

Moral Dilemma
PHIL 486A / 605A
Fall 2008

Prof. Lisa Tessman
Office: Library Tower 1216
Office hours: Tues. 9:30-11:30 or by appointment.
Office phone: 777-2269
Email: ltessman@binghamton.edu

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Texts:

Most of the readings are on reserves, either electronic or traditional or both. Please have the reading with you in class (thus print or photocopy from reserves). I would suggest buying the following books, as we will be reading significant portions of them (some are expensive, so decide for yourself whether to buy them or use the library reserves copy; all are available used through Amazon):

- Gowans, Christopher, ed. *Moral Dilemmas*. Oxford University Press, 1987. ISBN: 0-19-504271-9. (Out of print, available used).
- Michael Stocker. *Plural and Conflicting Values*. Oxford University Press, 1990. ISBN: 0-19-824055-4.
- Gowans, Christopher. *Innocence Lost: An Examination of Inescapable Moral Wrongdoing*. Oxford University Press, 1994. ISBN: 0-19-508517-5. (Out of print, available used).
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 1999. ISBN: 0-19-823818-5

At the end of the semester, students will choose a book to read and discuss in small reading groups/pairs. Choices include:

- Practical Conflicts: New Philosophical Essays*. Edited by Peter Baumann and Monika Betzler. Cambridge University Press, 2004. ISBN-13: 978-0521012102.
- Greenspan, P.S. *Practical Guilt: Moral Dilemmas, Emotions, and Social Norms*. Oxford University Press, 1995. ISBN: 0-19-509090-X.
- Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. *Moral Dilemmas*. Blackwell, 1988. (Out of print, unavailable; must use the library reserves copy).
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage Books, 1987. ISBN: 1-4000-3341-1.

Course Description:

The “moral dilemmas debate” begins with the question of whether there is such a thing as a genuine moral dilemma, and what a moral dilemma should be understood, by definition, to be. (For now, you can think of a moral dilemma as a situation of moral conflict in which there is a compelling moral reason to enact each of two possibilities, where it is not possible to enact both.) Other questions about moral dilemmas include: Is it wrongheaded to conceive of the task of ethics as providing a perfect decision procedure for resolving moral conflicts? When a dilemma can be resolved, does one of the initial moral requirements get cancelled, and if not, what happens to the moral requirement on which one does not act? Does the presence of a moral dilemma suggest that moral wrongdoing is inevitable? What moral conditions give rise to dilemmas? Should moral theorizing be done as “non-ideal theory” in order to foreground conditions that give rise to dilemmas? Must we pay attention to the role and the impact of moral dilemmas in order to give a good description of what actual moral life is like? In our

discussions, we can also consider whether aspects of one's social position (race, gender, etc.) affect the "dilemmaticity" of one's moral life. For the last two weeks of the course, students will form small reading groups (or pairs) to do further reading in order to extend their understandings of a topic we have studied, or to venture into related topics.

A note about background and "recommended" readings:

This course presumes some background knowledge of ethics in the history of philosophy; in particular, students will fare better in this course if they are familiar with the Kantian and Utilitarian ethical traditions (and to some extent, the Aristotelian or virtue ethics tradition). If you are not already familiar, please familiarize yourself by the second class meeting (for which the required reading is extremely brief). Graduate students, and undergraduates who are serious about philosophy, please make sure you have read Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (you might also read the Kant selection in Gowans, ed.) and John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*. If you are not very serious about philosophy but nevertheless want to survive this course, at least read the relevant entries in the (online) Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (I would suggest <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/> and <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill/#MorUti>).

For some weeks, I list optional background reading. If you are going to do these readings, do them before reading the required works for that week; they will help you understand the readings, and/or help you understand the lecture/discussions. Also for some weeks, I list optional additional readings. If you are going to do these readings, do them after reading the required works for that week; they are mainly intended for those students who are especially interested in that week's topic and who may want to write a seminar paper on that topic. We will not directly discuss the optional readings in class.

Course Requirements and Grading for Undergraduates:

- 1) There is a prerequisite of two prior philosophy courses. Please do not take this course if you do not have the appropriate background in philosophy.
- 2) Undergraduates with extensive background and interest in philosophy may ask to be treated as graduate students; please speak with me about this.

Class preparation and participation: You are expected to prepare for, attend and participate thoughtfully in ALL seminar meetings. Please avoid scheduling travel, medical appointments, etc., to conflict with class time. Two or more missed classes without documentation of a medical excuse or other emergency will result automatically in failure of the course. Repeated lateness or early leaving will add up to an absence. No laptops or other electronic distractions in class please.

Short written assignments: For the nine class meetings between Sept. 11 and Nov. 13 (inclusive), please choose any eight out of these nine for which you will prepare a 250-300 word piece of writing. This piece of writing should consist of one paragraph in which you demonstrate your understanding of the reading by concisely articulating its key points (without quoting any passages), and one paragraph in which you present an original response to the reading. Credit is given only for written assignments that are completed on time and that are within the specified word limits; please put an electronic copy (Microsoft Word format only please) in the digital dropbox on Blackboard *before class and* have a hard copy with you in class to refer to during discussion. Short written assignments will receive a $\sqrt{+}$, $\sqrt{}$, or $\sqrt{-}$.

Seminar paper: A 3,000 word seminar paper is due on the last day of class. Please see me individually to discuss your ideas for a paper topic. The paper will be developed in stages, with a 1,000 word draft/outline due on Dec. 4th (to be worked with in your reading group). A full letter

grade will be deducted from the final paper grade for each day that either the first or final draft is late. Seminar papers are expected to draw on material that has been assigned to the whole class, and on works read in the reading groups. If you wish to consult any other sources please speak with me about it before doing so. The 1,000 word draft should be submitted via the digital dropbox (before class time on Dec 4), and the final version must be submitted via turnitin.com (before class time on Dec. 11). I will not make written comments on the 1,000 word draft but will be happy to discuss drafts with students who come to see me individually.

Grading:

25% class participation.

25% short written assignments.

50% seminar paper.

Plagiarism: I follow the Philosophy Department policy on plagiarism (see separate sheet). Students are responsible for being familiar with, and abiding by, the Student Academic Honesty Code, available at: http://bulletin.binghamton.edu/program.asp?program_id=703#1

Course Requirements and Grading for Graduate Students:

Graduate student grades are based primarily on the seminar paper; however, unsatisfactory work on other aspects of the course can reduce the final grade.

Prepare for each class discussion by writing a 250-300 word response to the reading and posting it on the Blackboard Discussion Board by 7:00 PM on Wednesday for the rest of the graduate students (and me) to read (you are exempt from this on the week that you will be presenting); be sure to read everyone else's responses before class time on Thursday. Feel free to post responses to other students' postings. If you want to discuss your posting or another student's posting in class, please read the posting out loud to the class first (as the undergraduates will not have read them).

Class presentation / discussion: Each graduate student will have one one-hour opportunity during the semester to present an original interpretation/further development/critique of the reading and to lead a class discussion. The presentation itself should be between 15-20 minutes (please practice and time the presentation so that you go neither under nor over this amount of time), and the rest of the hour taken up with discussion, facilitated by the presenter. If you are unsure about being able to speak from notes for 15-20 minutes, I would suggest that you write a short (2500-3000 word) paper so that you can simply read the whole paper for your presentation. Do not spend any time summarizing the reading; rather, focus on your own original ideas about it. Keep in mind that your presentation must be accessible to undergraduates.

Seminar paper: Seminar papers of 5,000-6,000 words are due on Friday, Dec. 12 via email. Please see me individually to discuss your ideas for a paper topic. The paper will be developed in stages, with a 1,000 word draft/outline due on Dec. 4th (to be worked with in your reading group). Seminar papers are expected to draw on material that has been assigned to the whole class, material listed as optional readings (where relevant) and on works read in the reading groups.

SCHEDULE:

Introduction to the ‘moral dilemmas debate,’ and to (purported) examples of moral dilemmas.

Thur., Aug. 28

Film: *Sophie’s Choice*.

Thur., Sept. 4

Optional background reading:

Terrance McConnell, entry on “Moral Dilemmas” in the (online) Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-dilemmas/>

Christopher Gowans, “Introduction: The Debate on Moral Dilemmas” in *Moral Dilemmas* (edited by Gowans); [electronic & traditional reserves].

Required reading:

Plato: *Republic*, 331b-332 (handout).

Immanuel Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives” (handout).

Jean-Paul Sartre: selection from *Existentialism is a Humanism* (handout).

The experientialist or phenomenological approach in support of moral dilemmas; the ‘moral remainder’ argument.

Thur., Sept. 11

Bernard Williams, “Ethical Consistency,” chapter 11 in *Problems of the Self*. Electronic reserves, and reprinted in Gowans, ed., *Moral Dilemmas*.

Ruth Barcan Marcus. “Moral Dilemmas and Consistency.” *The Journal of Philosophy* 77 (3) (March 1980): pp. 121-136. Electronic reserves, and reprinted in Gowans, ed., *Moral Dilemmas*.

Optional additional reading:

Bernard Williams, “Conflicts of Values,” chapter 5 in *Moral Luck*. Electronic reserves.

The ‘plurality of values’ argument in support of moral dilemmas.

Thur., Sept. 18

E.J. Lemmon. “Moral Dilemmas” *The Philosophical Review* 71 (2) (April 1962): pp. 139-158. Electronic reserves, and reprinted in Gowans, ed., *Moral Dilemmas*.

Thomas Nagel, “The Fragmentation of Value,” chapter 9 (pgs. 128-141) in *Mortal Questions*. Electronic reserves, and reprinted in Gowans, ed., *Moral Dilemmas*.

Intuitionist and utilitarian arguments against moral dilemmas.

Thur., Sept. 25

Sir David Ross, "Prima Facie Duties." Reprinted in Gowans, ed., *Moral Dilemmas*.

R.M. Hare, "Moral Conflicts" Reprinted in Gowans, ed., *Moral Dilemmas*.

Kantian/rationalist arguments against moral dilemmas.

Thur., Oct. 2

Alan Donagan, "Consistency in Rationalist Moral Systems." *The Journal of Philosophy* 81 (6) (June 1984): pp. 291-309. Electronic reserves, and reprinted in Gowans, ed., *Moral Dilemmas*.

Christine Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 15(1) (Autumn, 1986): pp. 325-249. Electronic reserves.

Optional additional reading:

Earl Conee. "Against Moral Dilemmas." *The Philosophical Review* 91 (1) (Jan. 1982): pp. 87-97. Electronic reserves, and reprinted in Gowans, ed., *Moral Dilemmas*.

Barbara Herman, "Obligation and Performance: A Kantian Account of Moral Conflict" in *Identity, Character and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Owen Flanagan and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, 1990. pp. 311-337. Electronic reserves.

Thomas Hill, Jr.. "Moral Dilemmas, Gaps and Residues." In *Human Welfare and Moral Worth: Kantian Perspectives*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002): pp. 362-403. Electronic reserves (originally published 1996 in Mason, ed., *Moral Dilemmas and Moral Theory*).

David Brink, "Moral Conflict and Its Structure." *The Philosophical Review* 103 (2) (April 1994): pp. 215-247. Electronic reserves (reprinted in Mason, ed., *Moral Dilemmas and Moral Theory*).

Thur., Oct. 9: no class, *Yom Kippur*

Dirty Hands

Thur., Oct 16

Optional background reading:

Jean-Paul Sartre, "Dirty Hands" (Les Mains Sales) in *No Exit and Three Other Plays*.
Traditional reserves only.

Required reading:

Michael Walzer. "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands" *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2 (2) (Winter 1973): pp. 160-180. Electronic reserves.

Michael Stocker, "Dirty Hands and Ordinary Life" chapter 1 (pgs 9-36) in *Plural and Conflicting Values*. Electronic reserves.

Optional additional reading:

Michael Stocker, "Dirty Hands and Conflicts of Values and of Desires in Aristotle's Ethics" chapter 3 in *Plural and Conflicting Values*.

Affirming moral dilemmas and expanding ethics beyond action guidance.

Thur., Oct. 23

Michael Stocker, "Moral Immorality", chapter 2 in *Plural and Conflicting Values*.

Michael Stocker, "Moral Conflicts: What They Are and What They Show." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 68 (1987): pp. 104-123. Electronic reserves, and reprinted as chapter 4 in *Plural and Conflicting Values*.

Thur., Oct. 30

Christopher Gowans, *Innocence Lost: An Examination of Inescapable Moral Wrongdoing*, chapters 1-5.

Thur., Nov. 6

Christopher Gowans, *Innocence Lost: An Examination of Inescapable Moral Wrongdoing*, chapters 6 & 9.

Optional additional reading:

Chapters 7 & 8.

Thur., Nov. 13

Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Part I (chapters 1-3).

Optional additional reading:

Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20 (1991): pp. 223-246. Electronic reserves.

Thur., Nov. 20

Reading groups.

Thur., Nov. 27: no class, Thanksgiving

Thur., Dec. 4

Reading groups.

Thur., Dec. 11

Undergraduate papers due.

Student presentations.