

CNTV 530
Cinematic Ethics
2 units
Monday, 10 am -11:50 am, SCA 108
Spring 2018

Instructors: Ted Braun & Lisa Leeman

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**Hours: Braun, by appointment, SCA 348
Leeman, by appointment, SCA 408**

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Course Description

This is an introductory course in the ethical questions professionals encounter in the field of cinematic arts. Ethical questions are those in which we ask, "What's the right thing to do?" The cinematic arts unlike professions of law or medicine, for example, have no specific code of conduct. So this course does not aim to instruct you how to adhere to standards. Instead it seeks to develop your capacity to recognize ethical questions and deepen your ability to engage those questions and make ethical decisions consciously, fully and effectively.

Learning Objectives

The goal is for you to hone your skill at comprehending ethical questions and arriving at sound ethical decisions. This is done primarily through a series of case studies that ask you to navigate real ethical problems encountered in cinematic arts.

Approach

The course is composed primarily of two sorts of weekly meetings.

The core of the course is a discussion of actual, not hypothetical, cases drawn from the experience of professionals in the cinematic arts. Most weeks you'll be assigned questions faced by filmmakers doing their work. These will be discussed in class, led by the instructors and guests with expertise in the area under consideration. We'll explore different dimensions of these dilemmas and you'll be asked to decide how best to act. The idea is that by rehearsing different sorts of choices deliberately, and in detail, you'll be better equipped to handle decisions that, in your professional life, you'll often have to make in the blink of an eye.

Along with the cinematic case study assignments and class meetings, we'll invite professionals outside cinema - from the fields of journalism, law, engineering, and medicine - to offer perspective on ethical questions that arise in their disciplines. These guests will present their own cases and the codes of conduct that govern their decisions. In this way, you'll be introduced to a broader set of distinctions, and sharpen your sense of the uniqueness of ethical questions in cinema.

Weekly Assignments

- Jan. 8** **Beginnings: What will you choose to work on? How will you decide? In what way does that relate to cinematic ethics? A case study from Lisa Leeman's *Awake*.**
- Jan. 15** **MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY – no class**
- Jan. 22** **Decisions filmmakers face. What is an ethical question?**
Assignment: Group 1: 1st Case Study. See *Darfur Now*. Read “This Is Water” by David Foster Wallace.
- Jan 29.** **Law (Professional versus personal morality - Clare Pastore, USC Gould School of Law)**
Assignment: Special readings about legal ethics.
- Feb. 5** **Partnerships. Questions about collaboration. (Prof. Amanda Pope, Production, Prof. Barbara Nance, Wells Writing)**
Assignment: Group 2: 1st Case Study. Read selections from “The Ethics of Memory” by Avishai Margalit
- Feb. 12** **Relationships and distance. Questions about telling someone else’s story. (Prof. Howard Rodman, Wells Division of Writing for Screen and Television)**
Assignment: Group 3: 1st Case Study. Read “To Kill A Chinese Mandarin” by Carlos Ginzburg and “Affluence, and Morality, and Famine” by Peter Singer.
- Feb. 19** **PRESIDENTS DAY – no class**
- Feb. 26** **Medicine (life and death decisions, privacy, informed consent – University Professor Alex Capron, Gould School of Law)**
Assignment: Special readings about medical ethics.
- March 5** **Directing/Comedy. Questions about working with actors and eliciting a performance. (Prof. Barnet Kellman, Production Division)**
Assignment: Group 1: Case Study #2. Readings and viewings tbd.
- March 12** **SPRING BREAK – no class**
- March 19** **True Stories. Questions in journalism & documentary. (Professor Mark Harris, Production Division, Professor Roberto Suro, Annenberg School of Journalism)**

- Assignment: Group 2: Case Study #2. Watch *Kill The Messenger* and documentary tbd.
- March 26 Work. Questions about gender, harassment and power. (Guest panel.)**
- Assignment: Group 3: Case Study #2. Readings and viewing tbd.
- April 2 Work. Questions when you supervise others. In class: Permission Predicament Case Study. (Prof. Brenda Goodman, Production Division; Professor Ali Abbas, Viterbi School of Engineering & Neely Center for Ethical Leadership and Decision Making).**
- Assignment: Special readings about decision making.
- April 9 Work. Questions when you work for others. (Professors Midge Costin, Lenny Garner, Bruce Block).**
- Assignment: Group 1: Case Study #3. Watch *Who Needs Sleep*.
- April 16 Representing. Who to depict and how in scripted film, games, and interactive. Questions of race, ethnicity, and class and what you owe to whoever or whatever you represent in your work. (Guest panel.)**
- Assignment: Group 2: Case Study #3. Read "James Baldwin Writing and Talking."
- April 23 Choice. Questions about the material you choose to work on. Semester recap.**
- Assignment: Group 3: Case Study #3.
- May 7 FINAL EXAM – in class 2 hour exam. Attendance is required. Do not make travel plans that conflict.**

Syllabus is subject to revision.

Grading

Direct engagement with ethical questions, and a conscious open discussion of those questions, is a fundamental methodological goal of the course. For this reason you're expected to participate in and make a thoughtful contribution to each week's discussion. Preparation for the discussion – in the form of review of assigned films and reading and the assigned case studies – is a requirement.

You're also required to write 500 word responses to three case studies. The class will be divided alphabetically into three groups. When it's your group's turn, your written response must be delivered via email by 9 am prior to each class meeting. Written responses will be evaluated on the basis of a full engagement with the

question posed by each case study and a clear decision about a course of action. Late work is not accepted and receives a failing grade.

A final two-hour exam makes up the remainder of your grade. The exam will present fresh case studies - specific real problems - and ask you to discuss the ethical issues involved and decide on a course of action. The exam will be evaluated not on the basis of arriving at a single correct answer, but on a broad, thoughtful appreciation of the dimensions of the ethical question and how well you support a particular course of action.

Grading will be based on classroom participation (15%), fulfillment of the three case study responses (35%: 5% for the 1st, 10% for the 2nd, 20% for the 3rd), and the final exam (50%).

You cannot participate in the class if you are not in class. You are expected to be present and on time. IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO NOTIFY THE SA'S OF YOUR PRESENCE. Two absences will result in your grade being lowered one step (A- to B+); a third absence in another step (B to B-). Two late arrivals equal an absence.

Phones off. Laptops closed.

Required and Recommended Texts, Films and Websites

"Affluence, and Morality, and Famine" by Peter Singer.
Awake: The Life of Yogananda, directed by Paola di Florio and Lisa Leeman
Cameraperson, directed by Kirsten Johnson
Center for Media and Social Impact, School of Communication, American University, Washington, DC. <http://cmsimpact.org/>
Darfur Now, written and directed by Theodore Braun
Ethics in The Real World, Peter Singer
The Ethics of Memory, Avishai Margalit
"James Baldwin Writing and Talking," by Mel Watkins. The New York Times Book Review, Sunday, September 23, 1979.
Kill the Messenger, written by Peter Landesman, based on the book by Nick Shuro and "Dark Alliance" by Gary Webb, directed by Michael Cuesta
"The Moral First Aid Manual," by Daniel C. Dennett
"Rolling Stone and UVA The Columbia Graduate School of Journalism Report: an anatomy of a journalistic failure," Sheila Coronel, Steve Coll, Derek Kravitz
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, <https://plato.stanford.edu/>
"This Is Water," David Foster Wallace
What Should I Do? Philosophers on the Good, the Bad, and the Puzzling, ed. Alexander George
Who Needs Sleep, directed by Haskell Wexler
"Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance," Carlo Ginzburg

Lab on Diversity & Inclusion

A lab dealing with the subject of diversity and inclusion is required for all incoming graduate students and has been attached to this course. The classes will include a lecture and panel discussion with industry professionals, with a goal of increasing awareness and understanding of issues pertaining to diversity and inclusion. Attendance at these classes is mandatory. Absence can result your failing this course. Associate Professor of Practice Christine Acham leads the lab; Ashley Young is the TA. Their emails: cacham@cinema.usc.edu, ashleisy@usc.edu.

The Diversity and Inclusion Lab meets on the following dates in SCA 108.

Friday, January 12; 2pm-2-3:50pm

Friday, February 2; 2pm-3:50pm

Friday, March 2; 2pm-3:50pm

Friday, March 30; 2pm-3:50pm

Friday, April 27; 2pm-3:50pm

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs
Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic.
<https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.
Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

**PLEASE NOTE:
FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN
ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**