Ethics:

Chapters 1 & 2
On Moral Diversity:

- Is diversity in the classroom generally a good thing?
- If so, what kinds of diversity should we promote and preserve?
- Should moral diversity be treated similarly to ethnic, racial, religious, economic and sexual orientation diversity?
- Does a preference to respect moral diversity imply moral relativism (that there are no values that we can all agree upon as reasonable or that morality has no more authority than fashion or tradition)?
Good & Evil

- Does a belief in good and evil depend upon a religious foundation?
- If one supports the idea of good must one also accept the idea of evil?
- Is the claim that something is morally right or wrong equivalent to the claim that something is good or evil?
- Can one support a moral system without committing to a religious foundation?
Is Morality Hardwired?

We’ll discuss the issue of recent discoveries from sociobiology and neuropsychology in the upcoming weeks but it is important to remember...

“Brain research can pinpoint where our thoughts and feelings originate and what affects them chemically, but it can’t tell us whether one moral answer is better than another. For that we need to engage in a discussion of values.” (p.12)

“Psychology can tell us only what people believe and possibly why they believe it; it can’t make a statement about whether people are justified in believing it.” (p.13)
Morals, Values & Ethics

- Morality: from the Latin *mores* - translated as character, custom, habit - generally refers to those moral rules we follow and the values we hold.

- Ethics: from the Greek *ethos* or character - generally used to refer to theories about those moral systems or rules we follow. Doing ethics suggests critically examining and perhaps rationally justifying the moral systems, rules and values we hold.
Morality & Legality

- **Naturalism** – universal moral laws embedded in god-given standards or in human nature

- **Legal positivism** – moral laws based on consensus among legislators hence no ultimate moral foundation – just shifting opinions over time.
Morality & Logic: Some Common Fallacies

- Appeal to authority
- Begging the question
- Ad baculum (appeal to force)
- Ad hominem (against the person)
- Slippery slope
- False dichotomy
- Red herring
- Ad misericordiam (Appeal to Pity)
Morality & Emotions

- What role does or should the emotions play in moral arguments?
- Should morality be founded solely in logic and reason?
- Can one’s emotions provide important insights in one’s moral deliberations?

This is also a discussion we will be pursuing in more depth in the coming weeks and the debate is developed especially with Hume and Kant.
Morality and Storytelling

- **Didactic stories** are those with a particular lesson or “moral”

- **Open-ended stories** are usually designed to promote thought and critical reflection and discussion. These stories encourage the listener (reader, viewer) to resolve the moral dilemma rather than having a set resolution provided.

Can you give examples of both sorts of story-telling?
Morality and Storytelling

- What is the pedagogical value of using stories in a study of ethics?
- What is the difference between historical truth and poetic truth in stories? Can a story have both kinds of truth embedded in it?
- How can certain story genres like Westerns, action-adventure tales, science fiction, crime dramas and even reality shows, be useful in moral philosophy?
Plato had a few general objections to art and theater:

1. He argued for state censorship by the Philosopher Kings because he maintained that the general public were not in the best position to know what was good for them.

2. Theater, including dramas and comedies both of which were popular in his time, encouraged high emotions and discouraged objective calm reason which Plato argued must be the hallmark of the philosopher. Theater has a corrupting influence on the development of one’s character.

3. Further, art and theater are imitations of one’s everyday world and that world is an imitation of an ultimate reality so the focus should be on the ultimate truths and not on an imitation of an imitation.
Aristotle and the Theater

- Aristotle argued that the Theater could help moral deliberation and growth if viewed in proper moderation. He set specific standards for what constituted the right sort of theater though.

- For Aristotle, plays could allow us to experience what happens through errors in character or judgment without actually having to pay for those errors in real life – in this way we can learn more painlessly without harming ourselves or others.

- Theatre also allows for what Aristotle referred to as a “catharsis of emotions” (p.96) and, if well written produce pity or fear both of which can be productive in the development of our character.