

Race, Gender, Identity, and Moral Knowledge
Philosophy 291
Dr. Carol Moeller
Spring 2009

Class Meets: T, TH: 12:50 – 2

Classroom: Zinzendorf 103

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Office Hours: T, TH: 11:40 – 12:40, 2-3; by appointment.

Texts:

Rodriguez, Luis J., *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.*, Touchstone (division of Simon and Schuster), 2005. This is a later version (than the original in 1993) containing a new introduction by the author. Any edition with this new introduction is ok. ISBN: 13: 978-0-7432-7691-7 or ISBN 10: 0-7432-7691-4

Alcoff, Linda Martin, *Visible Identities*, Oxford University Press, 2006. ISBN: 0-19-513735-3

Tatum, Beverly, *Can We Talk About Race?*, Beacon Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-8070-3284-8 (though the ISBN given here is from the hardback.)

Arbinger Institute, *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict* Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006. ISBN-10: 1576753344, ISBN-13: 978-1576753347

Davis, Angela (with Eduardo Mendieta), *Abolition Democracy*, 7 Stories Press, 2005. ISBN: 1-58322-695-8

Minnich, Elizabeth Kamarck, *Transforming Knowledge, 2nd Edition*, Temple, 2005, ISBN: 1-59213-132-8

Additional recommended readings:

Davis, Angela, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Seven Stories Press, 2003.

Hames-Garcia, Michael, *Fugitive Thought*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

Hames-Garcia, Michael, Paula Moya, ed., *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

Alcoff, Linda Martín, Michael Hames-Garcia, Satya P. Mohanty, Paula M.L. Moya, ed., *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, NY, NY: Palgrave Macmillan (Future of Minority Studies Series), 2005.

Moya, Paula M.L., *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.

Morrison, Toni, *Beloved*, NY, NY: Vintage, Reprint edition, June, 2004.

Additional recommended readings on related questions in more technical philosophy venues:

Bambrough, Renford, *Moral Skepticism and Moral Knowledge*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: 1979.
Coady, C.A.J., *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
Siebers, Tobin, *Morals and Stories*,
Witherell, Carol and Nel Noddings, *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*,
NY: New York Teachers' College Press, 1999.

Course Description

What are the relationships among identities, experiences and moral knowledge? How do our unique experiences shape our moral views? How are those experiences shaped by such differences as race, culture, gender and family background? Can we gain moral knowledge from the testimonies of others, and if so, how? We often think of people's experiences as purely subjective and thus offering no generally available knowledge to others. But is that really so, that we do not learn from others' experiences, morally?

In this course, we shall explore the notion that there are various ways in which moral growth at least seems to manifest through knowledge gained from one's own experience and the experiences of others, particularly as revealed through testimonies. Such an idea is both "realist" and "cognitivist", in the philosophical senses, since it posits the existence of a world external to mind and states that claims about that world may be literally true or false. (In other words, everything is *not* relative!)

Many are attracted to relativistic stances, views stating that standards of morals- or even reality as a whole are relative to cultures and communities, in part because of the great diversity they see in the world in terms of culture. Even within a particular nation, such as the United States, the variety of cultures may seem so great as to make commonality of values impossible- or even civil communication across values. What if, however, John Dewey was right when he called societies "experiments in living", so that societies and cultures are the living laboratories in which people are striving to make sense of questions of right and wrong, to realize the good, and to respond to other moral questions? What if there are ways to truly learn from each others' experiences- particularly where the conflicts seem great, morally, so that the diversity of viewpoints is grist for the mill of moral knowledge for all concerned.

We shall explore moral theoretical issues of how such moral views can claim to be genuine knowledge, and the more mundane ways in which these resources for moral growth- and for philosophical reflection- can be utilized in our everyday lives, in our own identities and in our particular life contexts.

This course can fulfill the Moral Life Learning in Common (LinC) requirement. As such, we seek to meet the following goals:

(1) an introduction to two or more theoretical frameworks for reflection upon a moral life, and
(2) multiple realms of application for these frameworks (i.e., two or more significant contemporary issues that will be explored in light of these theoretical considerations).

In particular terms, this Philosophy 291 course will meet these goals as follows:

- (1) This course will use philosophical ethical methods, competing theories of justice, as well as various philosophical accounts of respect, rationality, consent, empowerment and other relevant concepts,
- (2) applying them to such areas as:

- a) economic poverty (e.g., how does this relate to justice? What are the strengths and weaknesses of plans purporting to be more egalitarian?),
- b) visions of justice across all groups, including “Third World” people, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people, people with disabilities, women and men of color,

As a course fulfilling the Moral Life rubric, Philosophy 291 is an upper-division course. It requires sustained advanced analytical work. One must have an open mind; grapple with readings, topics and discussions that may be quite difficult intellectually, emotionally, and politically. (It can be quite difficult to struggle to understand a difficult article with which one disagrees and by which one feels offended.)

As a Moral Life course and as a philosophy course, its general learning outcomes include:

1. an awareness of the complexity of moral issues and of the need for interdisciplinary understanding for informed moral decision-making;
2. grappling with the student's own values and moral position-taking;
3. enhanced capacity for moral discernment, criticism, and argument.

In addition to these Moral Life (LinC category) outcomes, specific learning outcomes to this course are that students:

- 1) understand, explain, and critically examine competing conceptions of race and other forms of identity, as well as possible relations among identity, experience, and our moral lives.
- 2) understand and make use of emerging theory on these topics.
- 3) develop greater facility in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking about race and other forms of identity, experience, ethics, and knowledge.
- 4) strengthen critical reflection upon one’s own identities, experiences, and ethical views and those common in one’s culture (as well as those of others), but particularly one's own (which we sometimes take for granted like a fish does the water around it).

Responsibilities of each class member:

- 1) Come to class prepared, having done the readings and any assignments before class, having carefully and reflected upon them, with notes jotted down for questions, comments, and clarifications.
- 2) Participate fully in class, giving full attention to whomever is speaking, refraining from side talking.
- 3) Contribute to an atmosphere of learning, being focused and respectful of the ideas at stake, of the course materials, and of each other.
- 4) Regular participation in presentations, possible Blackboard postings (details to follow), discussions, group work, etc.
- 5) Honest self-assessment on these criteria. (I may periodically ask you assess yourselves on these criteria.)

Philosophy requires each of us to read, think, reflect, speak, and reason critically about what the world is like, what matters, what people are like, and how we ought to live. The course will consist of dialogue with the texts and with each other. One needs to do all the assigned

readings carefully and often numerous times in order to grasp the readings. One needs to engage deeply with the ideas. One needs to attend class and participate in class discussions, and by so doing learn to read, write, and think in a philosophical manner.

“Philosophy” literally means “love of wisdom,” when the word is translated from the Greek language. The principal aim of the course is to learn, to learn not only *what* philosophers have thought, but also *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. It’s not enough to have opinions; we must learn to examine our views for their adequacy, to give reasons for and against them.

Doing all the assigned work is indispensable. 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. One cannot learn how to do philosophy just by listening to anyone else talk about it or by reading what they have written. We learn it mostly by doing it – just as we must learn by doing when we learn to play a sport or to play a musical instrument.

Course Requirements (as percentage of final grade)

Exam 1	25
Exam 2	25
6-7 Page Essay 1	25
6-7 Page Essay 2	<u>25</u>
	100%

Attendance is required and will be figured into the above final grade average. Unexcused absences or failure to participate will detract from your grade, pushing your course average -- and final grade -- down. Each unexcused absence beyond one will result in your final grade being dropped by 0.5 points. For example, if you have 3 unexcused absences (which would be 2 beyond the 1 "freebie" allowed); your final average will be lowered by 2 x .5, 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, your participation level will be taken into account (as opposed to simply attendance).

Quizzes: There may be quizzes, to see how well students are understanding 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).

Attendance and participation are required:

Failure to participate will detract from your grade. Unexcused absences (beyond one) will push your course average -- and final grade -- down by .5 % points per miss. For example, if you have 3 unexcused absences (which would be 2 beyond the 1 "freebie" allowed); your final average will be lowered by 2 x .5, 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, your participation level will be taken into account (as opposed to simply attendance).

Two Exams (25% x 2 = 50%): 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.)

Two 6-7 Page Essays (25% x 2 = 50%): 6-7 double-spaced pages on topic selected from those I distribute, or your own proposed topic with my written approval. Come see me for any help or for feedback on outlines or drafts of your essay.

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.

Disabilities/Learning Disabilities:

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

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 Department Chair, Bernardo Cantens, and to the Dean's Office.

While the quantity of reading will be relatively small, 35 pages or so per class session, you need to read each article carefully, several times, taking notes, asking questions about anything remaining unclear. It is your responsibility to achieve a thorough and deep understanding of each of the readings. You need to go far beyond grasping each author's position(s) to understanding each author's argument for the position(s), to comprehending criticisms of those arguments and positions, and to develop your own responses and critical evaluations of them, supporting them with good arguments.

Moeller, "Realism and Identity: Rethinking the Categories of our Lives," *Cultural Logic*, available online.

Final Exam, as scheduled during the final exam week.

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-ups of finals, beyond those permitted by official policy (as detailed in the College Catalog).

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.

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.”

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, first floor), in the *Moravian College Student Handbook*, and at <http://www.moravian.edu/studentlife/handbook/academic2.htm>. Plagiarism and cheating are 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. Plagiarism or cheating will result in failure of the assignment in this class.

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.

SPRING TERM 2009 Tuesdays & Thursdays PHIL 291	
Monday, January 19	CLASSES BEGIN – Martin Luther King Day
Tuesday, January 20	Introductions
Thursday, January 22	Tatum, ix-xvi, 1-38
Tuesday, January 27	39-104
Thursday, January 29	105-134
Tuesday, February 3	Rodriguez, xix-xxi, 3-79
Thursday, February 5	80-131
Tuesday, February 10	132-209
Thursday, February 12	210-260
Tuesday, February 17	Exam 1
Wednesday, Feb 18	Jazz Opera pertaining to race at Moravian (required)
Thursday, February 19	Davis, 7-18, 19-48
Tuesday, February 24	49-104
Thursday, February 26	105-136
Friday, February 27	MIDTERM
Sat, February 28 noon- Mon, March 9 7:30am	SPRING RECESS
Tuesday, March 10	Anatomy of Peace, xix-xxi, 3-68
Thursday, March 12	69-200
Tuesday, March 17	200-224
Thursday, March 19	Alcoff, 5-46
Tuesday, March 24	47-83
Thursday, March 26	84-129
Friday, March 27	Last Day for Withdrawal with “W”

Tuesday, March 31	133-176
Thursday, April 2	179-223
Tuesday, April 7	227-290
Thursday, April 9	Minnich, xii-xviii, 1-61
Thurs, April 9 10pm- Monday, April 13 6pm	EASTER RECESS (No class meetings missed for us.)
Tuesday, April 14	62-102
Thursday, April 16	103-168
Tuesday, April 21	169-231
Thursday, April 23	232-276
Tuesday, April 28	232-276
Thursday, April 30	Discussion
Saturday, May 2	CLASSES END
Monday-Saturday May 4-May 9	FINAL EXAMINATIONS