

Race, Gender, Identities, and Moral Knowledge
Philosophy 271
Dr. Carol Moeller
Spring 2010

Writing Intensive Version: for Alison Dobrowolski

Class Meets: T, TH: 1:10 – 2:20

Classroom: Memorial 303

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Office Hours: T, TH: 8:00 – 8:45, 2-3:15; and by appointment. I am often in and out of the office at other days and times, so please feel free to stop by anytime, or call (x7881), or email (moeller@moravian.edu) to see if I am in.

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

Williams, Patricia, *Toward a Color Blind Future*,

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

and one of the two following (your choice):

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

Arbinger Institute, *Leadership and Self-Deception, 2nd Edition*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010.

Additional readings may be supplied and required.

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.
Siebers, Tobin, *Disability Theory*, University of Michigan, 2008.
Teuton, Sean, *Red Land, Red Power*,
MacDonald, Amie, and Susan Sanchez-Casals, *Identity in Education*,

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.

Intended Learning Outcomes

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

- 1) To 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) To understand and make use of emerging (post-positivist) realist theory on these topics.
- 3) To develop greater facility in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking about race and other forms of identity, experience, ethics, and knowledge.
- 4) To 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).

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

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 $2 \times .5$, 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 $2 \times .5$, 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 who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street

(extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services.

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, 65 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.

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.

Course Schedule**

Section of text is to read beforehand. For example, all of Williams' Ch. 2 and 3 need to be read by 1/26.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Pages</u>
1/19	Tues.	First Class Meeting
1/21	Thurs.	Williams, Ch. 1, "Reconsidering Identity Politics: An Introduction" Satya Mohanty and Linda Alcoff
1/26	Tues.	Williams, Ch. 2-3
1/28	Thurs.	Williams, Ch. 4-5
2/2	Tues.	Minnich, vii – xviii, 1-24
2/4	Thurs	Minnich, 25-47
2/9	Tues.	Minnich, 47-86
2/11	Thurs.	Minnich, 86-102
2/16	Tues.	Minnich, 103-139
2/18	Thurs.	Minnich, 140-168
2/23	Tues.	Minnich, 168-205
2/25	Thurs.	Minnich, 205-231
Note: Friday, Feb. 26 is the mid-point of the semester.		
3/2	Tues.	Minnich, 231-276
3/4	Thurs.	Exam 1 Five sets of 3 questions due

3/9, 3/11	Tues., Thurs.	No Class Spring Break
3/16	Tues.	<i>Leadership and Self-Deception</i> , pp. beginning to p. 108
3/18	Thurs.	<i>Leadership and Self-Deception</i> , pp. 109-end Essay 1 Due
3/23	Tues.	<i>Anatomy of Peace</i> , pp.
3/25	Thurs.	<i>Anatomy of Peace</i> , pp.
3/30	Tues.	<i>Anatomy of Peace</i> , pp.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Pages</u>
4/1	Thurs.	Moeller and/or hand-outs Last day to withdraw with a "W"
4/6	Tues.	Moeller and/or hand-outs
4/8	Thurs.	Rodriguez, pp. xix, 3-79
4/13	Tues.	Rodriguez, pp. 80-131
4/15	Thurs.	Rodriguez, pp. 132-209 Essay 2 Due
4/20	Tues.	Rodriguez, pp. 210-260
4/22	Thurs.	Moeller and/or hand-outs
4/27	Tues.	Moeller and/or hand-outs
4/29	Thurs.	Further Discussion
5/1	M	Classes end

Final Exam

**I may adjust course this schedule and may supplement readings with additional materials at times.