IT 228/FILM 228/GAM 228 Ethics in Computer Games and Cinema

Winter 2020

FILM 228-801 / GAM 228-801 / IT 228-801

W – LEWIS 1509 / 5:45-9:00 PM

Johnny Wilson

Office Hours: W 1:30-4:30 PM (CDM 617)

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**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/FILM 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 two Peer Review papers the second of which challenges them to identify a personal code of ethics drawn from the ethical philosophies studied in the course. The first 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. The second paper asks students to identify widely accepted philosophies and areas in their lives to which principles of Utilitarianism, Kantian, and virtue philosophies apply. These will theoretically meet 2, 3, and 4.
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. This should touch base with 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.
3. Both Peer Review papers are written from an 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. Together, these meet #2.
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. This meets 1, 2, 4, and 5.
5. In the Ethical Analysis paper, the student must relate their issue to the principles covered in class. They must demonstrate that the philosophies they applied in the earlier papers are the arguments they applied to the current issue they chose for their final Ethical Analysis project. This should cover 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

**Writing Expectations:**

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

**How Writing Expectations Will Be Met**

1. Students will write two Peer Review papers—The assignments are two-three page papers.
2. Students will respond to film clips in a mid-term examination and a final examination where two short (.5-1-page) essays and one long (1-2-page) essay will integrate digital presentations and philosophers/philosophies covered in class.
3. Students will regularly respond in writing to film clips related to the ethical systems studied to that point in the course.
4. Students write one four-to-five-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 and in-class readings.

**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.

**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 completely 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](https://campusconnect.depaul.edu/).

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

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**Academic Policies**

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### Students with Disabilities

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Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.   
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TTY: (773)325.7296

**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*, Ninth edition, McGraw-Hill Education: New York, New York. [The changes in editions for this book have not been substantial. Students are allowed to use any edition.]

**Supplementary Readings:**

Various articles and readings posted on D2L

**COURSE POLICIES**

* Attendance: You are expected to attend all classes and participate in class activities as scheduled. Class will start promptly. I usually take attendance via in-class activity. Students are individually responsible for material they may have missed due to absence or tardiness. To make up in-class assignments, students must have notified the professor and received permission in advance or provide physical evidence (record of medical visit or funeral program from deceased family member) after a given circumstance. Lectures are recorded.
* All non-class assignments will be submitted on d2l (except for presentations). Do not submit assignments by email.
* Email: Email is the preferred means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time. My email is [jwilso61@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:jwilso61@cdm.depaul.edu) --

**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:**

* Grand total of 100 possible points.
* 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 midterm test minimum of two pages- 20%
* Students will write two Peer Review papers—the first paper is a minimum of two pages the second, the Best Plan paper, is a minimum of 3 pages—These assignments will be posted on COL and forums will be set up to have students comment on the papers submitted by other students. 20%
* 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. 20%
* One final examination with minimum of two pages essays--20%
* Grades will also be based on class participation and participation in the Peer Review Forums, as well as in-class activities. 20%

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

**Wednesday, January 8th**

First Session: Introduction to the course material and review of the syllabus.

What is Morality? Reason and Impartiality

The Minimum Conception of Morality

*Reading:* Rachels

Chapter 1 “What is Morality”

Second Session: Subjectivism or Proofs/Moral Facts in Ethics

BEFORE NEXT SESSION -- Score your virtues using moral decisions from *Ultima IV* (<http://www.tk421.net/ultima/>)  
Upload a .jpg or .png of your scores to the *Ultima IV* submission folder on d2l.

Complete and upload the response sheet for Rachels and Plato

Reading: Rachels

Chapter 2 “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”

Chapter 3 “Subjectivism in Ethics”

Plato, *“*Gorgias,” *Dialogues of Plato,* Paragraphs 491-509 [on d2l]

*Star Wars* Conspiracy (*Chicago Tribune*\_11/11/2015)

Wilson, Johnny L. “Just Toys?” (*Computer Gaming World*, March 1993.)

Activity: Debating *Star Wars*

Debating “Toys”

**Wednesday, January 15th**

**DUE – Response sheet on Plato and Rachels readings  
DUE – Screenshot of the results of your Ultima IV virtues to folder**

First Session: Morality and Religion, Divine Command Theory and the Theory of Natural Law

Reading: Rachels

Chapter 4 “Does Morality Depend on Religion?”

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapters 1-3, Book V, Chapter 8 [on d2l]  
“Yall Need Andraste: How *Dragon Age* Uses Religion”

Activity: Dramatic Reading of Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica, Second Part*, Question 18, Articles 1-6

Second Session: Ethical Egotism

Reading: Rachels

Chapter 5 “Ethical Egoism”

Read Cunningham, Daniel A. *The Age of Selfishness*. New York: Abrams Books, 2015, excerpts.

Rand, Ayn, “The ‘Conflicts’ of Men’s Interests” *The Virtue of Selfishness*. New York: Signet, 1964, pp. 57-65.

Activity: Respond to Film Clips  
 Complete a Survey

**Wednesday, January 22nd**

First Session: The Idea of Social Contract

**DUE – Write a one-page response to Rand’s “The ‘Conflicts’ of Men’s Interests”  
Upload a .doc or .docx to the Rand\_Conflict submission folder (NO .PAGES files)**

*Reading*: Rachels

Chapter 6 “The Social Contract Theory”

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*, Chapters 14-15 (Available at <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/hobbes1651part1.pdf>)  
Read Evers, William. “Social Contract: Critique”

Activity: Betrayal Game

Extra Credit: Participate in a scheduled *Diplomacy* game and write a one-page paper on your experience as it related to a “social contract” made with another player or players in the game. Did you ally with another for any of the reasons Hobbes stipulated in *Leviathan*?

Second Session: The Utilitarian Approach

**Quiz: Covers readings in Ethical Egoism and Social Contract Theory**

*Reading:* Rachels

Chapter 7 “The Utilitarian Approach”

Chapter 8 “The Debate over Utilitarianism”

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 5 “On Connecting Justice and Utility” (Available in PDF at <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/mill1863.pdf>)

Activity: Debates using dilemmas from *The Walking Dead, The Shape of Water, Ex Machina, Her, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, This War of Mine,* etc.

**Wednesday, January 29th**

First Session: Immanuel Kant and Absolutes

**DUE -- Peer Review Assignment One: Write a two-three-page paper discussing four of the inadequate philosophies covered thus far (Emotivism, Subjectivism, Cultural Relativism, Divine Command, Natural Law, and Ethical Egoism) and how each potentially fails to meet the Minimum Conception of Morality by failing the test of impartiality or reason. Please bring printouts of your papers with only the playing card ID you were given earlier in class in place of your name.**

Second Session: *Jeopardy* Review for Mid-Term  
*Reading*: Rachels

Chapter 9 “Are There Absolute Moral Rules?”

Activity: *Jeopardy* Review for Mid-Term

**Wednesday, February 5th**

First Session: Kant and the Respect for Persons

*Reading:* Rachels

Chapter 10 “Kant and The Respect for Persons”

Activity: Respond to film clip and summary

Second Session: MID-TERM EXAMINATION

**Wednesday, February 12th**

First Session: Feminism, Caring, and Ethics

*Reading*: Rachels

Chapter 11 “Feminism and the ethics of Care”  
Read Saxe, “Do the Right Thing” (*Boston Review*)

Ethics of Virtue

*Reading:* Rachels

Chapter 12 “The Ethics of Virtue”  
Goodwin, William W. (Ed.), *Plutarch’s Morals Volume III* (1878), pp. 461-494.

Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (excerpt)

Activity: Virtue Game

**Wednesday, February 19th**

First Session: Media and Ethics

*Reading:* Galician, Mary-Lou, *Sex, Love, and Romance in the Mass Media*

Read Rachels  
Chapter 5 “The Influence of the Mass Media”

Activity: Good, Bad, or Ugly

Second Session: Censorship

**DUE -- Submit your second peer review paper where you must identify widely accepted philosophies and areas in your own life to which principles of Utilitarianism, Kantian, and/or Virtue philosophies apply. Choose a film or game situation not already discussed in class to illustrate how an advocate of one of these three philosophies would solve an ethical dilemma. Then, in the last paragraph, identify where, among all of the philosophies considered in this class, your personal ethical position would be the best fit. Please bring printouts of your papers with only the playing card ID you were given earlier in class in place of your name.**

*Reading:* Collins, Glenn, “Guidance or Censorship: New Debate on Rating Films”  
(*New York Times*, April 9, 1990) <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/09/movies/guidance-or-censorship-new-debate-on-rating-films.html?pagewanted=all>

Wilson, Johnny L., “Game Ratings,” *Computer Gaming World*, June, 1994.  
 Wilson, Johnny L., “Revisionist Computer Games,” *Computer Gaming World*, September, 1994.

Activity: Rate or Censor?

**Wednesday, February 26th**

First Session: Representation and Stereotypes

Reading: Kumari, Archana and Joshi, Humani, “Gender Stereotypes Portrayal of Women in the Media,” *Journal of Humanities and Social Science (April, 2015),* pp. 44-52.

Activity: Comment on Film Clips

Second Session: Intellectual Property

*Reading:* Quinn, *Intellectual Property*, Chapter 4

**Monday, March 4th**

First Session: Professional Ethics  
Reading: Dyer-Witherford, Nick and Greig Peuter, “’EA Spouse’ and the Crisis of Video Game Labour: Enjoyment, Exclusion, Exploitation, Exodus” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, 3 (available at <https://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1771/1893>)

Second Session: Cheating in Games

*Reading:*   
Berlinger, “Ethics in Gaming 101” (*The Games Journal*)  
Consalvo, *Cheating in Games*, Chapter 4 “How Gamers Gain Advantage”  
Kimppa and Bissett, “The Ethical Significance of Cheating in Online Games” (*International Review of Information Ethics,* 4)  
Kim, Amy Jo. “Killers Have More Fun”  
Reynolds, Ren. “Playing a "Good" Game: A Philosophical Approach to Understanding the Morality of Games”

Sezen, “From Ozans to God Modes: Cheating in Interactive Entertainment from Different Cultures” (MiT5 Presentation)

Van Gelder, “The Strange Case of the Electronic Lover”

Activity: Rate five (5) games according to RSAC system

**Wednesday, March 11th**

First Session: What About The Children?

*Reading:* Robinson, Tom et al. Portrayal of Older Characters in Disney Films“  
(*Journal of Aging Studies*, 21)

QUIZ: This will cover readings from Berlinger, Consalvo, Kim, Reynolds, Sezen, and van Gelder

Second Session: Preparation for Final Examination

Activity: Jeopardy Review for Final Examination

**Wednesday, March 18th**

Final Examination

**Your final examination is on Wednesday, March 18, 2019 during the regular class period.**

**College Policies**

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