

Vanguard University
School for Professional Studies
Degree Program

“ETHICS IN FILM”
COMM 230

Student Guide

ONLINE EDITION

01/11
v2.4

TEXTS AND MATERIALS

Required Text:

Nina Rosenstand. (2006). *The Moral of the Story: An Introduction to Ethics* (Sixth Edition). Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

Required Technology:

- Computer with word processing software and internet access including browsing (I.E., Firefox, Safari, etc.) and email capabilities.
- Webcam w/ microphone.
- Login credentials for the Vanguard University network.

Required Films:

- *Batman: The Dark Knight* (2008)
- *Return to Paradise* (1998)
- *Extreme Measures* (1996)
- *Crimson Tide* (1995)
- *Emperor's Club* (2002)

Recommended Texts:

Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Birch, Bruce and Larry L. Rasmussen. *Bible and Ethics in Christian life*. Rev. ed. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989.

Broad, Charlie E. *Five Types of Ethical Theory*. New York: Harcourt, 1930.

Davis, John Jefferson. *Evangelical Ethics*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985.

Feinberg, John & Feinberg, Paul. *Ethics for a Brave New World*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1993.

Fletcher, Joseph. *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966.

Frankena, William K. *Ethics*. 2d ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Geisler, Norman L. *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 1971.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Hays, Richard M. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1996.

Holmes, Arthur F. *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions*. Edited by C. S. Evans. *Contours of Christian Philosophy*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. 1984.

- Houlden, J.L. *Ethics and the New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Kant, Immanuel. *The Moral Law; or Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. London: Hutchinson, 1948.
- Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. *Toward Old Testament Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983.
- Long, Edward LeRoy, Jr. *A Survey of Christian Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Long, Edward LeRoy, Jr. *A Survey of Recent Christian Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *New Testament Social Ethics for Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. Wd ed., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935.
- Nielson, Kai. "Ethics, Problems of." In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3, pp. 117-134. Ogletree, Thomas W. *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1946.
- Pieper, Josef. *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965.
- Plato. *Euthyphro*. In *Five Dialogues*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981. Pojman, Louis P., ed. *Ethical Theory: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Co. 1989.
- Sampley, J. Paul. *Walking Between the Times: Paul's Moral Reasoning*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991.
- Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1965.
- Sher, George, ed. *Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987.
- Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods of Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981. Stout, Jeffrey. *Ethics After Babel*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.
- Stringfellow, William. *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*. Waco, TX: Word, 1973.
- Toulman, Stephen. *The Place Of Reason In Ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1950.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Through in home screenings, intensive online discussion and related readings, this course will examine films whose themes strongly concern the depiction of ethical and moral choice. This course will discuss the ways in which filmmakers create meaningful ethical dilemmas; how the characters' choices are portrayed; and how these portrayals may influence our own formulation of value systems and ethical choices.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course will provide the students with the following:

1. Understand and utilize ethical reasoning.
2. Understand the ethical issues surrounding film making.
3. Understand the nature of *Utilitarianism* and its usage to resolve ethical dilemmas.
4. Understand the nature of *Deontology* and its usage to resolve ethical dilemmas.
5. Understand the nature of *Virtue Theory* and its application to ethical dilemmas.
6. Explore the ways in which selected films depict various ethical dilemmas.
7. Examine how the characters' choices in a film are portrayed and how these portrayals may influence our own formulation of value systems and ethical choices.
8. Understand the intellectual and emotional impact of film upon the formulation of culture.

STUDENT EVALUATION

Students will receive a grade for the course based on the evaluation of their performance in the following areas:

- I. **Film Analyses:** The student will evaluate five films at home and will receive 50 points per film analysis.
- II. **Short Answer Questions:** Written work will consist of questions from the readings in *The Moral of the Story*. Each written assignment will be worth 50 points.
- III. **Online Discussions:** The student will join live online chat sessions with the instructor and other students to discuss the film. Each discussion will be worth 50 points.
- III. **Final:** The Final Exam will consist of an essay topic which will be emailed to the students in the final week of the course. The final will be worth 250 points.

A grade will be received from the total of the student's points for the in class film analyses, Short answer questions, online discussions, and Final according to the following scale:

Percentages	Points	Grade	Significance	GPA
93-100%	884-950	A	Exceptional	4.00
90-92.9%	855-883	A-		3.67
87-89.9%	854-827	B+		3.33
83-86.9%	826-789	B	Above Average	3.00
80-82.9%	788-760	B-		2.67
77-79.9%	759-732	C+		2.33
73-76.9%	731-694	C	Average	2.00
70-72.9%	693-665	C-		1.67
67-69.9%	664-637	D+		1.33
63-66.9%	636-599	D	Below Average	1.00
60-62.9%	598-570	D-		0.67
00-59.9%	000-569	F	Failure	0.00

All reading and written work is to be completed based on the schedule outlined on the course website. This includes the first week of class. Late work, as well as the failure to read all assignments, will result in a loss of points and will adversely affect your grade. Make every effort to be in class and be prepared to participate in class discussions.

Your weekly written work, and the final, will be graded for the soundness of your arguments, the critical use of class readings, class discussions, and for formal matters such as spelling, grammar, and formatting. The criteria for the evaluation of your work will include:

1. Proofing. Papers must be typed and proofed before they are submitted. Miss-typing and grammatical errors will be factors in the determination of your grade.
2. General hints for your Film Analysis and all other written work.
 - a. Coherence: Carefully developed? Is it thoughtful? Does it unfold in a logically coherent fashion?
 - b. Accuracy: Is the evidence it presents accurate?
 - c. Completeness: Is there additional evidence, which is important, but overlooked?
 - d. Methodology: Does the essay reflect a sound understanding of the argument of the film?

- e. Writing style: Is the essay grammatically correct? Is the prose interesting, clear, rhetorically appropriate?
- f. Sensitivity: Are the ethical issues dealt with in a sensitive manner? Is there evidence that the complexity of the issues is understood?

OVERVIEW

Films are the books to our times; films have become the vehicles of information, escape and entertainment for people living in Western culture. In terms of information, for good or ill, many modern people would footnote a movie as to the place where they were informed about history and historical figures. For example, my suspicion is that all of the knowledge most modern people have about King Arthur and his Roundtable would be sourced in one of a myriad of movies concerning this historical figure over the past sixty years. Thus, history and movies have become one. Any license Hollywood took, with the actual history of Arthur and his Knights of the Roundtable, would not be known by the average moviegoer. This is not to place any intention of malice upon the producer's of these kinds of films that deal with historical figures. Rather, it is to highlight the way film becomes a vehicle of information whether it is intended to be or not. My purpose is to simply illustrate that "Films have become the books to our culture."

Furthermore, films come in various forms: some are produced for pure entertainment value (although they may contain subtle arguments) and other films have the function of arguing for specific claims about values, ends, or goals for human existence. When one discusses values, ends, or goals one is entering the realm of ethics.

Thus, the study of film is crucial to being an educated and culturally aware person. Moreover, this course will help you understand the connection between ethics and films. Ethics is the philosophical study of morality. Morality, which comes from the Latin *mores*, refers to the accepted values of a society. The tenets of a particular culture's morality are not necessarily ethical. For example, slavery was once the morality of Southern culture in the United States of America. However, even though this was the accepted "morality" it was never ethically justifiable.

Many films attempt to argue for the acceptance of certain behaviors and lifestyles so that these behaviors and lifestyles will become part of the cultural morality. When the filmmaker attempts to influence the cultural morality they are trying to have life reflect art. Although art is a powerful tool to influence thinking, believing, and acting, it is as Plato said, "The lowest form of knowledge." Plato's comment is not a "put down" of the various forms of art. Rather, it is a

warning to the naïve who may not understand the limits and nature of the various forms of human expression. Having a daughter who is an artist, I am in no way against art. However, one must understand the nature and limits of art as a vehicle or expression of reality and most importantly the conveying of ethical stances. One must understand the difference between aesthetics and epistemology acknowledging that each has its own knowledge reference points.

Therefore, this course will examine the connection between ethics and film. We want to understand the various theories of ethics and show how they are expressed in film. Of course, some films may be so bold as to argue for the non-existence of any absolute values that transcend all subjects.

COURSE POLICIES

- **ATTENDANCE AND TARDY POLICY**

Although online classes do not keep attendance in the same manner as a traditional course, you will need to make sure you watch all online lessons, participate in every online forum, and continue to check in with the course website as often as necessary to stay current with the course.

- **COURSE PARTICIPATION**

You must be prepared and participate in all online discussions. Criterion: Is the student engaged in classroom discussions? Does the student demonstrate an ability to handle assigned material with a degree of proficiency? (E.g., demonstrate the type of questions and issues consistent, and reflecting a familiarity with the assigned material). Participation evaluated according to quality, not quantity, of participation.

- **SUBMISSION OF FINAL EXAMS / PAPERS**

The School for Professional Studies office does not assume responsibility for any final papers. No homework or final papers will be accepted for professors in the SPS office, nor will final papers be returned to students through the SPS office.

The method for the submission of homework and the final exam or final paper will be determined by the professor. The professor will discuss the method which will be employed during the first night of class. All exchanges of papers will be between the student and the professor.

- **LATE PAPER POLICY**

You are responsible for submitting assignments on time (by 6:00 pm). Unless authorized by the Professor in advance, no credit will be given for assignments not turned in when due. Any assignments that are accepted late will be subject to

- **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Work submitted for assessment purposes must be the independent work of the student concerned. Plagiarism, or copying and use of another's work without proper acknowledgment, is not permitted. Nor is it permissible for any former or present student to allow another student to refer to, use as a sample, or in any way copy or review their work. If a student needs guidance, he or she must seek the Professor's assistance.

- **DISABILITY SERVICES**

For students with documented medical or psychological disabilities, please contact the Coordinator of Disability Services to request reasonable accommodations. The Coordinator of Disability Services is located in the Counseling Center on the second floor of the Scott Academic Center and can be reached at extension 4489 or by email at disabilityservices@vanguard.edu

For students with a documented learning disability who would like to request appropriate accommodations, please contact the Director of Learning Skills, located upstairs in Scott Academic Center at extension 2540 or by email at disabilityservices@vanguard.edu

STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS**WEEK ONE**

Learning Objectives: To understand the power of stories and films and to analyze the theory of relativism.

Weekly Activities

1. Watch *Batman: The Dark Knight*.(2008)
2. Online Discussion of film as it relates to the week's topic.

Assignments Due

1. Read pages 47 through 95 in *The Moral of the Story* and carefully answer the Study Questions on page 95 and 96.
2. Read pages 115 through 143 in *The Moral of the Story* and carefully answer the Study Questions on pages 143 and 144.
3. Film analysis

WEEK TWO

Learning Objectives: To understand both psychological and ethical egoism.

Weekly Activities

1. Watch *Return to Paradise* (1998).
2. Online Discussion of film as it relates to the week's topic.

Assignments Due

1. Read pages 163 through 198 in *The Moral of the Story* and carefully answer the Study Questions on page 198.
2. Read the **Primary Reading** on pages 207 through 210 and answer the Study Questions on pages 210 and 211.
3. Film analysis

WEEK THREE

Learning Objectives: To understand both Act and Rule Utilitarianism.

Weekly Activities

1. Watch *Extreme Measures* (1996).
2. Online Discussion of film as it relates to the week's topic.

Assignments Due

1. Read pages 224 through 255 in *The Moral of the Story* and carefully answer the Study Questions on page 255 and 256.
2. Read the **Narrative** on pages 263 through 265 and answer questions 1 and 2 in the Study Questions on page 265.
3. Film analysis

WEEK FOUR

Learning Objectives: To understand the ethical theory of Deontology.

Weekly Activities

1. Watch *Crimson Tide*. (1995).
2. Online Discussion of film as it relates to the week's topic.

Assignments Due

1. Read pages 275 through 296 in *The Moral of the Story* and carefully answer the Study Questions on page 296.
2. Read the **Narrative** on pages 304 through 306 and answer the Study Questions on page 307.
3. Film analysis

WEEK FIVE

Learning Objectives: To understand the nature and application of Virtue Ethics

Weekly Activities

1. Watch *Emperor's Club*. (2002).
2. Online Discussion of film as it relates to the week's topic.

Assignments Due

1. Read pages 385 through 411 in *The Moral of the Story* and carefully answer the Study Questions on page 411 and 412.
2. Read the **Narrative** on pages 427 through 429 and answer the Study Questions on pages 429 and 430.
3. Film analysis