Ethics Reading List

Note: To teach these materials, might begin with Levinas and the edited volume *The Turn to Ethics* (esp. Butler, Guillard, Johnson) and then move to feminist ethics (Flax; Gatens; Willet) and queer ethics (Winnubst on Irigaray) to then teach clearer texts like Foucault, Critchley, Keenan, Oliver, and perhaps also Mahasweta Devi’s stories (with Spivak commentary) with Oliver’s ed. vol. on Kristeva, concluding with Ziarek; leave Badiou, Chow, Irigaray, and Spivak (after/with Foucault and Derrida) for advanced students; may want to use May as intro, but be cautious before endorse/use him.

Badiou, Alain, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Verso, 2002. Major French activist and post-foundational political philosopher; critiques human rights as supporting capitalism/liberalism; Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought* (128-130) argues that Badiouian politics of the immediate and unconditional might best be understood not as a politics but as an ethics: rigorous and uncompromising ethics of the unconditional, by which steps out of Machiavellian moment of the conditioned, i.e., of power and strategy. Runs danger presented by subsuming politics under ethical of neglecting necessary horizontal solidarities (as Hardt and Negri do).


Garber, Marjorie, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca Walkowitz, eds., *The Turn to Ethics*, Routledge, 2000. Essays by Butler, Guillory, Johnson, Mouffe, Fraser, Bhabha and others addressing the relation between ethics and politics under poststructuralism challenging central presuppositions of what constitutes ethical behavior.


Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.


See also Spivak, “French Feminism Revisited,” esp. p. 168-70 and Winnubst.

Keenan, Thomas, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics*. Stanford University Press, 1997. Rereads Marx and Foucault to rethink the conditions of any political action and argue that the absence of unambiguous universal standards is the precondition of ethical responsibility, forcing the subject to engage fully with unacknowledged ethico-politicals (see Derrida/Foucault above) in every apparently neutral position without recourse to metaphysics.


Oliver, Kelly, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, University of Minnesota, 2001. Argues that the Hegelian demand for recognition that characterizes identity-based social movements is a symptom of the pathology of oppression that perpetuates subject-object and same-different hierarchies; proposes an ethics founded in the ability to respond to, and address, others, which she terms “witnessing,” in the ethical ability to respond and to enable responsability from others (15); s.a. her *Subjectivity without Subjects: from Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers and Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double Bind* and her edited volume, *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Kristeva’s Writings*.


Spivak, Gayatri. “Appendix: The Setting to Work of Deconstruction,” *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 423-31. Argues that justice and ethics can be seen following later Derrida as a call to the wholly other (425) through experiences of the impossible—experiences of radical alterity—through decisions to act based on aporias or non-passages disclosed only in effacement through a certain setting to work (426-7) of deconstruction/displacement/deferral; for Spivak the most critical work is in counterglobalist or alternative-development resistance (to the inexorable calculus of globalization that claims democratization) through “a constant pushing away—a differing and a deferral—of the *capital*-ist harnessing of the *social* productivity of capital” (429-30).
---. Death of a Discipline, esp. p. 13-14, 55-72, 101-2.
---.”French Feminism Revisited,” in *The Spivak Reader*, 141-171. Argues through a reading of Irigaray’s critique of Levinas for an ethics where sexual difference is “posited as the undecidable in the face of which the now displaced ‘normal’ must risk ethicopolitical decisions” (165); ethics occurs via a shaping of otherness at the prepropriative site of the impossible origin of the ethical where the subject accedes to the agency of the caress that violates the historical narrative in which the subject is written (167, 169); finds the impossible intimacy of the ethics of sexual difference as a response to the call of a larger critique of humanism (170-71).
---. “More on Power/Knowledge,” *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Routledge, 1993 (1992), 25-52; also published *The Spivak Reader*, 141-74. Argues for a type of “ethical living with hope for political change” (44) through a refusal to be taken in by “victories measured out in rational abstractions” (45) while still pursuing the “persistent critique of what one cannot not want”(42, 45, n. 71); urges begin ethical investigations with the study of the historical, cultural, linguistic limits of the constitution of the ethical subject in order to a) question “the transparent ethical
subject... into specificity and visibility” (39), following André Glucksmann, to “make appear the
dissymmetries, the disequilibriums, the aporias, the impossibilities, which are precisely the objects
of all commitment.” (40)
Argues for the ethics of relations with the Other as agency is staged within language via a certain
erotics of surrender; s.a. “French Feminism Revisited.”
---. “Righting Wrongs
---. “Translator’s Preface” and “Afterword” to Mahasweta Devi’s Imaginary Maps; also pub. in
The Spivak Reader, 267-86.
See also Mark Sanders, “Representation: Reading-Otherwise,” Interventions, 4.2 (2002): 198-
204, which reads Spivak (Critique) reading Marx as an opening toward a Marxian/socialist
ethics; and Sanders, “Postcolonial Reading,” Postmodern Culture, 1999 (10.1) review of
Spivak’s Critique of Postcolonial Reason.

Willett, Cynthia. Maternal Ethics and Other Slave Moralities.

Queering Freedom, Indiana University Press, 2006, 78-107. Reads Irigaray’s An Ethics of
Sexual Difference to rethink the categories and presuppositions of ethics in a way that reduces
their heteronormativity and reinscribe the limits in a way that clears space for the performance of
embodiment that includes queer pleasures.

Ziarek, Ewa Płonowska, An Ethics of Dissensus: Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of
Radical Democracy, Stanford University Press, 2001. Develops an ethical model of
intersubjective relations contrasting Nietzsche/Deleuze/Foucault where the Other is contained
within endless variation against Levinas/Derrida/Lyotard where the ethical significance of alterity
persistently escapes the social system of signification; supplements Foucault with Levinas on the
Other and Lyotard on the different and Kristeva on the libidinal economy of the drive (5);
elaborates non-appropriative relations to the Other based on accountability that balances
obligation for/responsibility to the Other (Levinas) with agency/freedom of the subject
(Foucault) to articulate a place of anarchic responsibility (6-7); enables the tension between
unconditional responsibility and the radical contingency through a reading of Kristeva and
Irigaray (6-7); moves beyond the problem of identification that troubles Butler and
Laclau/Mouffe (10) through a positive aesthetics of existence affirming irreducible alterity (8)
that avoids the dilemma of equality versus difference (11).