

**Introduction to Ethics**  
**Philosophy 122B**  
**Dr. Carol Moeller**  
**Spring 2006**

Class Meets: Mondays and Wednesdays 10:10-11:20

Classroom: Comenius 114

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Office Hours: M, W 9:00 - 10:00 a.m.; T, TH 1:00 - 2:00 p.m. and by appointment.

Text: *Ethics for Life*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Judith A. Boss, ed., Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2004.

LinC Requirement: M3 *Ultimate Questions*

**Course Description**

This is a course in ethics. It requires each of us to read, think, reflect, speak, and reason critically about how we ought to live, how people are and how we ought to be. Are there any moral truths? We often think not, that people have such divergent views about ethics that they must be a matter of personal choice, or cultural practice. Yet, is not genocide wrong regardless of people's justification for it, even if they think the people they are wiping out are not actually people? If you were given the opportunity, as in a recent *Twilight Zone* episode, to go back in time and kill the infant Adolf Hitler before he had a chance to grow up and do what he did, would you do it? Should you? Would it be wrong to kill him? Would you be committing "the lesser of two evils" or doing something morally good? Would it matter if you found it painful to kill him but did so simply to save millions, as opposed to killing him out of delight in inflicting pain and death? These are simply a few of the classic questions we will pursue in Ethics.

The course will consist of discussions, lectures, presentations, essays – short and long, quizzes and group exercises. You will need to do all the assigned readings carefully, and often numerous times in order to really grasp the readings in depth, attend class, participate in class discussions, and by so doing learn to read, write, and think in a philosophical manner. The readings are often not long, but they are deep. One learns philosophy by doing it: reading what philosophers have written, following their lines of thought, asking our own questions of the texts and of each other, and thinking critically about their -- and our -- ways of thinking about the world.

All of us in this classroom speak a language, English, which contains many philosophical reasoning and logical expressions, such as 'if -- then,' 'not,' 'or,' 'only if.' In daily life, we say what we believe, we argue for our views, we give reasons for our actions and beliefs. In this course we will study and use philosophical tools to improve and study our reasoning and reflection. "Philosophy" literally means "love of wisdom," when the word is translated from the Greek language. The academic study of philosophy sheds light upon the reasoning we do in English in our day-to-day lives and helps to refine that reasoning.

The principal aim of the course is to learn, to learn not only *what* philosophers have thought, but *how* they have thought, with what methods and approaches. We seek to find strengths and weaknesses in their approaches, as well as in their views. We seek to discover, evaluate, and reflect critically upon our own views, holding them up to critical scrutiny. It's not enough to have opinions; we must learn to examine our views for their adequacy, to give reasons for and against them. In part, the aim is to help you to acquire certain intellectual *skills*. Whether or not you acquire these skills depends, mostly, on whether you dedicate enough time and

energy to the course. You will need to attend class, read the text, and, especially, do the daily homework exercises in order to master the material. *Doing all the assigned work is indispensable.* You cannot learn how to do philosophy just by listening to me or anyone else talk about it. You learn it mostly by doing it -- much the way you learn to play a sport or a musical instrument.

A friendly tip: do not fall behind in the course. What you learn each day will build upon what you have learned previously. Since the only way to learn really is by doing the work, cramming will not help much.

**Homework:** *Before* each class meeting, I expect you to read and reflect upon everything that we are covering in class. Fair warning: there is no way to master the material except by doing lots of reading, discussing, and reflecting upon the material.

**Seeing Me:** If you have any trouble with any of the material, come see me. Don't wait. Come to my office hours. If you cannot make these, let me know and we can set up another time to meet. We can try to identify what your specific difficulties are, e.g., motivation, interest, reading comprehension, note-taking, writing, quiz and test-taking skills, philosophical reasoning. I can best help you get on track by seeing where in particular you have gone wrong. If you need to get something to me, leave it at my office.

### Course Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should achieve the following outcomes:

- 1) To understand and explain important concepts and views related to ethics such as relativism, subjectivism, utilitarianism, duty-based ethics, and virtue ethics;
- 2) To be familiar with traditions of ethical theory, as well as their strengths and weaknesses;
- 3) Develop greater facility in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking about ethical positions, reasoning, and arguments;
- 4) Strengthen critical reflection one's own ethical views and those common in one's culture (as well as those of others), but particularly our own (which we sometimes take for granted like a fish does the water around it).

### Course Requirements (as percentage of final grade)

Attendance and discussion participation, and oral presentation,

Quiz Average	10%
Ethics Journal/ Brief Presentation	10
Exam 1	20
Exam 2	20
Final Exam	20
9-11 Page Essay	<u>20%</u>
	100%

### Course Requirements Further Explained

**Quizzes:** There will be regular pop quizzes, every 1-2 chapters or so, to check to see how well students understand the material from the text and from class. There will be no make-up quizzes except for those recognized as official College absences (e.g., athletic matches and religious observance), serious illness documented with doctor's note). Unexcused absences on quiz occasions will result in a mark of 0 for that quiz.

The lowest single quiz score for each student will be dropped. That is, if you miss a quiz, that one zero will be dropped; if you are present for all of them, the lowest score will be dropped.

**Three Exams (20% x 3 = 60%):** These will cover material from the text and from class, and it will also go beyond those to ask you to apply these ideas and skills further. (In other words, you will need to go far beyond mastery of the written and verbal material from class.)

**Essay (20%):** 9-11 double-spaced pages on topic selected from those I distribute, or your own proposed topic with my written approval. Please use 10-12 font (no decorative fonts please), use 1 inch margins (top/bottom/sides) and properly document sources. Use a complete bibliography and references, according to MLA, Chicago, or another standard style. Come see me for any help or for feedback on outlines or drafts of your essay.

**Six Ethics Response Essays and One Brief Presentation (10%):**

In response to questions of your own on ethics from readings, class, or life in general, you are to write **six response essays**, typewritten, one and a half pages to two pages. These can be on questions raised in the text, called "exercises," or they can be questions and issues of your own. The first three must be in before fall break, the next three by 12/4. You can do these at your own pace, throughout the semester, and of course you may submit them before those deadlines.

In these essays, you should:

- 1) explain the question, topic, or issue you are addressing,
- 2) take a particular stand, stating it explicitly in a thesis statement and/or conclusion, and
- 3) offer reasons on behalf of the stand you take.

These essays are for your benefit, to practice engaging critically with the readings; they will not be graded except for Credit/No Credit, simply marked for credit toward your assigned total of six. I will not write comments on them, generally, unless they appear to be really off track from the structure of the assignment. While these brief essays will simply be counted for credit, particularly thoughtful and well done response essays will weigh in should your grade average be on a border between two grades. In addition, doing these well should be good practice for writing the 9-11 page essay.

Further required is a single **oral presentation**. You may do this in a presentation giving an overview of the readings for that day, or you may bring in and share something -- an object, an experience or story to tell, a piece of music, etc. -- that has ethical meaning, according to you. You must explain, giving reasons to support your idea that it has ethical meaning, and what sort of ethical meaning you think it has.

**Attendance and participation** are required. Unexcused absences or failure to participate will detract from your grade, pushing your course average -- and final grade -- down. Each unexcused absence beyond two will result in your final grade being dropped by 0.25 points. For example, if you have 6 unexcused absences (which would be 4 beyond the 2 "freebies" allowed); your final average will be lowered by 4 x .25, which equals 1. If your grade would otherwise be an 80.1 ( B - ), it will become a 79.1 ( C + ). If the final score remains right on the borderline between two letter grades, such as a 239 (which is one point short of a C -), your participation level will be taken into account (as opposed to simply attendance).

**Academic Integrity:**

The rules of academic integrity for Moravian College must be followed. Please take them seriously. Any suspicion of violations will be actively pursued. Moravian College standards on academic integrity and plagiarism are available in *Academic Honesty at Moravian College*, available from the Office of the Dean of the College (in Monocacy Hall). Plagiarism is very serious, resulting in automatic failure on the relevant assignment, even if the action is unintentional, such

as the failure to cite the source of paraphrased ideas. We will discuss these issues on particular assignments, such as essays. For more information on these policies, please see the student handbook, the professor, or the academic dean's office.

For this course, the following pointers may be helpful. Follow instructions on graded assignments, doing your own work unless the assignment is explicitly given as a group project or as allowing for open-book work. In doing essays, be sure to give references and credit for any ideas which are not entirely your own. That is, when quoting or paraphrasing or even referring to the idea(s) of another, cite the source. If you are not sure whether a reference is required, give a reference anyway. If in doubt, err on the side of overly generous reference-giving, and consult with the professor for guidance.

**Doing Well:**

It is imperative that students keep up with their work in this course and get help any time they have trouble. Each chunk of material builds upon the previous chunk, and so holes in understanding will continue to cause problems. Similarly, missing even a single class can disrupt the learning process and leave a student feeling hopelessly lost very quickly. Please be on top of your work, come to class, ask questions, and achieve an excellent level of understanding of all the material covered, together with the developed ability to apply that understanding independently.

**Learning Disabilities:**

Students with learning disabilities should contact the Learning Services Office as soon as possible to arrange for any necessary accommodations.

**Disabilities:**

Students with any disabilities who may be interested in reasonable accommodations should contact the Learning Services Office.

**Potential Syllabus Changes:**

This syllabus is subject to change at the professor's notice.

**Further Note on Grading:**

As in other courses, grading is at the discretion of the professor. For example, there may be an element of subjectivity in how much partial credit is given to a response. You may appeal grades to the Dean's Office.

**Note on Grading Standards:**

Grading and academic integrity policies for this course are in accordance with Moravian College standards, as expressed in the Catalog (p. 43).

Please note the following about grading. In particular, be aware of the qualitative distinction made among the letter grade options. Often if students receive less than an A, they ask what was wrong with the paper. However, A's are intended to be reserved for truly exceptional work, with mastery of the material, original thinking, and so on.

Grading scheme: 97-100=A+ 93-96.9=A 90-92.9=A- 87-89.9=B+ 83-86.9=B 80-82.9=B- 77-79.9=C+ 73-76.9=C 70-72.9=C- 67-69.9=D+ 63-66.9=D 60-62.9=D- 0-59.9=F

- A (4.00 points) and A- (3.67): "These grades indicate achievement of the highest caliber. They involve expectations of independent work, original thinking, and the ability to acquire and effectively use knowledge."
- B+ (3.33), B (3.00), and B- (2.67): "These grades indicate higher than average achievement. Evidence of independent work and original thinking is expected."
- C+ (2.33), C (2.00), and C- (1.67): "These grades are given when the student has devoted a reasonable amount of time, effort, and attention to the work of the course, and has satisfied the following criteria: familiarity with the content of the course, familiarity with the methods of study of the course, and active participation in the work of the class."
- D+ (1.33), D (1.00), and D- (0.67): "These grades indicate unsatisfactory work, below the standard expected by the College. They indicate work which in one or more important aspects falls below the average expected of students for graduation. The work is, however, sufficient to be credited for graduation, if balanced by superior work in other courses."
- F (0.00): "This indicates failure."

<i>Week</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Section Chapter</i>	<i>Pages</i>
			I. The Study of Ethics	
1	M	8/28	First Class Meeting	--
2	W	8/30	1 "Ethics Overview"	1-31
3	M	9/4		32-45
4	W	9/6	2 "Moral Reasoning"	45-67
5	M	9/11		67-74
			II. Ethical Relativism	
			3 "Ethical Subjectivism: Is Morality Just a Matter of Personal Feeling"	
6	W	9/13		75-99
7	M	9/18		100-124
			4 "Cultural Relativism: Is Morality Dependent on Culture?"	
8	W	9/20		124-142
9	M	9/25		Review
10	W	9/27		<b>EXAM 1</b>
			III. Beyond Ethical Relativism	
			5 "Is Morality Grounded in Religion?"	
11	M	10/2		143-164
12	W	10/4		164-181
--	M	10/9	No Class	Fall Break
13	W	10/11		
			6 "Conscience and Moral Development"	
14	M	10/16		182-203
15	W	10/18		204-228
16	M	10/23		Review
17	W	10/25		<b>EXAM 2</b>

IV. Morality as Universal

7 "Ethical Egoism: Morality is Acting in Our Best Self-Interest"

18	M	10/30		229-263
--	W	11/1	No Class	Spring Break
--	M	11/6	No Class	Spring Break
19	W	11/8	8 "Utilitarianism: The Greatest Happiness Principle"	264-288
20	M	11/13		<b>Essay Due</b> 288-296
21	W	11/15	9 "Deontology: The Ethics of Duty"	297-322
22	M	11/20		322-338
--	W	11/22	No Class	Thanksgiving
23	M	11/27	10 "Rights Ethics: The Other Side of Deontology"	339-367
24	W	11/29		367-382
25	M	12/4	11 "Virtue Ethics and the Good Life"	383-411
26	W	12/6		411-421
27	M	12/11		Review

12/13-12/16; 12/18-12/19, (as scheduled during finals)

**Final Exam**

Note: It is College policy that final examinations may not be rescheduled except by approval from the dean's office. If you anticipate needing to leave town before the last day of final exams, seek that approval. The professor is not permitted to allow other re-scheduling or make-up of finals, beyond those permitted by official policy (as detailed in the College Catalog). There will be no exceptions (except as arranged through the dean's office, that is).