



Enlightenment and the End of Ethics

LIT 6934

Number 15368 | Section 0679 | TUR 2346

Instructor:

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Meeting times:

Wednesdays, periods 9–11 (4:05 PM–7:05 PM, Eastern time)

Office hours:

Wednesday, 1:30–3:30, and by appointment

Course description

Suppose someone were to claim that cold-blooded murder is morally permissible. How would you respond? Christians or religious Jews might disagree by citing the Fifth Commandment (“Thou Shalt not Kill”), while secular utilitarians might condemn murder for its pernicious consequences. But you might agree instead, by alleging that “whatever we call bad, as murder, theft, adultery, fornication, incest, sodomy, rebellion, treachery, & have always been, and still are believed, by abundance of different people, to be good.” This rationalization for murder was offered by the Italian adventurer Alberto Radicati during his exile in England in the 1730s. For cultural commentators in eighteenth-century England and France, something very much like this view lay hidden in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Speaking for many, the philanthropist Hannah More accused Enlightenment philosophers of justifying “savage brutality, treason, and murder,” in the name of “an overturn of all morals.” Whether they recognized it or not, More thought, such authors were on a campaign against ethics, licensing all criminal behavior and annulling the distinction between right and wrong.

Such charges may sound like low blows in a war of ideas; but a number of prominent twentieth-century thinkers have similarly accused the Enlightenment of “overturning all morals.” For Max Horkheimer, Lester Crocker, and Alasdair McIntyre, the secularizing tendencies of the Enlightenment rendered untenable any attempt to develop a coherent moral system. The logical consequence of Enlightenment ethics, for more recent critics, are spelled out in the depraved novels of the Marquis de Sade, who justified everything from poisoning and theft to torture and recreational beheadings.

In this course we will investigate why the Enlightenment has given rise to such readings. What made its philosophy and literature seem so immoral to contemporary and posterior observers? In approaching these questions we will couple essential readings in the history of ethics (Aristotle, Montaigne, Kant, and Nietzsche) with a selection of literary and philosophical works from eighteenth-century England and France. They include satirical comedies and novels of ideas by authors ranging from Thomas Shadwell and Aphra Behn to Amelia Opie, Denis Diderot, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and the Marquis de Sade.

Readings

In addition to a few primary and secondary sources I will make available through Canvas, we are reading a total of ten primary sources, in the following order:

1. *Libertine Plays of the Restoration*, ed. Gillian Manning (London: Everyman, 2001). ISBN: 0460877453.
2. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley (London: Penguin, 2009). ISBN: 9780143105923.
3. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The School for Scandal and Other Plays*, ed. Michael Corder (Oxford: OUP, 2008). ISBN: 9780199540099.
4. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: OUP, 1994). ISBN: 9780199555468.
5. Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, ed. Ann McWhir (Petersborough: Broadview, 2010). ISBN: 9781551114521.

6. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, ed. Mark Philp and Frederick Rosen (Oxford: OUP, 1998). **ISBN:** 9780199670802.
7. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Christopher Bennett et al. (Oxford: OUP, 2019). **ISBN:** 9780198786191.
8. Michel de Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1987). **ISBN:** 9780140444933.
9. Denis Diderot, *Jacques the Fatalist*, trans. David Coward (Oxford: OUP, 1999). **ISBN:** 9780199537952.
10. The Marquis de Sade, *The Misfortunes of Virtue and Other Early Tales*, trans. David Coward (Oxford: OUP, 2008). **ISBN:** 9780199540426.
11. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Marion Faber (Oxford: OUP, 1998). **ISBN:** 9780199537075.

For the sake of affordability, you are allowed to use a different edition of the texts in case you already have one, or to use a free online version if you prefer. But if you intend to buy a new copy, then please buy the editions listed above. **This is particularly important in the cases of works in translation** (Kant, Montaigne, Diderot, Sade, and Nietzsche).

We will be reading these sources following the schedule on the next page.

Reading Schedule

WEEK	READINGS
1. Aug 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Thomas Shadwell, <i>The Libertine</i> (in <i>Libertine Plays of the Restoration</i>) ■ Excerpts from Thomas Hobbes's <i>De Cive</i> (Canvas)
2. Aug 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aphra Behn, <i>The Rover</i> (in <i>Libertine Plays of the Restoration</i>) ■ M.L. Stapleton, "Aphra Behn: Libertine" (Canvas)
3. Sep 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adam Smith, selections from <i>The Theory of Moral Sentiments</i>: "Introduction" and pages 1–206.
4. Sep 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, <i>The School for Scandal</i> ■ James Thompson, "Sheridan, <i>The School for Scandal</i>, and Aggression" (Canvas)
5. Sep 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Mary Wollstonecraft, <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>
6. Sep 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Amelia Opie, <i>Adeline Mowbray</i> ("Introduction" plus the full novel)
7. Oct 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> and <i>The Subjection of Women</i>
8. Oct 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
9. Oct 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aristotle, excerpts from <i>The Nichomachean Ethics</i> (Canvas) ■ Alasdair MacIntyre, excerpts from <i>After Virtue</i> (Canvas)
10. Oct 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Michel de Montaigne, <i>An Apology for Raymond Sebond</i>
11. Nov 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dennis Diderot, <i>Jacques the Fatalist</i> ■ Whitney Mannies, "The Style of Materialist Skepticism" (Canvas)
12. Nov 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Alberto Radicati, <i>A Philosophical Dissertation upon Death</i> (Canvas) ■ Tomaso Cavallo, "Atheists or Deists" (Canvas)
13. Nov 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Marquis de Sade, <i>The Misfortunes of Virtue</i> ■ Max Horkheimer, "Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality" (Canvas)
14. Nov 23	<i>Thanksgiving. No class meeting, and no weekly response.</i>
15. Nov 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> Your colleagues' prospectuses
16. Dec 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Brian Michael Norton, "Ancient Ethics and Modern Happiness" (Canvas)

Coursework

In addition to doing the readings, your work for this course will involve:

- Attending seminar meetings during periods 9–11.
- Posting weekly reading responses to a Canvas discussion thread starting on Week 2.
- Giving at least one in-class presentation paper resembling a conference paper.
- Reading and commenting on your peers' presentation papers.
- Researching and writing a brief prospectus for a final paper (3–5 pages).
- Giving two of your peers written feedback on their final paper prospectuses.
- Writing and submitting a final paper **by December 18**.

In the rest of this syllabus you will find detailed instructions on each of these components. Keep that in mind and revisit these instructions during the semester.

The weekly responses

Deadline: Each Wednesday at 9 AM.

Beginning the second week of class, I will be creating a weekly discussion thread on Canvas where everyone will post responses to the readings. I will read the responses prior to class and use them to assess common topics of interest, issues requiring clarification, or questions for the table. I will probably have a few things in mind to add to our class discussion, but for the most part our conversations will focus on topics that you highlighted in your responses.

Each response should be 250-400 words and accomplish one of three things: offer a personal reading of a passage, identify a feature of the source that seems to call for an explanation, or pose a question for class discussion. You do not need to cover everything that stood out to you — in fact, a response that treats one well defined issue well is more helpful than a response that briefly touches on several different topics.

You do not need to provide footnotes or a bibliography, but please give page numbers whenever you are quoting the texts (and you should). Please stick to the length limit.

Important: On the week when you are giving a paper you are not required to post a response.

Presentation papers

Format: Word document, double spaced

Length: 1400–1700 words

Font: Times New Roman size 12, double-spaced

Deadline: Tuesday before class, by 6 PM

Each of you will write, circulate via email, and read in class one short presentation paper on one of our primary sources; your presentation will be followed by a question and answer (Q&A) session. I will create a survey poll on Canvas where you will rank *all* our primary sources in terms of your interest; based on that poll I will create a presentation schedule.

The presentation must focus on the primary source we are reading for the week, but you do not need to narrowly focus on the topic of this course. In fact, I encourage you to seek connections between our readings and your field of specialization, as doing so will make your coursework more relevant for thinking about your dissertation. That said, if you touch on theoretical concepts or authors not covered in class, make sure to explain them in your paper so your peers will be able to understand and engage with your argument.

If we are also reading a secondary source that week, you are welcome to incorporate it into your paper, but you do not have to.

Responding to a presentation

On weeks when you are not giving a paper, you are responsible for reading your colleagues' papers before class and thinking ahead of questions to ask or suggestions to make. You will still listen to the paper in class, but comprehension levels go up substantially when you encounter a paper for the second rather than the first time. So, do read it at home prior to class.

When thinking of how to respond to a paper given by a colleague, keep the big picture in mind. Before hyper-focusing on the author's word usage or on a particular sentence on page 4, ask yourself: What is the main argument of this paper? Can I articulate it to myself? If not, then what exactly is unclear to me? If yes, then do I agree with the argument? If I do, then how can it be made even better? If I don't, then why not? Working with questions such as these will make sure

that you are actually helping the author improve their work. Sometimes merely asking, “Are you trying to argue that X?” can be a great conversation starter. Maybe they are not explaining themselves well at crucial junctures, or maybe they are overlooking important passages in the primary source that would help them make a stronger case, or that would require them to reconsider their claims.

There is a well-known tendency for conference attendees to ask questions that hijack the paper’s topic towards their own areas of interest: “This paper makes me think of Foucault’s notion of discipline.” This may be a productive insight for the person asking the question, but you should consider whether the paper under discussion actually needs it. If you cannot explain how the paper’s argument would benefit from pursuing some approach you care about, then maybe that is not the most helpful feedback to give the author.

Needless to say, let’s be nice to one another. In order to be helpful readers we must be critical, but frame your criticism graciously and constructively. And if you sincerely admire a paper, say it. We all spend a lot of time and labor on the things we write, and sincere appreciation is always welcome.

The final-paper prospectus

Format: Word document, double spaced

Length: 1000–1300 words

Deadline: Monday, November 28 by 6 PM

Font and documentation: Follow the guidelines style recommended by the journal you are working with. (See below for details.)

There is the final paper, and there is the final-paper *prospectus*. They are not the same. The final-paper prospectus is a short writing assignment indicating what your final paper will be about. You will be writing it towards the end of November and workshopping it in class with two of your peers.

Please refer to the following guidelines before you start working on your prospectus. The guidelines depend on whether you are a PhD or MFA student.

1. The prospectus, PhD version

Think of this prospectus as the introductory pages of your final paper *plus* a cover sheet.

In the cover sheet you will identify a journal that publishes work on the topic of your paper and summarize their submission requirements. Your prospectus as well as your actual final paper must conform to those guidelines in terms of length, documentation style, whether to use footnotes or endnotes, and so on. The purpose here is to give you the experience of researching journals and following their requirements when submitting articles to them.

The rest of the prospectus should read like the beginning of an article — those opening pages where the author defines their topic and object of study, covers the existing debate on the topic, and states what they intend to accomplish. In order to give you a sense of what these pages look like, I will ask everyone to **read the first three pages of Deborah Weiss’s article “The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda: Maria Edgeworth’s Female Philosopher”** (available on Canvas). Weiss’s article is a paradigmatic example of how to set up a professional essay in English studies; she moves clearly through the steps described below, which are also the steps you will have to follow in your final-paper prospectus.

Your prospectus should accomplish **five** things:

a. *Provide a brief introduction to your topic and source.* This should not be the kind of generic introduction to an author or source you would find in an encyclopedia entry. (“Jane Austen is a famous British novelist...”). You can safely skip this kind of basic introduction and assume that your readership knows who Jane Austen is. Instead, get straight to your topic. Take Weiss’s article as an example. Instead of using her first paragraph to cover the basics about Edgeworth or *Belinda*, she uses it to zero in on the topic that will matter for her article: Edgeworth’s complicated relationship to radical writers. If you are writing about inheritance in *Pride and Prejudice*, then your introduction should be about inheritance in *Pride and Prejudice* (or in Austen more broadly); if you are writing about the role of metaphors in Milton, then your introduction should be about metaphors in Milton. **Important:** These introductory remarks do not need to be a full paragraph if you feel that all you need is a couple of sentences. **Caveat:** It is okay to be more didactic if you are writing about an author or source that even scholars in the field are unlikely to know well.

b. Survey what scholars have said on your topic in recent years. Take Weiss again as an example. Having introduced us to her topic, she goes on to survey the critical conversation on Edgeworth and British radicalism, giving us concise but concrete insight into the current state of our knowledge. Notice that she does not summarize everything that other critics have had to say; she focus on what they have said *on her topic*. You should do the same. Of course, because of time constraints you will not be able to read, absorb, and cover as many sources as Weiss does. Instead, I will ask you to find three or four recent articles (published in the last 20 years) that touch on your topic, preferably in relation to the same author or source you are writing about; and then explain to your reader, as Weiss does, where those sources stand with regard to your topic.

This, by the way, can be really hard to do, especially if you are just getting started at professional academic writing. Sometimes students will write overly extensive summaries that do not fit well in the introduction of an essay, and which end up reading like summaries for the sake of summary; at other times they will provide short summaries of several sources without articulating how they all fit together as a conversation. Here, again, Weiss is a helpful example of how to do this well. She is always concise and concrete, and she groups critics together in the form of a conversation rather than keeping them disconnected from one another. Your summaries at this point should also be short and tightly focused on your topic; and you should explain what the several sources have to say when read together. Maybe they all agree on the essentials; or maybe there are two or three different camps out there, defending different positions with regard to your topic. Map this out for your reader, concisely and concretely.

c. Indicate the extent of your agreement with existing views. It is unlikely that you will find previous readers of your source to have been wrong about everything. Take Weiss as an example again: she is opposing critics who view Edgeworth as conservative but she gives credit to some of them (such as Marilyn Butler and Claudia Johnson) for broadening the scope for studies of Edgeworth. You should do that as well. Think of this as the equivalent of giving credit: “This line of work has helped us understand X.”

d. Identify what you view as the shortcoming of existing readings. Here is where you move from reproducing and agreeing with others to presenting something uniquely yours. **This is the most important move in your entire introduction.** Note how Weiss makes it:

Thus, the radicalism of Edgeworth's understanding of gender has generally been overlooked owing to what scholars have taken to be the timidity of her approach to reform. What I suggest is that this interpretation of Edgeworth is based on a confusion about her investment in pragmatism. Unlike Wollstonecraft, whom Edgeworth critiques obliquely in *Belinda* for her disruptive devotion to theory without regard to application, Edgeworth's interest in reform was founded on a deep belief in the unity of theory and practice. (442-3)

Notice the essential gesture: Weiss's summary of the existing scholarship is tailored to show not only what these critics have accomplished, but also where they have fallen short. In one way or another, they have been confused about Edgeworth's "investment in pragmatism"; and getting this right, Weiss argues, is essential if we are to understand Edgeworth's radicalism. This gesture may take many shapes: maybe you think previous critics have not considered the far-reaching implications of their views; maybe you think they missed certain crucial passages in the primary source; or maybe you think critics are divided into camps whose insights need to be brought together for a more satisfying interpretation. Whatever the shortcoming is, you should identify it explicitly. Keep in mind that the shortcoming should *matter*. Maybe no one has written about eggs in *Pride and Prejudice*, but then eggs are likely irrelevant for understanding the novel. You need to show that the gap in the scholarship is relevant — in that it makes a substantial difference for how we understand your topic.

e. *Offer a thesis statement.* This should be an announcement of the argument to follow (which you will only develop for the final paper itself). Here, again, Weiss provides us with a good model:

The way to a more accurate assessment of Edgeworth's challenges to prevailing social codes is, I think, to go back to Butler's positioning of her as a writer in direct conversation with Enlightenment moral philosophy. Two more recent scholars also offer useful approaches for thinking about Edgeworth in this vein [*summary of this work*]. In this article I have tried to take more precise stock of the nature and significance of Edgeworth's engagement with Enlightenment thought by submitting *Belinda* to an analysis that combines Myers's method of careful philosophical reading with Ó Gallchoir's larger concern about the role of gender in current discussions of the Enlightenment. I will suggest thereby that Edgeworth's innovative theories of sex and

gender constitute a contribution to Enlightenment moral philosophy that has not yet been recognized.

This thesis statement does not give away every detail of what is to follow, but it is concrete enough to indicate the gist of the argument: Weiss will combine an attention to philosophy and gender to show that Edgeworth was a more innovative thinker than scholars have realized. You should provide this kind of indication as well, even if you are not fully sure about the nature of your thesis. The goal is to give your peers a sense of where you think you are going so they can weigh in at the workshop.

Finding secondary scholarship on your topic may be challenging. For this reason I have created a [Guide to Research in English Literary Studies](#), summing up resources to help you. The guide is available on Canvas and can be downloaded as a PDF. Make sure to read it as you get ready to work on your prospectus.

2. The prospectus, MFA version

There is a lot of flexibility for MFA final assignments, and hence the prospectus will also be a lot more flexible. My recommendation is that you choose a venue that publishes the kind of work you are producing and see if they have submission guidelines. In a single document, provide a cover sheet indicating the title of the venue and reproducing their submission requirements; then, starting on Page 2, provide a written description of your prospectus together with a short sample. I will not specify length because that will vary a lot depending on whether you are writing a short story, a poem, or something involving visuals. It is up to you to decide how much you should provide to give your peers a sense of what you are going for.

The prospectus workshop

The purpose of your prospectus is not only to give yourself a quick start on writing the paper; it is also to give your peers an opportunity to read your work and give you feedback at an early stage of the process.

I will divide the class into small groups of 3 people. You will circulate your prospectus to the other members of your group by 6 PM of November 28. They will read it and provide comments in writing, and you will do the same. On November 30 we will dedicate the first hour of our seminar to a group workshop. Each prospectus will be discussed for 20 minutes.

In giving feedback, the first thing you should keep in mind are the five steps I outlined in the prospectus description. Check if your colleague's prospectus is taking those steps, and if not, point that out.

Focus also on anything that seems in need of improvement. This is the right stage for interrogating a questionable assumption or for pointing out overlooked evidence, as the author still has time to rethink the prospectus and work out something better. Praise is also good, but make it concrete: "I agree with your argument up to this point," "Your reading of this scene is compelling for this reason," and so on. This is helpful for the author, whereas "your paper is beautiful" is not. Remember that agreement is also a good way of providing feedback: it encourages the author, identifies areas of strength, and potentially suggests ways for making them even stronger.

In every case, frame your recommendations in relation to the author's purposes. Instead of saying "Why don't you write about this scene?" go for "This scene would be relevant for developing this aspect of your thesis." If you can't explain why exactly the author should attend to something, that probably means it is not as important as you first thought.

After the workshop, I will ask you to revise the prospectus and send it to me at rogermaioli@gmail.com. Please do so by December 2.

The final paper

Format: Word document, double spaced

Length: 5,000–7,000 words

Deadline: December 18

Font and documentation: Follow the guidelines style recommended by the journal/magazine you are working with.

You will be writing your final paper/creative piece *as if* you were submitting it to the journal/magazine of your choice. For that reason, write it following their style guidelines. Academic articles are usually longer than the length limit for this paper, but you will find it easier and more productive to stick to 5,000–7,000 words at this stage. I will give you feedback on your paper, and if you decide to revise it and eventually submit it for publication, you will find it convenient to have that extra space at your disposal.

Two things to keep in mind:

- Your paper must have a title.
- Submit a cover sheet with your paper identifying the journal/magazine and their guidelines. If you are a PhD student, include a short abstract in the cover sheet as well.

Grading policy

I know that a good grade is important for you, and for that reason I will not assign grades to individual assignments. This will allow you to try and experiment with topics and approaches without worrying about how a specific weekly post or presentation paper will affect your grade in the long run. Instead, you will receive a grade based on your overall work for the course. Do not be afraid of making mistakes; we learn from our mistakes, and you are here to learn.

Additional Course Policy

In response to COVID-19, the following recommendations are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones.

- If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit [one.ufl.edu](https://one.ufl.edu/screening/testing) for screening/testing and vaccination opportunities.
- If you are sick, stay home. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 to be evaluated.
- Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.

Plagiarism: All written assignments should be your own work. Plagiarizing the work of others (by copying printed or online sources without acknowledgement) is illegal, and you may fail the course if you plagiarize. If you have questions about how to document your sources, or if you want to make sure you are not committing plagiarism without realizing it, please ask me.

Special accommodations: Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the Office of Student Service in order to determine appropriate accommodation. I will be pleased to provide accommodation, but students are responsible for notifying me at the beginning of the semester.

UF Online Course Evaluation Policy: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last 2-3 weeks of the semester. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Counseling and Mental Health Resources: Students facing difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help should call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center.

Sexual Assault and Harassment: Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are civil rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here:

http://www.ufsa.ufl.edu/faculty_staff/fees_resources_policies/addressing_sexual_misconduct/reporting_sexual_misconduct/