

Writing 100: Reflections on the Moral Life

Fall 2006

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Course Theme

In this writing course, we will study not only the tradition of moral philosophy but also alternative ways of “reflecting on the moral life”—as evidenced by the realms of photography, literature, film and advertising.

Each of these different types of moral reflection implicitly and explicitly poses a series of interrelated questions that we will address throughout the course of the semester:

1. What motivates individuals to act in the way they do?
2. How and why **should** individuals act in a certain way?
3. How are we to define the “moral life”?
4. How are we to resolve—or is it in fact possible for us to resolve—conflicting definitions of the moral life?

Required Texts

Bowie, G. Lee. Thirteen Questions in Ethics and Social Philosophy

Hacker, Diana. Bedford Handbook for Writers, 6th edition. Boston: St. Martin’s Press, 2002.

Rachels, James. The Right Thing To Do.

Custom Reading Packet

(Books available at Moravian College Bookstore; reading packet will be distributed in installments throughout the semester).

Format/Requirements

This course will be primarily discussion-based. **Each student is therefore required to complete the reading assignment prior to the beginning of class.** This will allow each student to participate in the classroom discussions and workshops that will help him or her develop the ideas and arguments which are necessary for writing insightful and well-organized essays.

Writing Assignments

Each student will draft and complete 12 graded papers of varying lengths and an expanded version of a previously written essay (that contains a research component) over the course of the semester.

The third 3-4 page essay will be a collaborative work (co-authored with another student).

(Further instructions about the collaborative work to be handed out within first two weeks of class).

Short Writing Exercises

Eight graded writing exercises (approximately one page) will serve two primary purposes; they will focus on a particular aspect of writing (such as commenting on a cited passage from a particular text or writing an introduction), and they will form the building blocks for three 3-page essays.

Oral Presentation

Each student will give one oral presentation that includes preparing and discussing a quiz on select readings for the rest of the class.

A handout that will describe what is required of the oral presentation will be handed out the second week of class.

Breakdown Of Writing Assignments And Corresponding Course Material To Be Covered

Weeks 1 through 4

(Note: schedule subject to slight change; **Assignment sheet covering 6 class periods will be handed out every two weeks**)

I. Summary (One 750 word essay and three 1-page writing exercises)

Each student will write a concise and well-organized summary of an assigned text. This assignment is designed to introduce students to the importance of reading comprehension. Students will be asked to “restate” the central idea of a text and the author’s supporting arguments in their own words.

Primary Texts: Rachels and Bowie

Texts from course packet (including: selections from Friedrich Nietzsche's Twilight of the Idols)

Themes: Introduction to the tradition of moral philosophy

1. What is morality?
2. "Nature", "reason" and ethics
3. The Social Contract
4. Critiques of the tradition of moral philosophy

Weeks 5-7

II. Close Reading and Argument/Commentary (750 word essay; two 3-page writing exercises)

In this assignment, students will critique a select passage from a text or a scene from a video, focusing not merely on "what" is presented, but above all on "how" the material in question is presented.

Primary Texts:

Rachels and Bowie.

Select essays from course packet (including: Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery.")

Themes:

1. The question of "rights": what are my rights? What are the rights of others?
2. Application I of rights theory: Is there a right to lie?
3. Application II of rights theory: The case for and against animal rights

Weeks 8-10

III. Comparative Analysis (750 word **collaborative** essay; three 1-page writing exercises).

Each pair of students will compare and contrast two essays that are written from different perspectives on a similar issue. In this assignment, students will be expected to develop an argument stating why they think one perspective has more validity than the other. This essay will enable the student to learn how to analyze similarities and differences, expose argument subtleties, and discover significant criteria for an analysis.

Primary Texts:

Rachels, and Bowie

Themes:

Students select a particular field of study from a list of moral “topics” provided by instructor

(This list will be handed out at the end of September)

IV. Expanded Paper With Research Component (6-8 pages)

This assignment will allow students to conduct independent research, evaluate sources and develop an original argument.

In order to assist the student with this project, there will be several research related assignments due throughout the semester. There will also be a class session conducted by the librarian that is designed to introduce students to various library resources that will assist them with their research projects.

Each student will also meet with the instructor for a research paper conference.

It is the student’s choice which 3-4 page paper is expanded into the research paper.

Grades

Final grades will be determined on the basis of the following percentages:

2 750-word essays: 20%

8 writing exercises: 15%

1 Collaborative 750 word essay: 10%

Mid-term: 10%

Expanded Paper with research component: 15%

Oral Presentation: 10%

Peer Reviews: 10%

Quizzes: 10%

In accordance with the Moravian College grading policy, each letter grade corresponds with numerical “Quality Points”:

A: 4.00.

A-: 3.67

B+: 3.33.

B: 3.00.

B-: 2.77.

C+: 2.33.

C: 2.00.

C-: 1.67.

D+: 1.33.
D: 1.00.
D-: 0.67.
F: no points.

While this grading system is obviously quantitative, the final grade will be determined, in part, by a qualitative consideration; that is, on the basis of the first essay, each student will meet with the instructor to establish a set of goals for the rest of the semester in order to improve his or her writing in specific ways. If these goals are met, then the final grade will be adjusted upwards by 1/3 or 2/3.

Attendance Policy

Regular class attendance is of course expected. There is no penalty for unexcused absences. However, please note the following: **there will no make-up quizzes given if you are not present on one of the days that a quiz is given. There will be no make-up oral presentations if you are not present when you are called to give one.**

Further, there will be no make-up assignment for missing one of the graded peer-review sessions. And finally, for each day a writing assignment is late, the final grade for that assignment will be lowered by 1/3 grade (exceptions made for documented medical absences).

(Due to past difficulties arising from electronic mail submissions, all essays are to be handed in during class; no essay is to be turned in via e-mail).