Leadership Ethics
LDST 450, Section 2

Fall 2008

Course Syllabus

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Office Hours: Open door and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, you will construct and analyze arguments about what actions are morally right, what goals are morally good, and what aspects of character are morally virtuous. In this respect, the course is similar to other endeavors in ethical inquiry in that it too seeks to answer the basic question: what matters morally? This question is made concrete in the exercise of leadership. General ethical problems take on a particular guise in leadership contexts. So this course is different from other courses in ethics in that it uses moral philosophy to address central issues in leadership studies. Our main goal will be to identify and understand the peculiar moral challenges faced by leaders.

We begin the course by framing traditional ethical questions in leadership contexts. Some examples are the following: Is morality relative? Does it depend on a leader’s culture or personal beliefs? Does anything count morally aside from a leader’s self-interest—a leader’s wants, plans, and projects? Is it possible for leaders to act against self-interest if morality asks that they do so? Can morality and self-interest be reconciled? Is character the focus of the ethical analysis of leaders, or should we look instead to particular actions? If ethics is concerned primarily with the actions of leaders, should our assessments of their behavior consider the intentions behind the actions—what was willed—or the consequences in which leaders’ actions result? What should be the basis of a leader’s motivation? Do consequences other than pain and pleasure matter morally?

As we work through these questions, we will pay special attention to the moral psychology of leadership. Moral psychology is a subfield of ethics dedicated to the study of the relationships between belief, motivation, and action. In this class, we will consider whether a central component of the moral psychology of leadership is a belief about justification—namely, that leaders are sometimes justified in doing what others are not allowed to do. If ethical leadership is consistent with moral rule breaking, then there must be a convincing reason or set of reasons for leaders to behave in ways that are proscribed for the rest of us. Leadership ethics would thus bring with it a distinctive demand for justification.
What reasons might leaders use to justify their behavior? There are several potential lines of justification, most of which are variations on the reasons any person might give for breaking rules that apply more generally to others. The morally relevant difference is that leaders who appeal to these reasons seem to be in a relatively better position to build a special case for rule-breaking behavior. Some plausible reasons include the following: he did it…

- because he has his own morality (moral relativism).
- because he does not care about morality (amoralism).
- because he could (egoism).
- because he is special (virtue ethics).
- because we said he could (social contract theory).
- because he had to (moral situationism).
- because he has special obligations to his group (communitarianism).
- because it was for a higher cause (cosmopolitanism).

Any of these reasons could be similarly applied by one of us in an attempt to justify our own behavior. What distinguishes an appeal to these reasons in the leadership context, however, is that the rule breaker’s standing as a leader generally gives (at least the impression of) greater substance to the justification. More so than the rest of us, leaders may well be in a position to develop a convincing argument based on one or more of these reasons.

One particular situation for ethical concern is the case in which a leader and followers use their roles to justify unethical behavior. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in group contexts. In an attempt to understand the place of role morality and partiality in unethical leadership, we will pay particular attention to historical examples of moral disasters such as the Holocaust, My Lai, and lynching in America.

This course is designed for rigorous discussion of the issues, which means that all participants bear an equal burden in the explaining, critiquing, and developing the ideas conveyed in the readings. To facilitate this process, each student will be asked to prepare weekly papers on the readings and on the implications that these readings have for our understanding of moral leadership. I will regularly ask students to speak from their papers as an impetus to our discussions.

Please note that we begin and end on time, and that students are expected to be in class for the entire class period. You may use computers in class, but you must first send me an email pledging that you will restrict your usage to the course-related activities of note-taking and accessing course readings.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- The student should develop an intellectually sophisticated view of the relationship between morality and self-interest and, in particular, of the ways in which this relationship is manifested in the exercise of leadership.
- The student should be able to catalog the strengths and weaknesses of competing theories of moral leadership.
• Drawing on philosophical ethics, the student should become a keen moral observer of leadership and, for example, recognize the justifications leaders give for exception making.
• The student should learn how to critique moral arguments and how to present moral arguments of his own.
• The student should be able to analyze past ethical problems from a broadened moral perspective and to address future ones with the mature use of moral imagination.
• The student should become cognizant both of the particular moral perils associated with the exercise of leadership and of the features of this process that give rise to these perils: the focus on truth, the appeals to emotion, the utilization of power, the connection to the group, and the preoccupation with consequences.
• The student should be able to provide an ethically informed reading of leadership theory.

REQUIRED TEXTS


REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Class Contribution 10%
2. Weekly Essays 10%
3. Midterm Examination 20%
4. Term Paper 30%
5. Final Examination 30%
6. Holocaust Museum P/F

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1 The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System as sanctioned by the School of Arts and Sciences. **Every piece of written work** must have the honor pledge and the student’s signature on it. The pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.” I reserve the right the refuse to accept any work submitted without the honor pledge.
Attendance affects your class contribution grade. If you are absent, you will not be able to contribute to the class. Punctual and full class attendance is also required for essay credit. Weekly essays critique, analyze, and develop the arguments in the readings for the assigned day. They should take the following form: 1 single-spaced, typed page, consisting of at least 600 words, per week for 10 weeks. Failure to conform to these requirements will result in a loss of credit for your work. Essays must be posted to blackboard by 5:00 p.m. on Monday and 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, each week. In some cases, the assignment days for the weekly essays will change. When this happens, you will be responsible for writing for the new assignment day and attending class on this day.

The instructor takes deadlines and scheduled exams very seriously. In fairness to your classmates, any difficulties that arise should be brought to my attention as soon as possible before the deadline or scheduled exam. No late work will be accepted, unless accompanied by a completed and approved request form. The form can be found attached to this syllabus. It cannot be used for weekly essays. Please note that computer problems never constitute an acceptable excuse.

Grading legend:

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If you need accommodations for any of the assessments, please contact the instructor during the first week of classes.
I. Introduction to Leadership Ethics

Tuesday, August 26: Villains and Heroes

II. Relativism

Thursday, August 28

*Primary Reading:*
- Midgley, “Trying Out One’s New Sword”
- Glover, Chapters 1, 3-6

*Secondary Reading:*
- Price, Chapter 1, pp. 15-24

Monday, September 1

**WEEKLY ESSAY 1 (Group A)**

Tuesday, September 2

*Primary Reading:*
- Bennett, “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn”

*Secondary Reading:*
- Price, Chapter 1, pp. 24-35

III. Egoism and the Exercise of Power

Wednesday, September 3

**WEEKLY ESSAY 1 (Group B)**

Thursday, September 4

*Primary Reading:*
- Plato, “Justice and the Leader”

*Secondary Reading:*
- Price, Chapter 3, pp. 65-73

Monday, September 8: **WEEKLY ESSAY 2 (Group A)**

Tuesday, September 9

*Primary Readings:*
- Plato, “Ring of Gyges”
- Ludwig and Longenecker, “The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders”

*Secondary Reading:*
- Price, Chapter 3, pp. 73-81
Wednesday, September 10
WEEKLY ESSAY 2 (Group B)

Thursday, September 11
Primary Reading:
Rand, “Why Self-Interest Is Best”
Secondary Reading:
Price, Chapter 3, pp. 81-89

IV. Leadership and Necessity

Monday, September 15
WEEKLY ESSAY 3 (Group A)

Tuesday, September 16:
Secondary Reading: Price, Chapter 6, pp. 158-164

Wednesday, September 17
WEEKLY ESSAY 3 (Group B)

Thursday, September 18
Primary Reading:
Machiavelli, “The Qualities of Princes”
Secondary Reading:
Price, Chapter 6, pp. 142-151

Monday, September 22
WEEKLY ESSAY 4 (Group A)

Tuesday, September 23
Primary Reading:
McCoy, “The Parable of the Sadhu”
Secondary Reading:
Price, Chapter 6, pp. 151-158

V. Kantian Leadership

Wednesday, September 24
WEEKLY ESSAY 4 (Group B)
Thursday, September 25

*Primary Reading:*
  - Kant, “Good Will, Duty, and the Categorical Imperative”

*Secondary Reading:*
  - Price, Chapter 2, pp. 38-43

Monday, September 29

WEEKLY ESSAY 5 (Group A)

Tuesday, September 30

*Primary Reading:*
  - Kant, “Good Will, Duty, and the Categorical Imperative”

*Secondary Reading:*
  - Price, Chapter 2, pp. 44-51

Thursday, October 2

MIDTERM EXAM

VI. Utilitarian Leadership

Monday, October 6

WEEKLY ESSAY 5 (Group B)

Tuesday, October 7

*Primary Reading:*
  - Mill, “What Utilitarianism Is”

*Secondary Reading:*
  - Price, Chapter 8, pp. 192-201

Wednesday, October 8

WEEKLY ESSAY 6 (Group A)

Thursday, October 9

*Primary Reading:*
  - Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

*Secondary Reading:*
  - Price, Chapter 8, pp. 201-204

Friday, October 10 through Tuesday, October 14: Fall Break

VII. Virtue Theory

Wednesday, October 15

WEEKLY ESSAY 6 (Group B)
Thursday, October 16

Primary Reading:
Aristotle, “Virtue Ethics”

Secondary Reading:
Price, Chapter 4, pp. 93-96

Monday, October 20

WEEKLY ESSAY 7 (Group A)

Tuesday, October 21

Primary Reading:
Aristotle, “Virtue Ethics”

Secondary Reading:
Price, Chapter 4, pp. 101-116

VIII. Social Contract Theory

Wednesday, October 22

WEEKLY ESSAY 7 (Group B)

Thursday, October 23

Primary Reading:
Hobbes, “Self-Interest and Human Nature”

Secondary Reading:
Price, Chapter 5, pp. 119-128

Monday, October 27

WEEKLY ESSAY 8 (Group A)

Tuesday, October 28

Primary Reading:
Rawls, “Distributive Justice”

Secondary Reading:
Price, Chapter 5, pp. 128-135

IX. Transforming and Charismatic Leadership

Wednesday, October 29

WEEKLY ESSAY 8 (Group B)
Thursday, October 30

*Primary Reading:*
Burns, “The Structure of Moral Leadership”

*Secondary Reading:*
Price, Chapter 8, pp. 204-214

Monday, November 3

WEEKLY ESSAY 9 (Group A)

Tuesday, November 4

*Primary Reading:*
Lindholm, “‘The Only God You’ll Ever See’: Jim Jones and the People’s Temple”

X. Role Morality

Wednesday, November 5

WEEKLY ESSAY 9 (Group B)

Thursday, November 6

*Primary Reading:*
Solomon, Chapters 10-12 and 16, pp. 160-167

*Secondary Reading:*
Price, Chapter 7, pp. 165-173

Monday, November 10

Background Reading—Jonathan Glover, Part VI, “The Will to Create Mankind Anew: The Nazi Experiment”

Tuesday, November 11

*Eichmann on the Stand*

Thursday, November 13

*Eichmann on the Stand (con.)*

Saturday, November 15

REGIONAL ETHICS BOWL, UNC-CHAPEL HILL

Monday, November 17

WEEKLY ESSAY 10 (Group A)

Tuesday, November 18

*Primary Reading:*
Hannah Arendt, “The Accused” and “An Expert on the Jewish Question”
IX. Ethics in Groups

Wednesday, November 19
   WEEKLY ESSAY 10 (Group B)

Thursday, November 20
   Primary Reading:
      Glover, Chapters 8-9, 42-43

Monday, November 24
   WEEKLY ESSAY 11 (Group A)

Tuesday, November 25
   Primary Reading:
      Essays from Without Sanctuary

Wednesday, November 26
   ETHICAL ANALYSIS DUE (Thanksgiving break begins)

Monday, December 1
   WEEKLY ESSAY 11 (Group B)

Tuesday, December 2
   Primary Reading:
      Price, Chapter 7, pp. 184-190

Thursday, December 4
   Course Summary and Discussion

Tuesday, December 9, 2:00-5:00
   FINAL EXAM
REQUEST FOR EXTENSION/MAKE-UP

1. Today’s Date:

2. Original Assignment Date:

3. Reason for Extension/Make-up:

4. Proposed Due Date/Make-up Date:

5. Instructor Signature:

6. Your Signature:

Submit this form with the completed assignment (e.g., paper, make-up exam, etc.). This form will not be accepted if incomplete (e.g., if #5 is blank).