

PHIL 271: Race, Gender, Identities, and Moral Knowledge

Professor Carol J. Moeller
Spring 2011

Class Meets: Tuesdays, Thursdays: 10:20 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Classroom: Memorial 302
Office: Zinzendorf 202
Office Hours: T, TH: 11:40 - 1; TH: 2:30 - 3:50, and by appointment.
Phone: 610- 625- 7881
Email: moeller@moravian.edu
(Please allow at least 24 hours for responses to your emails.)

All Books are Required:

Abraham, Laurie Kaye, *Mama Might Be Better off Dead: The Failure of Health Care in Urban America*, University of Chicago Press, 1994, ISBN-13: 9780226001395

Tatum, Beverly, *Can We Talk About Race?*, Beacon Press, 2007
ISBN: 978-0-8070-3284-8

Rodriguez, Luis J., *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.*,
Touchstone, 2005, ISBN: 13: 978-0-7432-7691-7 or ISBN 10: 0-7432-7691-4

Moya, Paula M.L., *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles*,
Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002, ISBN: 0520230140,
ISBN-13: 9780520230149

Davis, Angela, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Seven Stories Press, 2003
ISBN: 1583225811, ISBN-13: 9781583225813

Course Description

Note: This course has a prerequisite of one prior course in philosophy or women's studies, or permission of instructor.

What are the relationships among identities, experiences and moral knowledge? How do our unique experiences shape our moral views? How do such differences as race, culture, gender and family background shape those experiences? 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).
- 5) Increased knowledge of and analytical ability at how such issues as gender, race, class, and sexuality relate and compound questions.

This course fulfills the Moral Life Learning in Common (LinC) requirement. As such, we seek: (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). As a Moral Life course and as a philosophy course, the learning outcomes expected are the following:

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, goals specific to this course are that students:

4. Achieve a broad understanding of social justice and to how culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and economic class issues.
5. Strengthen skills for fair and sympathetic treatment of competing views and for critical reflection upon them.
6. Develop verbal, writing, and thinking abilities to take positions, explain them, and back them up well.

As a course fulfilling the Moral Life rubric, this is an upper- division course. It requires sustained advanced analytical work. One must have an open mind and grapple deeply with readings, topics and discussions that may be quite difficult intellectually, emotionally, and politically.

(It can be quite a struggle to understand a difficult article, particularly one representing

views divergent from one's own.)

Course requirements (as percentage of final grade)

I. Engagement

A. One Presentation. (These may be done alone or in a pair.) In this presentation of 4 - 5 minutes (on assigned class days), you should provide an overview of the main points of the readings for that day explained in your own words (though you may point to sections of the text for clarification and support), offering your own analyses, questions, and responses to them.

B. Occasional quizzes, worksheets, collective work projects and/or other brief in-class assignments, (some graded by letter or number, some simply for credit as satisfactory or unsatisfactory).

C. Overall engagement and attendance (both qualitative and quantitative).* See note at end for description of engagement grades.

D. Occasional brief assignments to be done outside of class, such as online bias tests.

Note: in addition to the attendance grade here, unexcused absences beyond two will count against your final grade at a rate of 0.5% each. Please inform me before the date of an excused absence, giving relevant documentation in advance.

**Note: 10% may not see like much, say on a presentation one would rather not do or would do a n unsatisfactory job on, but skipping it would give you a 0 as a significant portion of that 10%, which could bring an 80 down to a 76 for the course grade.

Average grade on the above (I.A-I.D): → 20%**

II. Examinations:

Midterm 25%

Final Exam 25%

III. Essay: One 5- 6 Page Essay: including stages required 30%

100%

Course Requirements Further Explained

II. Exams: Two Exams (30% each, for total of 60%): These will be somewhat cumulative, building on material covered throughout the length of the course.

III. Essay (30%): 5 - 6 double-spaced pages (with reasonably-sized font, margins, etc.) on topic selected from those I distribute, or your own proposed topic with my written approval. In the essay, you will demonstrate your grasp of the course materials and go beyond them to develop your own positions and arguments. These essays will not necessarily be research papers involving outside research and sources beyond the books for the course. Rather, they may simply involve working the texts for class and responding to them critically, showing how and why you agree or disagree with the author's central argument on a topic. These will be due in stages (details to follow).

Coursework: Before each class meeting, read and reflect upon everything that we are covering in class.

Intellectual Environment: Teaching and learning, on all of our parts, requires consistent effort.

An atmosphere supporting high intellectual levels of discussion and written work is invaluable. Work Expectations: These readings will range from moderately difficult to extremely difficult. To be understood they must be read, reread, and questioned in great detail. One needs to be able to express the author's ideas in one's own words precisely. Expect to work hard to understand the readings, then still harder to respond to them.

Seeing Me: If you have any trouble with any of the material, please bring it up in class, email me, or 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. You can be sure that others are having similar difficulties or questions. 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.

Seeking help: Please see me with any questions you may have. Come to office hours. If those do not work out for you, arrange an appointment outside of office hours. Email me with questions, to find a time to meet, etc. I am available to talk over essay topics and to look at essay drafts as well.

Learning Services: If you know or suspect you might be in need of Learning Services assistance, in anything from study skills or time management to possible disability issues, please contact Learning Services as soon as possible. This is particularly urgent if you know or suspect you might need accommodations to negotiate disability issues with the class. The office would simply contact me about the accommodation requested; they respect privacy.

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a learning 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.

The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392.

Class Protocol: Since we are all adults, I need not specify all of the various ways in which we ought to treat each other with respect, being silent (especially while another person is speaking), being on time, having cell phones and pagers turned off, etc. Treat one another with kindness and respect. Be sure to make any criticisms as constructive as possible, challenging an idea without attacking a person. Anyone appearing to be disruptive or disrespectful will be asked to leave class. On a second occurrence the person would be dismissed from the course altogether.

Academic Integrity: Be sure to observe strictly Moravian College policies on academic integrity. Do your own work. Give credit any time you quote, paraphrase, or use anyone else's words or ideas. Give credit wherever it is due. Failure to do so - - whether intentional or accidental - - is academic dishonesty and is taken seriously, resulting in at least a 0 on the relevant assignment. For further specific information and resources on academic honesty, see the Student Handbook, the professor, or the Academic Dean's Office. See

<http://www.moravian.edu/studentlife/handbook/academic2.htm>

Documentation: You must document your work correctly. Use a style manual (such as M.L.A. or Chicago) access one through the Internet, or use a library copy. Please see a librarian or me if you need help with documentation. Pay special attention to the documentation of any Internet sources. If you use an Internet source, you must include the web address plus a hard copy of the article used, attaching these as an appendix.

Disability Issues: Students with disabilities should inform me or Learning Services right away so that we can discuss how to negotiate any related issues through Learning Services.

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, discussions, group work, etc.
- 5) Honest self- assessment on these criteria. (I may periodically ask you assess yourselves on these criteria.)

Grading and Academic Integrity:

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 Colonial Hall, first floor). 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 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.

In addition, borderline grades may swing up or down (say, from a C- to a C, if the numerical grade is just on the line between those), depending upon student’s course contribution. Missed presentations, exams, quizzes, and other assignments are only eligible for make-up in cases of emergency circumstances, at the professor’s discretion. Contact the professor immediately in such a case. In the interests of fairness, documentation may be required.

Final note on grading: Please be aware that there is a qualitative component to grading that is up to the professor’s judgment. If you do not understand the comments or grade on any assignment (or for the course), please ask me about it. If you wish to challenge a grade and are not satisfied with my response, you may appeal to the department chair, Professor Bernardo Cantens, Zinzend

orf 203, 610- 861 - 1589. Note: This syllabus may be revised with the notice of the professor.

The following is borrowed entirely from Dr. Khristina Haddad, Political Science, and used for this class.

What does an engagement grade represent?

A Critical, innovative and careful reading of all assignments; substantial notes or written preparation for discussion; frequent text-based contributions; contribution of discussion-shaping questions; careful engagement of the arguments of others; support of positive discussion dynamics.

B Complete and careful readings; consistent notes or written preparation for discussion; lively, substantial, and argumentative text-based contributions; contribution of independent questions; engagement of the arguments of others.

C Incomplete or superficial readings; minimal notes or written preparation for discussion; regular (at least once per meeting) discussion participation.

D Incomplete or missing readings; lack of notes or written preparation for discussion; mostly passive presence.

F Persistent, vegetative state; low-level trance; slightly elevated body temperature

PHILOSOPHY 271 Course Schedule¹

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Text and Pages</u>
Jan. 20	Th <i>Mama Might Be Better off Dead: The Failure of Health Care in Urban America</i> , pp. 1 - 43
Jan. 25	T 44 - 110
Jan. 27	Th 111 – 166 Required Program: 7 p.m., Prosser Auditorium, HUB, Dr. James Cone
Feb. 1	T 167 - 231
Feb. 3	Th 232 - 262
Feb. 8	T <i>Can We Talk About Race?</i> , pp. ix – xvi, 1 - 38
Feb. 10	Th 39 - 82
Feb. 15	T 83 - 134
Feb. 17	Th <i>Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.</i> , pp. xix, 3 - 79
Feb. 22	T 80 - 131
Feb. 24	Th 132 - 209
March 1	T 210 - 260
March 3	Th Midterm
March 8	T No Class – Spring Break
March 10	Th No Class – Spring Break
March 15	T <i>Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles</i> , 1-22
March 17	Th 23 - 57
March 22	T 58 - 99
March 24	Th 100 - 135
March 29	T 136 - 158
March 31	Th 158 - 174
April 5	T 175 - 214
April 7	Th <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> , 9 - 39
April 12	T pp. 40 - 59
April 14	Th pp. 60 - 83
April 19	T pp. 84 - 104
April 21	Th Essay Due pp. 105 - 118

¹ Also, I may supplement this schedule and readings with additional materials from time to time.

April 26 T pp. 105 – 118, continued
April 28 Th Wrap-Up

Final Exam: Th, May 5, 8:30 a.m.