

**Leadership Ethics
LDST 450, Section 4**

Fall 2021

Course Syllabus

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Meeting Requests: Please contact me via email to set up an in-person or 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 among 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, and the role of feelings*. 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 theories of moral leadership 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 as a leader and/or follower? In particular, we will take up the notions of *conscience, charismatic motivation, 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 sometimes ask questions to see who has carefully completed the reading, and I regularly call on people so that they can **Demonstrate Class Preparation**. At the beginning of each class, you should be prepared to answer the following questions:

1. What did you find most interesting about the reading?
2. Given the central questions of the course, what is the author's most important, provocative, or controversial claim?
3. What part of the author's argument is most susceptible to critique?

Each student is also required to write at least one **Short Paper**. Short papers are 800-1000 words, and they 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 9 a.m. on Thursday. 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. Assuming you haven't already taken advantage of this option, you can use it to get credit for a paper submitted after 9 a.m. on Thursday. Otherwise, please do not put me in a position reject late papers.

Attendance affects your **Demonstrated Class Preparation** grade, your **Short Papers** grade (in-person 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 are unable to attend class. **Do not attend class if you are symptomatic or ill.**

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! You may use computers and tablets in class, but usage should be restricted to the course-related activities of note taking and accessing course readings. **Recording class sessions or meetings is strictly prohibited.** Unnecessary devices

must be silenced and placed out of view during class. All 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

Terry L. Price, *Leadership Ethics: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Blackboard Readings.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING¹

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.** There is no “extra credit.”

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

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

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

HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS COURSE

Pretty much failsafe in my experience!

1. Attend all classes.
2. Complete all readings in advance of class meetings.
3. Write the maximum number of short papers (4).
4. Be an informed participant in discussions by drawing directly on the texts.
5. Write a final paper that builds on your best short paper and responds to my comments and—if applicable—the comments of your classmates.

SCHEDULE (subject to change as the semester progresses)

*** Short Paper Opportunity**

I. The distinctive challenge of leadership ethics: rule breaking

Thursday, August 26

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 do people break them (and how should we react to people who do)?

Thursday, September 2

Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility"*

Moody-Adams, "Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance"*

Thursday, September 9

Plato, *Republic*, 32-53

Ludwig and Longenecker, "The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders"*

Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 73-81

III. What are the moral rules? (Or is that even the right way to think about ethics?)

Thursday, September 16

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 61-94

Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil"*

Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 38-43

Thursday, September 23

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 95-113

Flanigan, "The Ethics of Authentic Leadership"*

Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 44-51

Thursday, September 30

Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 185-209

Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"*

Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 192-204

Thursday, October 7

Wolf, "Moral Saints"*

Kalin, "In Defense of Egoism"*

Thursday, October 14

Reading Test 1

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 33-53

Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 101-103, 114-116

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

Thursday, October 21

Annas, "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing"* (Virtue ethics con.)

Nagel, "Moral Luck"*

Williams, "Moral Luck"*

Thursday, October 28

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 54-72

Walzer, "Political Action: The Dilemma of Dirty Hands"*

Price, *Leadership Ethics*, 142-151

Thursday, November 4

Thalos, "Dirty Hands: The Phenomenology of Acting As an Authorized Agent"*

Price, "Feeling and Dirty Hands: The Role of Regret Experienced by Responsible Agents"

V. What is moral motivation? (And what do we do now?)

Thursday, November 11

Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn"*

Flanigan, "Charisma and Moral Reasoning"*

Thursday, November 18

Reading Test 2

Appiah, "The Ends of Ethics"*

Thursday, November 25

THANKSGIVING WEEK

Thursday, December 2

Buss, "Needs (Someone Else's), Projects (My Own), and Reasons"*

Mason, "Why Philosophy Matters"*

Tuesday, December 14

FINAL PAPERS DUE VIA EMAIL (By 12:00 p.m.—Thursday, December 9, strongly preferred)