

Anthropology 382: The Anthropology of Ethics

Instructor: China Scherz - Office ETC 112A – cscherz@reed.edu
Meeting time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9am-10:20am
Meeting location: Elliot 126
Office hours: Tuesdays 10:30-11:30, Wednesdays 3-5 and by appointment

In recent years the word “ethics” has become increasingly prevalent in public discourse. One need only look at the debates over corporate accountability following the financial collapse of 2008 or the bioethical debates that have emerged in the wake of new technologies and debates over nationalized health care to see this term in action. The discipline of anthropology is no exception to this rule. Much time has been spent discussing anthropology’s professional ethics, examining the problems related to translating bioethics cross-culturally, and exploring the effects of ethical discourse in contemporary forms of governance. To some extent, this course brackets these more topical problems in favor of attending to the classic anthropological project of examining diverse forms of reasoning concerning matters of justice and right action. In line with this aim, we will work to define and utilize a conceptual toolkit adequate to the task of investigating how social actors understand and negotiate complex ethical quandaries, and how by so doing such actors may come to participate in processes of social change.

In this course we will use a mix of concept work and ethnographic case studies to move through a series of themes. Following a brief overview of the current state of the field we will begin by looking at questions of subjectivity and ethical work, exploring the ways in which people shape themselves and each other as particular kinds of ethical subjects. Next, we will look at different ways of theorizing the processes through which people approach ethical dilemmas and how ethics change over time and space. In the final section of the course we will look at how new “universal” moral forms including bioethics, human rights, and life itself are moving around the globe. In relation to this we will turn the lens on anthropology itself asking whether or not anthropology might become a tool for the creation of more nuanced ethical forms.

Course Requirements

Participation and Attendance: Conference participants are expected to come to each class having read and thought about the readings listed for that day. Our discussions will focus on coming to a collective understanding of the assigned readings, evaluating the evidence and claims made by the authors, and considering other possible approaches to the same topics. During class each person should expect to make a contribution to the conversation.

Discussion Questions: Each conference participant will be required to develop a set of discussion questions twice during the semester. The assigned conference participant

should come to class with a set of 3-5 questions designed to spark our conversation.

Mid-Semester Essays: Each student will be required to submit **two 5-6 page mid-semester essays** over the course of the term. These papers will be due **IN CLASS** on **October 7th** and **November 16th**. You should print out your paper (double-spaced, 12-pt Times New Roman, 1 inch margins), staple it, and bring it with you to class on the day it is due. I will return your papers to you within two weeks. Prompts for each of these essays will be distributed two weeks before the due date.

Final Paper: A **15-20 page final paper** will be due on **December 16th**. Please print your paper out and bring it to my office by **5pm**. Over the course of the semester you should work with me to develop a final paper topic that brings writings on the anthropology of ethics to bear on an ethnographic case or topic of interest to you. Your paper should make use of course readings, but should also incorporate some independent library research. You will be expected to submit a **250-word paper abstract and bibliography** in class on **November 23rd**. The final two class sessions will be paper workshops where each student will have a chance to present and receive feedback on their work in progress.

Policies

Late Papers and Extensions: Everyone will have a 24-hour grace period on all written assignments. After 24-hours you will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for each day the assignment is late. Additional extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

Laptops, Cell Phones... To create an atmosphere conducive to dialogue all laptops or cell phones should be switched off before the start of class. No phone calls, texting, or computer use will be allowed during class. If you need to use your laptop to take notes for a medical reason please see me so that we can make an accommodation.

Punctuality Class will start on time at 9am. Please be here and ready to begin at that time.

Grading: Your final grade in the course will be calculated out of a total of 100 points.

Mid-Semester Essays	20 points each x 2 =	40
Final Paper	30 points	30
Class Participation		30
Total		100

Required Texts:

Saba Mahmood (2005) Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject, Princeton University Press. ISBN: 978-0691086958

William H. Sewell (2005) Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation, University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 978-0226749181

Joel Robbins (2004) *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*, University of California Press ISBN: 978-0520238008

Heather Paxson (2004) *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece*, University of California Press. ISBN: 978-0520238206

Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2005) *Uncertain Honor: Modern Motherhood in an African Crisis*, Chicago University Press. ISBN: 978-0226401829

Library Reserves: All readings will also be placed on electronic and/or 2-hour hard copy reserve at the library.

Course Schedule:

August 31st: Introduction

September 2nd: Should anthropology be moral? A debate

Didier Fassin and Wiktor Stoczkowski (2008) "Should anthropology be moral? A debate"; Fassin (2008) "Beyond good and evil? Questioning the anthropological discomfort with morals"; Stoczkowski (2008) "The 'fourth aim' of anthropology: Between Knowledge and Ethics"

September 7th: Conforming with Norms, Coping with Freedom

Durkheim (1953) "Determination of Moral Facts" 35-62, Laidlaw, J. (2002) 'For an Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom'; Recommended: Foucault, M. (1984) "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self As a Practice of Freedom"

Subjectivity and Ethical Work

September 9th: Virtue and Its Alternatives

MacIntyre, A (1984) After Virtue (p. 146-164); Larmore, C. (1996) The Morals of Modernity (p.19-40)

September 14th: Autopoiesis: Part One

Faubion, J. (2001) 'Toward an Anthropology of Ethics: Foucault and the Pedagogies of Autopoiesis'; Foucault, M. (1984) The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality: Volume 2 (p. 3-32)

September 16th: Autopoiesis: Part Two

Zaloom, C. "The Discipline of Speculators" (p. 253-269); Bourdieu, Pierre (1972) Outline of a Theory of Practice (p. 72-95 and 159-197)

September 21st: Politics of Piety

Saba Mahmood (2005) *Politics of Piety* (p. 1-117)

September 23rd: Politics of Piety – FIRST ESSAY PROMPT DISTRIBUTED

Saba Mahmood (2005) *Politics of Piety* (p.118-199)

Moral Dilemmas and Ethical Transformation

September 28th: Problematizations and Moral Breakdowns (50)

Foucault, M. (1984) "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault" (p. 111-120); Robbins, J. (2007) "Between Reproduction and Freedom: Morality, Value, and Radical Cultural Change" (p. 292-314); Zigon, J. (2007) "Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand"(131-150)

September 30th: Riches and Renunciation

James Laidlaw (1996) *Riches and Renunciation* (1-21, 153-172, 349-363).

October 5th: Logics of History

William H. Sewell (2005) *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*

October 7th: Logics of History- FIRST ESSAY DUE

William H. Sewell (2005) *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*

October 12th: Vital Conjunctures

Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2005) *Uncertain Honor: Modern Motherhood in an African Crisis* (Chapter 1-4)

October 14th: Vital Conjunctures

Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2005) *Uncertain Honor: Modern Motherhood in an African Crisis* (Chapters 5-8), "When the Future Decides"

Fall Break – October 16th – 24th

October 26th: Making Modern Mothers

Heather Paxson (2004) *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece* (Chapters 1-3)

October 28th: Making Modern Mothers

Heather Paxson (2004) *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece* (Chapters 4-5)

November 2nd: Becoming Sinners – SECOND ESSAY PROMPT DISTRIBUTED

Robbins, Joel (2006) *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society* (Prologue, Introduction)

November 4th: Becoming Sinners

Robbins, Joel (2006) *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society* (Part 1)

November 9th: Becoming Sinners

Robbins, Joel (2006) Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society (Part 2, Conclusion)

Anthropology for Ethics

November 11th: Ethics in Circulation (Part One)

Adams, V. (1997) "Suffering the Winds of Lhasa: Human Rights, Cultural Difference, and Humanism in Tibet" *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 11(2):1-28; Petryna, A. (2005) Ethical variability: Drug development and globalizing clinical trials. *American Ethnologist* 32(2): 183-197.

November 16th: Ethics in Circulation (Part Two) Second Essay Due

Cohen, Lawrence (1999) "Where It Hurts: Indian Material for an Ethics of Organ Transplantation"; Cohen, L. (2010) "Ethical Publicity" (Article Will Be Sent Via Email)

No Class November 18th – Instructor at Conference – Library Workshop with Dena Hutto

November 23rd: Anthropology, Ethics, and Objectivity (Part One)

ABSTRACT AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

Weber, Max (1904) "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy"
Weber, Max (1922) "Science as a Vocation"

No Class November 25th – Thanksgiving Holiday

November 30th: Anthropology, Ethics, and Objectivity (Part Two)

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy (1995) "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology" in *Current Anthropology* v. 36, n. 3, June 1995;
D'Andrade "Moral Models in Anthropology" in *Current Anthropology* v.36, n.3, June 1995, Responses to D'Andrade and Scheper-Hughes in *Current Anthropology* v.36, n.3, June 1995.

December 2nd: Final Paper Workshop

Last Class December 7th: Final Paper Workshop

December 16th: FINAL PAPERS DUE