

**AI 188 Making Difficult Decisions: Moral Life in Modern Culture
Winter Quarter, 2005**

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Location: Loop, Mondays, January 3 - March 12, 2005, 6:00 – 9:00 PM

I will be available for pre-arranged meetings before class on Mondays.

Course Description

“It’s not illegal.” Is this statement a sufficient basis for moral decision-making? Do people have one set of values for their “private life” and another set of values for getting by at work? Is there a “public” morality? If yes, what is its basis? “Modern Life in Modern Culture” provides a window into the ways that people make some of the most difficult choices in their lives (for example, having an abortion, volunteering for military service or declaring conscientious objection, requesting “Do Not Resuscitate” orders for an ill and aged parent, etc.). The course readings, written exercises, and classroom activities will provide you with a framework that will help you to better understand your moral decision-making. This framework will also help you to better understand the decisions that other people make. A major focus of the course will be the different moral languages that influence the decision-making of most modern Americans, but which many of us are not able to sort out. The course will also emphasize the role that social institutions play in our decision-making processes.

Kevin Buckley earned an M.A. in Liberal Studies from DePaul University. He has more than twenty years experience in conducting training programs in both for-profit and non-profit settings. He has conducted continuing education programs at the Newberry Library in Chicago and at Loyola University’s Institute of Pastoral Studies. He works in the advising center at the Loop campus and has been a member of the SNL visiting faculty since January 2001.

Competencies

A-3-F. Can compare two or more philosophical perspectives on the relationship of the individual to the community.

You will develop this competence in class where we will discuss communitarian and libertarian understandings of the relationship of the individual to society. You will learn how modern perspectives on this relationship may differ from earlier views.

A-4. Can analyze a problem using two different ethical systems.

You will develop this competence when you learn about pre-modern and modern ethical systems. You will have an opportunity to apply your understanding during classroom “mini-case” discussions and in a series of short analytic papers.

H-3-G. Can analyze the impact of social institutions on individual human development.

You will learn a definition of social institutions that we will apply to the family, the economy, political life, and to organized religion. You will identify the impact of social institutions on the development of personal and group identity.

FX.

For those whose focus area is business or addresses a specific industry or profession, the competence statement will be: "Can describe the impact of social institutions on moral-decision making in the workplace." You will address the impact of selected social institutions on your industry or profession or workplace.

For those whose focus area is in the liberal arts, for example, writing, religion, political science, we will write a competence statement that relates ethics, political philosophy, *or* the impact of social institutions to your plan for your focus area.

Learning Experience

Classroom activities include brief presentations on key concepts, viewing of videotaped material, learning from each other during structured class discussions of the assigned reading, and small-group discussions of

mini-cases that illustrate course concepts.

Reading: Alan Wolfe, *Moral Freedom: The Search for Virtue in a World of Choice* (WW. Norton, 2001). In some editions, the title is *Moral Freedom: The Impossible Idea That Defines the Way We Live Now*. Either edition may be used. In addition to this book, course reading will include handout material that will be distributed each session.

You will do some additional reading for three short analytic papers that you will write for each of the competencies for which you have registered. You will also write two one-page analytic papers that apply course content to your personal life experience.

Classroom presentations, discussions, mini-case discussion and exercises provide information and opportunities for application of course content that are not provided in the reading assignments. Therefore, consistent attendance is expected. If you must miss class, please take notice before that date or within one day after the class. It is your responsibility to obtain notes from another class member after a class that you have missed. Since almost half of your grade is based on classroom participation, it is important that you complete classroom exercises that you missed because of an absence.

You will be expected to disclose some personal views and background information in written exercises and in classroom activities. However, this disclosure will be limited to information that you are comfortable sharing and that is appropriate for an academic setting. Because of the impact of the Bible on American culture, there will be some references to Biblical ethics during class discussions. My comments will address the Bible as a cultural document and will not reflect a specific faith tradition. No prior academic background in Bible study is necessary for this course.

Evidence That You Will Submit

A-3-F. Can compare two or more philosophical perspectives on the relationship of the individual to the community.

Your writing for this competence will address at least two understandings of the relationship of the individual to the community. Your writing will also address how your personal and family experiences have affected your perspectives on this relationship.

A-4. Can analyze a problem using two different ethical systems.

Your participation in class will demonstrate an ability to identify how an ethical system may address a specific issue. Your writing for this competence will give you the opportunity to apply a pre-modern and a modern ethical system to a specific issue or problem in society.

H-3-G. Can analyze the impact of social institutions on individual human development.

You will apply definitions of social institutions in classroom discussions and writing assignments. Your oral and written application of these definitions will emphasize the impact of social institutions on the development of personal identity and on the decisions that individuals make as family members, workers, and citizens. You will describe different ways of analyzing the impact of specific institutions on individual development.

FX. Can describe the impact of social institutions on moral-decision making in the workplace.

You will identify the ethical codes and the social institutions that most influence decision-making in your industry, profession, or workplace. You will also reflect on the role of virtue in your work life. *If we agree on a different competence statement for your focus area elective, your writing will reflect the revised statement.*

Criteria for Assessment

The criteria for class participation and written exercises will include the extent to which you have referenced your comments and questions to specific content in assigned readings or classroom “mini-case” scenarios, to outside authorities that you cite specifically, and to your own life experience or value systems that may differ from those of other students. Your grade will reflect the quality of your participation in class, and thus, absence from class or a pattern of tardiness may affect the final grade. Opportunities for

make-up work will be identified during the first session of the course.

All written assignments should follow the accepted practices of Standard English spelling, grammar, and usage. All primary and secondary sources should be appropriately acknowledged and cited. All papers should be typewritten or computer-generated, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and 12-point typeface. In the event that you are absent from class, the assignment should be emailed to the address at the beginning of this syllabus within twenty-four hours, unless other arrangements have been made.

The criteria for some writing assignments will address the extent to which you have demonstrated the competencies for which you have registered. To pass the course, it will be essential that you submit minimally-acceptable written work for each of your registered competencies. You may substitute a brief optional presentation for the final two-page analytic paper for one competence.

At the end of the quarter, I will ask you to submit a written reflection on what you have learned during the course. I will use this statement to supplement my own assessment of your work.

If you wish to take this class on a Pass-Fail basis, please inform me in writing before the second class session. Once you have chosen to do so, you cannot change back to a letter grade. If you need to take an incomplete in the class, you must discuss this with me before the tenth class session. At this time, in accordance with SNL policy, we will establish the time by which you will be expected to have completed all the work of the course and will sign a contract to that effect.

Vincentian Mission Statement

I am committed to providing you with feedback, responses, and guidance that embody the four Vincentian teaching principles: clarity, empathy, flexibility, and integrity.

Academic Integrity Policy Statement

Plagiarism is a violation of this university's academic integrity policy and carries severe penalties. Please refer to DePaul University's *Student Handbook* or at www.depaul.edu.

Outline of Topics

#1) January 3

- Introductions and overview of the course; key terms and concepts
- Discussion of course competencies and course expectations
- Mini-case discussion related to course competencies
- FX discussion

Reading for Session Two: *Moral Freedom*: Introduction; "Varieties of Moral Experience," pages 7-17.

#2) January 10

- The Good Life
- Moral sources and moral languages
- Divine revelation as a moral source
- Rule-based ethics; negative and positive morality
- A-4 discussion

Moral Freedom: "Varieties of Moral Experience," pages 7-22 and "Til Circumstances Do Us Part" (pages 23-40).

#3) January 17

- Virtue-based ethics
- The virtue of loyalty
- Institutions and trust; institutions and moral goods
- The workplace as a setting for moral formation and decision-making
- Individualism as a cultural and philosophical perspective
- A-3-F discussion

Moral Freedom: "Til Circumstances Do Us Part" (pages 40-62).

#4) January 24

- Moral messengers
- The family as a setting for moral formation and decision-making
- The family as social institution
- Morality based on a pluralism of social goods
- H-3-G discussion

Moral Freedom: “Eat Dessert First.”

#5) January 31

- The virtue of self restraint/self-discipline
- Social contract as a moral source; law and morality
- Principle-based ethics
- FX discussion

Moral Freedom: “Honesty, to a Point.”

#6) February 7

- The virtue of honesty
- Moral voices in the workplace
- The local community as a setting for moral formation and decision-making
- Analysis of consequences as the basis of the morality of an action or of a failure to act
- Religious and secular communitarianism
- A-4 discussion

Moral Freedom: “The Unappreciated Virtue.”

#7) February 14

- The virtue of forgiveness
- The virtue of justice
- Caring as a moral voice
- Measuring the success of an institution
- A-3-F discussion

Moral Freedom: “The Moral Philosophy of the Americans” (pages 167-178).

#8) February 21

- Application exercise: integration of course concepts
- Understandings of human nature as a moral source
- The religious congregation as moral space; religion and the social good
- Morality and resistance
- H-3-G discussion

Moral Freedom: “The Moral Philosophy of the Americans” (pages 178-197).

#9) February 28

- Educational institutions as settings for moral education and character formation
- Voluntary associations as moral space
- Morality and membership

Moral Freedom: “The Strange Idea of Moral Freedom.”

#10) March 7

- The "self" as a moral source
- The common good in a culture of tolerance
- Morality and civil society
- Moral life in future culture
- Optional classroom presentations

The topics listed above are tentative may be adjusted. Please hold March 14 in case it is necessary to cancel one of the earlier sessions.

10. Due Dates for Written Assignments (details to be provided in class)

Due Dates for Written Assignments

Specific details will be provided for each of the following:

- #2): January 10: Everyone: a one-page reflection paper
- #3): January 17: Everyone: a one-page reflection paper
- #4): January 24: Everyone: a partial draft of your *first* three-page analytic paper
- #5): January 31: No written paper due this session; drafts returned with comments
- #6): February 7: A-4 (only): a three-page analytic paper on a pre-modern ethical system
- #7): February 14: A-3-F; H-3-G; FX: a three-page analytic paper specific to your competence
- #8): February 21: A-4 only: a three-page analytic paper on a modern ethical system
- #9): February 28: A-3-F; H-3-G; FX: a three-page analytic paper specific to your competence
- #10) March 7: a two-page paper analyzing a moral or social issue from the perspective of two ethical systems or you may do a 5-6 minute presentation on this topic
- March 14 (by email):
 - Everyone: a one-page reflection on your learning in the course,
 - A-3-F; H-3-G; FX: a two-page analytic paper specific to your competence (or a 5-6 minute presentation during the tenth session).