

Philosophy V252: Making Moral Decisions
Loyola University of New Orleans
Spring 2016, Ben Bayer

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION AND POLICIES

Course description

We all have views about what is right and what is wrong, and we need *some* kind of moral principles to make major decisions in life and develop a distinctive character. And yet, many who have strong views about right and wrong also believe that their views are mere matters of personal opinion that have no factual basis. And we are sometimes taught by cultural authorities that one person's moral opinions are no better than any other person's, and that it is arrogant to say otherwise. What are we to make of this mix of ideas?

This course will survey some important moral controversies and theories philosophers have devised to deal with them, with a focus on exploring the question of whether there can ever be a factual, objective basis for evaluating our moral judgments.

The course begins by examining uncontroversial paradigm cases in ethics, practices like slavery that are nearly universally regarded as immoral, and character traits like honesty that are agreed to be moral. After examining the paradigms, we'll look at classical theories of ethics that capture some common judgments about these paradigms, but which challenge these judgments on other matters. We'll then return again to concrete examples, to contemporary controversies about abortion, war, poverty, and the environment, each of which illustrate the application of the classical theories and, in certain respects, challenge them. We'll then examine some "alternative" ethical theories that in certain ways handle contemporary controversies more elegantly, but in other ways challenge our ordinary moral views more profoundly.

Loyola upper-division common curriculum course goals and learning objectives

1. Development of student ability to read and interpret primary texts by reading both primary and secondary sources in moral philosophy from ancient, early modern, and contemporary periods.
2. Development of a student's ability to formulate clearly and explain cogently in written form, through a series of written assignments, his or her own philosophical inquiry into fundamental beliefs and their impact on life.

See the rest of Philosophy Department's objectives for upper level common curriculum courses here:

<http://is.gd/RtsMjl>

Grading

Quizzes	15%
Online participation	15%
Paper #1:	20%
Paper #2:	20%
Midterm exam	15%
Final exam:	15%
In class participation:	Extra credit up to an extra 5%

Required texts

- LAD course pack, available exclusively from the Loyola Bookstore
- Public domain or Loyola-subscribed readings available via Blackboard

LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

Introductory material

Wednesday, January 20th

Introduction

Friday, January 22nd

Scientific and moral controversies

- Reading 1: David Lindley, “Atomism argued,” review of *Boltzmann’s Atom: The Great Debate That Launched a Revolution in Physics*. Read online: <http://goo.gl/7FtJHb>
- Reading 2: Lee Baker, “Columbia University’s Franz Boas: He Led the Undoing of Scientific Racism.” (Blackboard)

Paradigm moral good and evil

Monday, January 25th

Scientific and moral controversies (continued)

- Readings 1 and 2 (continued)

Respect for life and liberty

- Reading 3: Thomas Hobbes, “The State of Nature and the War of All Against All,” from *Leviathan* (Blackboard)
- Reading 4: Frederick Douglass, “The Nature of Slavery,” from *Mind Bondage and My Freedom* (Blackboard)

Wednesday, January 27th

Respect for life and liberty (continued)

- Readings 3 and 4 (continued)

Friday, January 29th

Self-regarding virtue (courage)

- Reading 5: Aristotle, “On Courage,” from *Nicomachean Ethics*, (Blackboard)

Monday, February 1st

Self-regarding virtue (honesty)

- Reading 6: Plato, “On Divine Love of Truth,” from *The Republic* (Blackboard)
- Reading 7: Tara Smith, “The Metaphysical Case for Honesty” ((Blackboard)

Wednesday, February 3rd

Other-regarding virtue (generosity and friendship)

- Reading 8: Aristotle, “On Generosity and Friendship,” from *Nicomachean Ethics* (Blackboard)

Friday, February 5th

Other-regarding virtue (generosity and friendship) (continued)

- Reading 8 (continued)

Monday, February 8th—Friday, February 12th—NO CLASS—MARDI GRAS HOLIDAYS

Classical ethical theories

Monday, February 15th

Divine command theory

- Reading 9: “Divine Commands,” from *Genesis* and *Exodus* (Blackboard)
- Reading 10: William Lane Craig, “Can We Be Good Without God?” Read online: <http://goo.gl/hAiu8>
- Reading 11: Thomas Aquinas, “On the Dispensability of the Decalogue,” from *Summa Theologica* (Blackboard)

Wednesday, February 17th

Divine command theory (continued)

- Readings 9, 10 and 11 (continued)

The practice of divine command theory

- Reading 12: Excerpts from the Gospel of Matthew, The Epistles of John and Paul (Blackboard)

Friday, February 19th

The practice of divine command theory (continued)

- Reading 12 (continued)

Monday, February 22nd

Alternatives to divine command theory

- Reading 13: Erik Wielenberg, from *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (COURSE PACK pp. 1-5)

PAPER #1 DUE—11:59pm (at the end of the day)

Wednesday, February 24th

Alternatives to divine command theory (continued)

- Reading 13 (continued)

Virtue ethics

- Reading 14: Aristotle, “Happiness, Function, and Virtue,” from *Nicomachean Ethics* (Blackboard)

Friday, February 26th

Virtue ethics (continued)

- Reading 14 (continued)

Monday, February 29th

Virtue ethics (continued)

- Reading 15: Aristotle, “Self-Love and Virtues of the Intellect” (Blackboard)

Wednesday, March 2nd

Virtue ethics (continued)

- Reading 15 (continued)

Deontological ethics

- Reading 16: Immanuel Kant, “Good Will, Duty, and the Categorical Imperative,” from *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Blackboard)

Friday, March 4th

Deontological ethics (continued)

- Reading 16 (continued)

Monday, March 7th

Deontological ethics (continued)

- Reading 16 (continued)

Wednesday, March 9th

Consequentialist ethics

- Reading 17: John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism,” from *Utilitarianism* (Blackboard)

Friday, March 11th

CLASSES CANCELLED

Monday, March 14th

Consequentialist ethics

- Reading 17: (continued)

Wednesday, March 16th

MIDTERM EXAM

Friday, March 18th

Consequentialist ethics

- Reading 17: (continued)

Monday, March 21st–Monday, March 28th–NO CLASS—EASTER HOLIDAYS

Contemporary moral controversies

Wednesday, March 30th

Abortion

- Reading 18: Pope John Paul II, “The Unspeakable Crime of Abortion,” from *Evangelium Vitae* (Blackboard)

Friday, April 1st

Abortion (continued)

- Reading 18 (continued)

Monday, April 4th

Abortion (continued)

- Reading 19: Mary Anne Warren, “The Moral and Legal Status of Abortion” (COURSE PACK, pp. 6-11)

Wednesday, April 6th

Abortion (continued)

- Reading 19 (continued)

Friday, April 8th

Abortion (continued)

- Reading 20: Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” (COURSE PACK)

Monday, April 11th

Abortion (continued)

- Reading 20 (continued)

Wednesday, April 13th

War and peace

- Reading 21: William O’Brien, “Just War Theory,” from *The Conduct of Just and Limited War* (COURSE PACK, pp. 12-15)
- Reading 22: Richard Norman, “The Case for Pacifism” (COURSE PACK, pp. 16-22)

Friday, April 15th

War and peace

- Readings 21 and 22 (continued)

War and peace

- Reading 23: Yaron Brook and Alex Epstein, “‘Just War Theory’ vs. American Self-Defense” (COURSE PACK, pp. 23-33)

Monday, April 18th

War and peace

- Reading 23 (continued)

Wednesday, April 20th

Poverty

- Reading 24: Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality" (Blackboard) Poverty

Friday, April 22nd

Poverty

- Reading 24: Peter Singer (continued)

Animals and the environment

- Reading 25: Peter Singer, "The Place of Nonhumans in Environmental Issues" (COURSE PACK, pp. 34-38)

PAPER #2 DUE

Monday, April 25th

Animals and the environment

- Reading 25: Peter Singer (continued)

Animals and the environment

- Reading 26: Tibor Machan, "Do Animals Have Rights?" (Blackboard)

Wednesday, April 27th

Animals and the environment

- Reading 27: Holmes Ralston III, "Respect for Life" (COURSE PACK, pp. 39-44)

Friday, April 29th

Animals and the environment

- Reading 27 (continued)

Alternative ethical theories

Monday, May 2nd

Ethical egoism

- Reading 28: Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics," from *The Virtue of Selfishness*, CP

Wednesday, May 4th

Ethical egoism (continued)

- Reading 28 (continued)

Friday, May 6th

Deep ecology

- Reading 29: Warwick Fox, "Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy for Our Time?" and Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects" (COURSE PACK, pp. 45-49)

Monday, May 9th

Deep ecology

- Reading 29 (continued)

Moral relativism

Wednesday, May 11th

Moral relativism

- Reading 30: James Rachels, from *Elements of Moral Philosophy* (COURSE PACK, pp. 50-56)