Course Syllabus

Instructor: Terry L. Price
E-mail: tprice@richmond.edu
Meeting Requests: Please contact me via email to set up a Zoom session.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will analyze and construct arguments about what leadership behaviors are morally right, what ends of leadership are morally good, and what aspects of a leader’s character are morally virtuous. In this respect, the course is similar to other courses in ethics—in that it too seeks to answer the basic question: what matters morally? However, this question takes on a particular guise in leadership contexts. Do the same things matter morally in leadership, and do they matter in the same way or to the same extent? So, this course is different from other courses in ethics in that it uses philosophy to investigate the moral distinctiveness of leadership. Our main goal will be to identify and understand the peculiar moral challenges faced by leaders, as well as potential responses and solutions.

We begin the course by framing traditional ethical questions in leadership contexts. Some examples are the following: Are leaders special? Do they have their own morality? What motivates them to lead? 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? 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 well-being and happiness 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. Throughout the course, we will use my book Leadership Ethics: An Introduction to consider a central component of the moral psychology of leadership: a belief about justification—namely, that leaders are sometimes justified in doing what others are not allowed to do. If leaders have a convincing reason or set of reasons to behave in ways that are proscribed for the rest of us, then ethical leadership may be consistent with breaking the moral rules. We must therefore ask whether leaders are distinctive in terms of their ability to meet demands for justification.
Rule breaking is therefore a central theme—perhaps the central theme—in the course. **What are the rules and who gets to break them?** But there are many other, often related themes at the core of discussions in leadership ethics. These topics also raise questions about the moral distinctiveness of leadership. We will take up relativism, egoism, self-defense and defense of others, authenticity, moral saintliness, moral luck, dirty hands, the role of feelings, and charisma. All are topics worthy of examination on their own merits, but our work on them will allow us to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the main moral theories covered in the course.

In the concluding sessions of the course, we will turn to issues that fall under what we might call ethics broadly construed—what is a good, moral life in the times in which we find ourselves. In particular, we will take up the notions of moral progress, civil disobedience, and the practical value of philosophical ethics.

All of my courses are designed for rigorous discussion of the issues, which means that students bear an equal burden in explaining, critiquing, and developing the ideas conveyed in the readings. To facilitate this kind of engagement, I will inquire about class preparation at the beginning of each class and regularly call on people so that they can **Demonstrate Class Preparation.** Each student is also required to write at least one **Short Paper.** Short papers are 800-1000 words and engage critically with readings identified as “short paper opportunities.” I will sometimes use these papers to structure class and ask that they be read aloud, so they are due to me via email by 5 p.m. on Thursday for Section 4 and by 9 a.m. on Friday for Section 5. I strongly recommend that you write more than one short paper. Your **Solution Paper** must be based on work from your short papers. Also, each additional short paper that you write (up to four total short papers) adds one point to the grade of your strongest short paper. You may choose once to write on a reading from the class just previous.

**Attendance** affects your Demonstrated Class Preparation grade, your Short Papers grade (in-person or virtual attendance for the entire class is required for your paper to count), and—in all likelihood—your Reading Tests grades. Please email me if you need to attend class remotely or are unable to attend class.

Please note that we **begin and end on time** and that students are expected to remain in class for the entire class period. We will take a break! Remote students are expected to enable their video but to disable their microphones when not speaking. In-person students may use computers or other devices in class, but usage should be restricted to the course-related activities note taking, accessing course readings, and engaging with remote students. **Recording class sessions or meetings is strictly prohibited.** Unnecessary devices must be silenced and placed out of view during class. All students, including remote students, should minimize distractions and respect the rules of standard classroom etiquette.
COURSE OBJECTIVES

• The student should understand the relationship between leadership and rule breaking.
• 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, in particular, the moral psychology of leadership.
• The student should learn how to critique moral arguments and how to present original moral arguments.
• The student should be able to recognize and respond to peculiar challenges to our moral assessments of leadership: relativism, moral luck, and dirty hands cases.
• The student should be able to provide an ethically informed reading of leadership theory.

REQUIRED TEXTS


Blackboard Readings.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Demonstrated Class Preparation 25%
2. Short Papers 20%
3. Reading Test 1 10%
4. Reading Test 2 15%
5. Solution Paper 30%

I take deadlines and scheduled exams seriously. In fairness to your classmates, any emergencies that arise should be brought to my attention as soon as possible before the deadline or scheduled exam. Otherwise, I do not accept late work. I will accept and grade incomplete work.

I will round final grades. For example, 92.5 is sufficient for an A in this course.

1 I reserve the right to refuse to accept any work submitted without the honor pledge.
Grading legend:

- A+ 97-100
- A 93-96
- A- 90-92
- B+ 87-89
- B 83-86
- B- 80-82
- C+ 77-79
- C 73-76
- C- 70-72
- D+ 67-69
- D 63-66
- D- 60-62
- F 50-59

**SCHEDULE** (subject to change with conditions)
* Short Paper Opportunity

I. The distinctive challenge of leadership ethics: rule breaking

Friday, August 28
Hollander, “Conformity, Status, and Idiosyncrasy Credit”
Hollander, “Competence and Conformity in the Acceptance of Influence”
Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 1-8; 29-35

II. What is the nature of the rules, and why do people break them (and how should we react to people who do)?

Friday, September 4
Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility”*
Moody-Adams, “Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance”*

Friday, September 11
Plato, *Republic*, 32-53
Ludwig and Longenecker, “The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders”*
Price, “Explaining vs. Responding to Ethical Failures in Leadership”
Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 73-81
III. What are the moral rules? (Or is that even the right way to think about ethics?)

Friday, September 18
Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 61-94
Korsgaard, “The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil”*
Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 38-43

Friday, September 25
Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 95-113
Flanigan, “The Ethics of Authentic Leadership”*
Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 44-51

Friday, October 2
Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 185-209
Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”*
Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 192-204

Friday, October 9
Wolf, “Moral Saints”*
Machan, “Moral Philosophy and Society”*

Friday, October 16
Annas, “Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing”*

IV. When bad luck and necessity get in the way…

Friday, October 23
Reading Test 1
Nagel, “Moral Luck”*
Williams, “Moral Luck”*

Friday, October 30
Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 54-72
Walzer, “Political Action: The Dilemma of Dirty Hands”*
Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 142-151

Friday, November 6
Thalos, “Dirty Hands: The Phenomenology of Acting As an Authorized Agent”*
Price, “Feeling and Dirty Hands: The Role of Regret Experienced by Responsible Agents”
Bennett, “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn”*
V. What do we do now?

Friday, November 13
   Flanigan, “Charisma and Moral Reasoning”*
   Moody-Adams, “The Idea of Moral Progress”

Friday, November 20
   Reading Test 2
   Candice Dalmas, “Civil Disobedience”

Friday, November 27
   THANKSGIVING WEEK

Friday, December 4
   Buss, “Some Musings…”
   Appiah, “The Ends of Ethics”

Tuesday, December 15
   FINAL PAPERS DUE VIA EMAIL—(Friday, December 11, strongly preferred)