



**Course: DC 228 / GAM 228 / IT 228 Ethics**  
**in Computer Games and Cinema**

DC 228 303 ETHICS IN COMPUTER GAMES and CINEMA  
GAM 228 303 ETHICS IN COMPUTER GAMES and CINEMA  
IT 228 303 ETHICS IN COMPUTER GAMES and CINEMA

**Levan Center Room 301 Mondays and Wednesdays 2:40 - 4:10 PM**  
**[LPC]**

**2017-2018 Spring - DePaul University**

**Instructor: Jonathan Hey**

**Summary of Course**

Office Hours:

- LPC Richardson Library - Mondays and Wednesdays 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM
- LPC Richardson Library - Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM
- **Or** by appointment

Email (preferred): [jhey@depaul.edu](mailto:jhey@depaul.edu)

[Also [jhey.depaul@gmail.com](mailto:jhey.depaul@gmail.com),

[jonhey@rcn.com](mailto:jonhey@rcn.com)

[jonathanhey@gmail.com](mailto:jonathanhey@gmail.com)]

**Jon Hey's mobile number - voice and text (773) 443-7877** - Feel free to contact me here via voice call or text, especially if some question or other situation arises that needs to be addressed quickly. For instance, when you need quick answers to questions.

## **Course Description**

Societies function based on normative ethics utilizing common sense to distinguish between ethical and unethical behavior. Most of us are not aware of the underlying theories when arriving at ethical judgments about right and wrong. However, the fast pace of progress in information technologies and digital entertainment creates an environment in which ethical challenges are particularly complex, both for the professional in the field and for the casual user. Several philosophical frameworks will be covered including; Kant's First and Second Categorical Imperatives, Utilitarianism, Social Contract Theory as well as the Ethics of Virtue. Students will use these frameworks to develop a personal code of ethics. In the second half of the course we will concentrate on the application of that code of ethics to the context of digital entertainment and its impact on an individual and society. In the eyes of many, games and movies are often violent, offensive and immoral: what are the ethical bases for these judgments? Implications of certain values embedded in games and movies will be discussed. The issue of balancing individual creativity vs. cultural impact, particularly on children, will be addressed. The course will culminate with the formulation of elements of an ethical code of conduct for a game or movie creator.

**PREREQUISITES:** none

## **Learning Domain Description**

IT 228/DC 228/GAM 228 Ethics in Computer Games and Cinema is included in the Liberal Studies program as a course with credit in the Philosophical Inquiry domain. Philosophical Inquiry examines the most basic questions of human existence. It considers the fundamental beliefs and convictions that shape what it means to be human, our relationships with others, and the nature of the world itself. Its aim is to develop our critical, imaginative, and analytical abilities, and it enables students to understand various kinds of important intellectual problems from a variety of perspectives and approaches, interpret and assess historical and contemporary texts concerned with these issues, and articulate reasoned judgments about these most basic concerns of human life. Philosophical inquiry is thus committed to the task of reflecting on the ideas and events that make up the cultures, societies, and traditions within which we live and to enhancing our understanding of their significance and complexity. Courses in Philosophical Inquiry support the mission of the Liberal Studies Program by fostering deeper understanding and appreciation of the worlds of meaning and of value and of the enterprise of intellectual inquiry and social dialogue.

## **Learning Outcomes:**

1. Using multiple perspectives, students will be able to address, critically think about, and analyze philosophical questions and problems.
2. Students will be able to evaluate philosophical questions, issues and/or problems using informed judgment. Students will be able to analyze and interpret the

- methods used by philosophers in addressing philosophical questions, issues, and/or problems.
3. Students will be able to develop an understanding of the historical context of philosophical topics, figures, and texts.
  4. Students will be able to write an analytic essay treating a philosophical question, issue and/or problem that forwards an identifiable thesis, argument, and conclusion.
  5. Students will be able to address, critically think about, and analyze ethical issues, applying philosophical tools drawn from various ethical traditions to concrete cases pertinent to a variety of subject matters.

### **How Learning Outcomes Will Be Met**

1. Students will demonstrate Learning Objective 1 by writing one Peer Review paper which includes challenging them to identify a personal code of ethics drawn from the ethical philosophies studied in the course. This paper requires that they identify theories that have been widely challenged by philosophers such as Subjectivism, Cultural Relativism, Ethical Egoism and Divine Command based theories, as well as examine widely accepted philosophies and areas in their lives to which principles of Utilitarianism, Kantian, and virtue philosophies apply.

Each week, students will be required to write either an in-class essay or an outside of class essay in which they will be required to respond to either readings, film clips, or game experiences from two to three different ethical approaches.

Students will also write an Ethical Analysis paper as described below.

2. The written midterm requires the students to demonstrate an understanding of each of the philosophers studied in the course and what arguments philosophers have put forth for and against each of the theories.
3. The Peer Review paper must be written from a historical perspective. The evolution of ethical thought must be explained in the papers so students understand when each philosophy was made popular, by whom and what the historical context was for each.
4. The Ethical Analysis final paper asks students to identify an ethically contentious issue in the field of digital entertainment and examine it in light of the philosophies studied in class.

5. In the Ethical Analysis paper, the student must relate their issue to the principals they wrote about in their Best Plan paper. They must demonstrate that the philosophies they developed into their Best Plan are the arguments they applied to the current issue they chose for their final Ethical Analysis project.

### **Writing Expectations:**

Students will be expected to complete a minimum of 10-12 pages of writing for this course.

### **How Writing Expectations Will Be Met**

1. Students will write two one Peer Review paper and one Ethical Analysis paper— The first assignment is a three-page paper and the second is a four-page paper.
2. Students will write essays, as well as answer objective questions, in the midterm addressing each of the philosophers covered in class. The strengths and weaknesses of each theory must be explained.
3. Students write one four-page Ethical Analysis paper on a topic they identify as ethically contentious in the field of digital entertainment. This paper requires that they reference at least two outside sources in addition to the textbook.

### **Rubric applied to written assignments**

#### *A = Exceptional*

- Reflects unusually thorough and comprehensive understanding of the ethical theories
- Analyzes, evaluates, and synthesizes evidence very effectively.
- Presents a clearly articulated thesis and highly persuasive argument that is probing, creative and nuanced.
- Reaches highly informed conclusions based on the evidence.
- Includes all of the most relevant and significant supporting evidence.
- Contains no factual inaccuracies.
- Is very well focused and organized.
- Is very well written and proofread with few to no errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, etc.
- Is very well documented with no errors or omissions in citation.
- Employs a mature vocabulary, is highly attentive to word choice, and uses metaphors effectively.

#### *B = Commendable*

- Reflects clear understanding of the ethical theories
- Analyzes, evaluates, and synthesizes evidence effectively.
- Presents a clearly identifiable thesis and defensible argument.

- Reaches informed conclusions based on the evidence.
- Includes relevant and significant supporting evidence.
- Contains only minor factual inaccuracies.
- Is well focused and organized.
- Is well written and proofread with few errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, etc.
- Is well documented with few to no errors or omissions in citation.
- Employs a relatively mature vocabulary, is attentive to word choice, and uses metaphors effectively.

*C = Competent*

- Reflects adequate understanding of the ethical theories
- Analyzes, evaluates, and synthesizes evidence somewhat effectively.
- Presents a thesis and argument that are reasonable but unpersuasive, simplistic, superficial, or logically flawed.
- Conclusions are reasonably well founded.
- Includes some supporting evidence but not all of it relevant.
- May have a major factual inaccuracy but most information is correct.
- Demonstrates adequate focus and organization.
- Is adequately written and proofread with some errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, etc.
- Is adequately documented but may contain a minor errors or omissions in citation.
- Employs a limited vocabulary and relatively unsophisticated narrative style.

*D = Limited Evidence of Achievement*

- Reflects poor understanding of the ethical theories • Ineffectively analyzes, evaluates, and synthesizes evidence.
- Thesis and argument are unclear and/or very superficial.
- Reaches incomplete or inaccurate conclusions based on the evidence.
- Omits most of the relevant evidence and includes information that is largely inaccurate.
- Demonstrates inadequate focus and organization.
- Is poorly written and proofread with many errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax, etc.
- Is poorly documented with many and/or serious errors and omissions in citation.
- Employs a limited vocabulary and unsophisticated narrative style.

*F = Minimal Evidence of Achievement*

- Work that does not adequately meet ANY of the standards set forth above, or which is exceptionally inadequate in its thesis, ideas, evidence, writing, or documentation.

## **D2L**

We are using D2L (<http://d2l.depaul.edu>) as the supporting learning platform for this course. All course materials including weekly lecture slides and class info (i.e. syllabus, lesson plan, assignment descriptions etc.) are available through COLTUBE from the course home page. Lectures are recorded and available within an hour after completion. Assignments are submitted under the DropBox on D2L.

## **REQUIRED MATERIALS**

Rachels James, Rachels Stuart (2012): *The Elements Of Moral Philosophy*, McGraw-Hill Education: Europe (United States). 8<sup>th</sup> Edition **OR** 7<sup>th</sup> Edition

### **Supplementary Readings:**

Various articles and readings as posted on D2L and announced in class.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

- Attendance: You are expected to attend all classes and participate in class activities as scheduled. Class will start promptly. Attendance will be recorded. Students are individually responsible for material they may have missed due to absence or tardiness. Lectures are recorded.
- All non-class assignments will be submitted on d2l (except for presentations). Do not submit assignments by email unless you received instruction to do so.
- Email: Email is the preferred means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time.

## **CHANGES TO SYLLABUS**

***This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class. Any change in assignments or specific due dates will be announced in class and posted under “Announcements” on d2l.***

## **GRADING:**

- Grades will be based on a percentage basis. Your final grade will reflect your grade total of all possible points you received (or had deducted).

- A = 91%+
- A- = 90%
- B + = 89%
- B = 88-81%
- B- = 80%
- C + = 79%
- C = 78-71%
- C- = 70%
- D + = 69%
- D = 68- 61%
- D - = 60%
- F = 59% or lower

### **Grade Breakdown:**

- One essay-based midterm test - 20%
- Students will write one Peer Review paper and one Ethical Analysis paper—the first paper is a minimum of three pages while the second, the Ethical Analysis paper, is a minimum of four pages—These assignments will be posted on d2l and forums will be set up to have students comment on the papers submitted by other students. 30%
- Students will write one Ethical Analysis Paper –minimum four pages. In this paper students will apply their own personal “Moral Theory” and explain how that theory applies to an issue in the field of digital entertainment. This will allow students to form a personal code of ethics to follow in their careers in the Digital Entertainment Industry. This theory will be developed from the Ethical Frameworks outlined in the textbook. Students will have feedback from the two Peer Review papers to use in developing this assignment. (included above)
- There will be a Final Project/Presentation. 30%
- Grades will also be based on class participation and participation in the Peer Review Forums: Attendance is required. More than three missed classes and you lose these points 20%

### **Week-by-week Assignments/Readings**

#### *Week 1*

**Day 1:** Introduction to the course material and review of the syllabus.

What is Morality?

The problem of Definition

Reason and Impartiality

The Minimum Conception of Morality

*Reading:* Rachels

Chapter 1 “What is Morality”

Chapter 2 “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”

**Day 2:** In-class Analysis: After watching the film clip from *The Godfather*, write an essay in which you address these questions: 1) Does Don Corleone have ethics; 2) If so, how would you define them; 3) If not, explain why not; 4) If so, can you offer a historical example of someone else with such ethics; 5) If not, describe a type of ethic to which Don Corleone might be able to subscribe.

### ***Week 2***

Subjectivism in Ethics; are there proofs in ethics and moral facts? Morality and Religion, Divine Command Theory and the Theory of Natural Law.; Psychological Egotism, Ethical Egotism. The idea of Social contract, introduction of social contract theory of Morals, the Prisoners Dilemma.

Reading assignment: Rachels

Chapter 3 “Subjectivism in Ethics”

Chapter 4 “Does Morality Depend on Religion?”

Chapter 5 “Psychological Egotism”

Chapter 6 “Ethical Egoism”

Chapter 11 “The Idea of Social Contract”

One Page Analysis One: Read the essay from Ayn Rand entitled “The Cult of Moral Grayness.” Identify how this essay relates to “Objectivism.” Consider whether you were surprised at her position. Is her argument against compromise a defensible position or does her approach lead ultimately to extremism which cannot be resolved?

### ***Week 3***

The Utilitarian Approach; The revolution in ethics; the debate over utilitarianism, the resilience of the theory, the defense of utilitarianism will be discussed. Are there absolute moral Rules? We explore Kant and the Categorical Imperative, Kant and the Respect for Persons.

Reading assignment

Rachels Chapter 7 “The Utilitarian Approach”

Chapter 8 “The Debate over Utilitarianism”

Chapter 9 “Are There Absolute Moral Rules?”

Chapter 10 “Kant and The Respect for Persons”

In-class assignment: Consider the “barn” episode from *The Walking Dead*. After the class discussion, write up your Utilitarian analysis of how different characters were benefited or penalized.

#### **Week 4**

Feminism and ethics, the implications for moral judgment, the ethics of virtue; the advantages of virtue ethics. What would make a satisfactory moral theory that you could live with in the entertainment industry?

Reading assignment: Rachels

Chapter 12 Feminism and the ethics of Care”

Chapter 13 “The Ethics of Virtue”

Chapter 14 “What Would a Satisfactory Moral Theory Be Like?”

Best Plan Paper for peer review. Write a three-page paper explaining your view of a “Satisfactory Moral Theory”. After a brief summary of each system we have studied and how they fall short of the MCM, form a clear thesis stating your view of a “Satisfactory Moral Theory”. Support this thesis with material from the text and other sources. Properly footnote references from the text, optional reading material or other sources. This paper should address which philosophies work best in making moral decisions regarding three different groups of people: People you will likely never meet but who will be affected by a moral decision you make, people you interact with casually, and people with whom you have intimate relationships- friends and family.

#### **Week 5**

Does media influence Society? Does influence imply responsibility?

The ethical implications of the portrayal of violence and sex in entertainment and the effect such portrayal has on the viewer.

Documentary and reality programming. What reality? How does the director’s decision about what to include and what not to include effect the finished work?

In-class writing assignment: After viewing each of the film clips presented by the professor, respond as to what you see as the ethical issue portrayed and how two of the ethical theories studied in class would address those issues.

#### **Week 6**

Midterm

Children’s programming. How are cartoons and violence different in the age of digital entertainment? Was violence in cartoons the same as violent video games today?

#### **Week 7**

The introduction of Interactive Media, Computer Games

How are digital games different from traditional movies and television entertainment?  
What effect does interactivity have on the participant? The player's "buy in" to the game core mechanic. How are interactive media more persuasive than Non-interactive media?  
What responsibility does this imply for the game creator?

Reading assignment: Playing a "Good" Game: A Philosophical Approach to Understanding the Morality of Games by Ren Reynolds  
© 2002 Ren Reynolds

Submit a description of a topic you find ethically contentious that you would like to research in your final Ethical Analysis paper. Those topics will be reviewed and approved before you begin developing your Ethical Analysis paper.

### ***Week 8***

Ethics in video games, how much is too much? Serious Games Movement, "Games for Social Change", "Games for Spiritual Development"; What potential do games have to enlighten and where does entertainment stop being entertainment?

Reading assignment:

Game Ethics - *Homo Ludens* as a Computer Game Designer and Consumer

Virtue **ethics** can be applied to **game** developers and consumers, the latter ones being far more numerous.

International Review of Information Ethics. Vol 4 2005

Ethical Analysis Paper: Write a four-page paper explicitly applying the "Satisfactory Moral Theory" you developed in the Best Plan paper to the Digital Entertainment industry. If your personal view of a "Satisfactory Moral Theory" has changed based on the reading materials in the second half of the course, explain how it has changed and why. Study the feedback you received on the Peer Review papers to insure adherence to the specifics posted online for that paper as well as the feedback you got from other students. You will not have an opportunity to rewrite this paper if it does not follow the guidelines.

### ***Week 9***

Self-Portrayal in a Simulated Life: Projecting Personality and Values and Gaming addiction in MMOGs. What are ethical questions of Social Networks such as Facebook? The class will vote this week from a choice of three options on how to take the final examination.

Reading assignment: The International Journal of Computer Game Research volume 6 issue 1 December 2006 ISSN:1604-7982 <http://gamestudies.org/0601>

### ***Week 10***

Piracy, MDCA, Fair Use, Computer generated images of Actors Digital artifacts as real property. How is burning a copy of a CD for a friend different than loaning someone a CD you bought. What is Fair-Use? Digital artifacts in MMOGs as real property, tax and legal implications of business on “Second Life”.

Reading Assignment: Executive Summary Digital Millennium Copyright Act  
Section 104 Report

### ***Week 11***

Final Project/Presentation. Date and time to be announced.

## **College Policies**

### **Online Course Evaluations**

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is separate from the student’s identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>. If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

### **Academic Policies**

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at: [cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment](http://cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment).

### **Students with Disabilities**

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: [csd@depaul.edu](mailto:csd@depaul.edu).

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.

Phone number: (312)362-8002

Fax: (312)362-6544

TTY: (773)325.7296