

Ethics Final Essay Assignment: Articulating an Ethical Life

Length: 7–9 pages

Sources Required: Minimum of 4 (Joseph Marshall + 3 Western philosophers)

Citation Style: MLA or APA

Assignment Overview

This assignment asks you to do more than summarize ideas—you will construct an ethical framework and critically situate it within broader philosophical conversations. This assignment is not about finding the “correct” ethical system. Building on our last formal essay assignment and taking a reflective look at our semester, it is about doing the difficult work of thinking through what kind of person you want to be and why you aspire to be that way.

In this final essay, you will develop and defend your own set of ethical principles by placing them in conversation with both Indigenous and Western philosophical traditions. Specifically, you will:

- Articulate **5–10 ethical principles** that you believe should guide a meaningful human life (use the ones from our previous assignment)
- Compare and contrast these principles with those found in **Joseph Marshall’s *The Lakota Way***
- Engage deeply with **three philosophers from the Western tradition** (e.g., Frankl, Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Nietzsche, etc.)

Learning Objectives

By completing this assignment, you should be able to:

- Develop a coherent and self-reflective ethical framework
- Analyze and interpret ethical systems across cultural traditions we’ve read this semester
- Compare Indigenous and Western approaches to morality
- Support arguments using textual evidence and philosophical reasoning
- Reflect on the lived implications of ethical beliefs

Essay Structure

1. Introduction (1–2 pages)

- Introduce the purpose of your essay

- Briefly explain why developing ethical principles matters
- Provide a roadmap of your argument

2. Your Ethical Principles (1-2 pages)

- Clearly articulate **5–10 principles** that guide your life
- Explain each principle in detail
- Discuss where these principles come from (experience, culture, upbringing, reflection, etc.)
- Begin to hint at tensions or challenges within your system

3. Engagement with *The Lakota Way* (2 pages)

- Identify key values from Marshall’s work (e.g., courage, generosity, humility, respect, honor)
- Compare your principles to Lakota ethical teachings
- Address questions such as:
 - Where do your views align with Lakota values?
 - Where do they differ?
 - What role do community, spirituality, and relationality play in each system?
- Reflect on what you learn from this comparison

4. Engagement with Western Philosophers (2 pages)

Select **three philosophers** and engage their ethical frameworks. For each:

- Briefly explain their central ethical ideas
- Compare them to your own principles
- Consider:
 - Do you agree or disagree with their reasoning? Why?
 - Do their frameworks challenge or strengthen your own?
 - How do they conceptualize the individual vs. community?

You are encouraged to choose philosophers with **different perspectives** (e.g., a virtue ethicist, a utilitarian, a deontologist, or a critic of morality like Nietzsche).

5. Synthesis and Reflection (1–2 pages)

- Reflect on how your thinking evolved through this process
- Identify tensions or contradictions in your ethical system
- Consider how your principles would function in real-world situations
- Address whether a universal ethical system is possible—or even desirable

6. Conclusion

- Reaffirm your ethical framework

- Reflect on the importance of ethical self-examination

Documentation Requirements

- **At least 4 sources:**
 - *The Lakota Way* (required)
 - Three Western philosophers (primary texts preferred)
- Use **direct textual evidence** to support your analysis
- Proper citation in MLA format
- Clear thesis and coherent argument
- Formal academic tone (while allowing for thoughtful personal reflection)

Evaluation Criteria

Your essay will be assessed based on:

- **Clarity and depth of your ethical principles**
- **Quality of engagement with Marshall and the philosophers**
- **Strength of comparative analysis**
- **Use of textual evidence**
- **Organization and coherence**
- **Originality and critical reflection**
- **Writing quality and proper citation**

Final Essay Rubric: Articulating an Ethical Life

Total Points: 100

1. Ethical Principles (20 points)

How well are the student's own principles developed and articulated?

- **18–20 (Excellent):**
Principles are **समृद्ध**, nuanced, and internally coherent. Each is well-explained, grounded in reasoning and/or experience, and shows awareness of complexity or tension.
- **14–17 (Proficient):**
Principles are clear and mostly coherent, though some may be underdeveloped or insufficiently justified.

- **10–13 (Developing):**
Principles are vague, overly general, or inconsistently explained. Limited depth or reflection.
- **0–9 (Inadequate):**
Principles are unclear, unsupported, or missing.

2. Engagement with *The Lakota Way* (15 points)

How effectively does the student interpret and engage Joseph Marshall’s work?

- **13–15 (Excellent):**
Demonstrates strong understanding of Marshall’s key concepts (e.g., virtue, community, relational ethics). Insightful comparisons to student’s principles with specific textual evidence.
- **10–12 (Proficient):**
Accurate summary and some comparison, but analysis may be surface-level or uneven.
- **7–9 (Developing):**
Minimal engagement or overly descriptive summary with little analysis.
- **0–6 (Inadequate):**
Misunderstanding, lack of evidence, or failure to engage the text.

3. Engagement with Western Philosophers (25 points)

How well does the student analyze and compare three philosophers?

- **22–25 (Excellent):**
Accurate, concise explanations of each philosopher’s core ideas. Strong comparative analysis showing agreement, tension, or critique. Thoughtful integration with student’s principles.
- **18–21 (Proficient):**
Solid understanding of philosophers with some comparison, though analysis may lack depth or balance.
- **14–17 (Developing):**
Limited or uneven understanding. Comparison is superficial or inconsistently applied.
- **0–13 (Inadequate):**
Major misunderstandings or failure to meaningfully engage philosophers.

4. Comparative Analysis & Synthesis (15 points)

Does the essay bring different traditions into meaningful dialogue?

- **13–15 (Excellent):**
Sophisticated synthesis across Indigenous and Western traditions. Identifies tensions, convergences, and implications for ethical life.
- **10–12 (Proficient):**
Some synthesis present, but connections may be more obvious than insightful.

- **7–9 (Developing):**
Traditions are discussed separately with limited integration.
- **0–6 (Inadequate):**
No meaningful comparison or synthesis.

5. Reflection & Critical Thinking (10 points)

How deeply does the student reflect on their own ethical system?

- **9–10 (Excellent):**
Demonstrates genuine critical reflection. Acknowledges tensions, limitations, and real-world implications of their principles.
- **7–8 (Proficient):**
Some reflection present, but may not fully explore complexity or contradictions.
- **5–6 (Developing):**
Reflection is minimal or overly simplistic.
- **0–4 (Inadequate):**
Little to no reflection.

6. Use of Evidence & Citation (10 points)

Are sources used effectively and correctly?

- **9–10 (Excellent):**
Strong use of textual evidence from all required sources. Proper MLA/APA citation throughout.
- **7–8 (Proficient):**
Adequate use of sources with minor citation issues.
- **5–6 (Developing):**
Limited or poorly integrated evidence. Citation errors present.
- **0–4 (Inadequate):**
Minimal or incorrect use of sources. Major citation problems.

7. Organization & Writing Quality (5 points)

Is the essay clearly structured and well written?

- **5 (Excellent):**
Clear organization, strong thesis, smooth transitions, and polished prose.
- **4 (Proficient):**
Generally clear, with minor organizational or stylistic issues.

- **3 (Developing):**
Noticeable issues with clarity, flow, or grammar.
- **0–2 (Inadequate):**
Disorganized or difficult to follow.

Grade Scale

- **A (90–100):** Exceptional work with strong originality and insight
- **B (80–89):** Solid, competent work with minor weaknesses
- **C (70–79):** Meets basic requirements but lacks depth
- **D (60–69):** Significant gaps in understanding or execution
- **F (0–59):** Does not meet assignment expectations