduct; so, we will be concerned with not only how we should *think* about the good, but what that means for what we should *do*!

As with any class on such a large topic, I’ve had to make choices about what to include and what not to include. There is way more to cover than we’ll have time to get to in 10 weeks. *Please* feel free to follow up with me if there’s a topic that really peaks your interest, or if you want to know more about what we *haven’t* covered, and I would be happy to point you to other readings.

The course breaks roughly into three units.

The *first unit* (weeks 1-3) covers three major theories in ethics: virtue ethics, utilitarianism, and deontology. We then move to feminist ethics, which is both a critical response to these traditional theories and a standalone ethical approach all its own. Finally, we’ll look at the topic of homelessness through the lens of these four approaches to ethics, thinking about the forms of conduct that they suggest.

The *second unit* (weeks 4-6) is our opportunity to work closely with one particular thinker: Jane Addams. An early contributor to pragmatism (a philosophical tradition originating in the U.S.) and the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, Addams is a fascinating thinker and excellent resource for thinking about ethics. Addams develops a theory of “social ethics,” and thinks through its relation to democracy. This unit will ask about the relation between ethics and politics, the role of the family and education, labor, and the importance of power to ethics.

The *third unit* (weeks 7-9) will turn to civil disobedience, “insurrectionist ethics,” and the ethical dimensions of political activism. This unit pushes the boundaries of “ethics” fully into the political, exploring the complexities of activism and resistance to oppression. After developing a vocabulary and conceptual framework for thinking about ethics and activism, we will turn to a consideration of the Black Lives Matter movement, using the resources of the class to think through that contemporary political and ethical struggle.
In the second and third units, I have placed a special emphasis on thinkers writing from the American context. This is because place matters (!) — in thinking about who we are and who we want to be, where we are is a crucial factor.

**Course Format**

Since we have a relatively small class, I will avoid lectures for the most part in favor of discussion and collective interpretation of the reading. I will give background and help with you make sense of the readings, but our classroom is a shared space of inquiry into our topic. With shared ownership of the classroom comes shared responsibility. I expect every. Single. One. Of. You. To come to class ready to go, having done the reading and an entry in your reading journal.

Philosophy is about transforming, about becoming a new and better human being. Yes, you will acquire some information and concepts, but the class should be first and foremost an opportunity for personal growth — treat it as such.

**Required Text**
Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*

**Grading**

Attendance – 10%
1 on 1s – 5%

Reading Journal – 25%
1st Paper (Ethics and Homelessness) – Draft 5%, Final Draft 10%
2nd Paper (Social Ethics) – Draft and outline 5%, Final Draft 15%
Final – Outline 5%, Final Draft 25%

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Attendance – Showing up is the first step to both learning and doing well in this (and every) class. So, every unexcused absence after 2 will result in -2% on your attendance score. If you have more than 10 unexcused absences, you will fail the class. For an excused absence, please communicate with me before the missed class if at all possible. If you’re unsure, ask!

1 on 1s – Everyone will be required to meet with me in office hours during the first 3 weeks of school. This is to encourage you to come to office hours, and to give us an
opportunity to chat and get to know each other. I’ve found that this greatly improves the class community and discussions.

**Reading Journal** – Get a journal on the first day of class. After every reading, spend *at least 15 minutes* (set a timer) writing about the reading: explain a concept, work through an argument, relate it to personal experience, describe the feelings it inspires…whatever helps you make sense of and relate to the reading.

Please end every journal entry with at least 2 questions that the reading raises for you.

This is a major part of your grade because reading and writing are *crucial* to doing philosophy. The RJ addresses both of these. It will help you understand the material better, make a substantive contribution to discussion, and become a better thinker.

**1st Paper (Ethics and Homelessness)** – The first paper will be on ethics and homelessness—I will post a prompt on Canvas at least one week prior to the due date. The draft will be due in class on Monday of week three, where you will workshop it with a partner in class. Not having a draft for that class will result in a loss of *1/3 of your grade* on that paper.

**2nd Paper (Social Ethics)** – The second paper will be on the social ethics of Jane Addams—I will post a prompt on Canvas at least one week prior to the due date. You will be required to bring a draft and outline to class the Wednesday before it is due. Not doing so will result in a loss of *1/4 of your grade* on that paper.

**Final Paper** – The final paper will relate insurrectionist ethics to one of the previously covered ethical theories—I will post a prompt on Canvas at least one week prior to the due date. You will be required to bring an outline to class the Wednesday before it is due. Not doing so will result in a loss of *1/5 of your grade* on that paper.

**Reading Schedule**

**Week 1 – Three Traditional Theories**

M - Introduction

T – Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics”

  Suggested: [PEL Podcast on Aristotle’s Ethics](#)

W – Kant, “The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative”

  Suggested: [PEL Podcast on Kant’s Ethics](#)
Week 2 – Care Ethics
M – Lindemann, “What is Feminist Ethics?”
W – Benhabib, “The Generalized and the Concrete Other”
R – Flex

Week 3 – Homelessness
M – Workshop and Discussion, 1st Paper Draft
T – Guest Speaker Erik De Buhr. Read: “Free to Choose”
W – Gowan, “Hobos, Hustlers and Backsliders: Homelessness in San Francisco”
R – Heben, “Tent City Urbanism”
F – Attend “Forum on Sustainability and Housing Justice”
    Extra Credit Opportunity: Sign up for volunteer or internship opportunity.
1st Paper DUE Saturday 5pm on Canvas

Week 4 – Social Ethics
M – Addams Intro
T – Addams Ch. 1
W – Addams Ch. 2
R – Addams Ch. 3
    Extra Credit: Attend "A Song, A Slogan, and A Service: Dispatches from the Movement for Black Lives" lecture by James Braxton Peterson, 7:30pm Thursday in EMU Ballroom.

Week 5 – Labor and Social Ethics
M – Addams Ch. 4
T – Addams, “A Modern Lear”
W – Follett, “Power”
R – Class Canceled

Week 6 – Social Ethics in Education and Politics
M – Addams Ch. 5
T – Addams Ch. 6 (Turn in Reading Journals for mid-term check)
W – Workshop 2nd Paper (Bring outline and draft to class.)

R – Flex
2nd Paper DUE Friday 5pm on Canvas

Week 7 – Civil Disobedience
M – Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”
T – Wells, “Southern Horrors”
W – MLK, “Nonviolence and Social Change”
Suggested: “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

R - Flex

Week 8 – Insurrection and Courage
M – Harris, “Insurrectionist Ethics”
T – Alfred, “First Words”
W – Alfred, “The Ethics of Courage”
R – Flex

Week 9 - #BlackLivesMatter
M – Garza, “A Herstory of Black Lives Matter”
W - George Yancy and Cornel West, “The Fire of a New Generation”
R – Smith, “The Rebirth of Black Rage”

Suggested: Gould-Wartofsky, “When Rioting is Rational”

Week 10 – Closing Reflections
M – Flex
T – Turn in/Discuss Reading Journals
W – Final Paper Workshop (Bring outline to class.)
R – Final Discussion

Final Paper DUE Monday 5pm on Canvas.