

LDST 390/PSYC 449: Empirical Exploration of Ethics Spring 2007	
Instructor	<p>Don Forsyth Office: 233 Jepson Hall Phone: 289-8461 Email: dforsyth@richmond.edu Office Hours: TTH AM and online</p> <p>Don completed his undergraduate studies at Florida State University and earned his Ph.D. at Florida in 1978. He has held teaching positions at Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Kansas, and the University of Richmond (Jepson School of Leadership Studies). He studies reactions to success and failure, individual difference in moral thought, applications of social psychology in educational and clinical settings, and group dynamics. He holds the Leo K. and Gaylee Thorsness Chair in Ethical Leadership.</p>
Class	Tuesday/Thursday 2:15-3:30 Jepson 107 (and 24/7 on the Internet via Blackboard)
Course description	When will an act, a thought, or a motive be characterized as immoral rather than moral? As evil rather than good? As wrong rather than right? The course Empirical Exploration of Ethics , rather than offering prescriptive answers to these questions—for example, a good act is one that is consistent with the highest moral principles or an act is only altruistic if done sole for the purpose of benefiting others—takes an empirical approach to ethics and morality by exploring the personal and interpersonal factors that influence moral thought, action, emotion, and motivation. The analysis will, in all cases, rely on approaches that have been supported by empirical research relevant to the moral phenomena of interest.
Course topics and goals	<p>We will restrict our analysis to moral phenomena that have been investigated empirically; that is, through the collection of data using scientifically acceptable procedures. We will examine such topics as: (a) the cognitive foundations of moral judgment, including cognitive-developmentalism (Kohlberg, 1983; Piaget, 1934), the cognitive algebra of information integration (Anderson, 1981), attributional approaches to social motivation and justice (Weiner, 2006), and social intuitionism (Haidt, 2001); (b) personological explanations of morality, including studies of personality (Hogan & Emler, 1995), values (Rokeach, 1973), virtues and strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), character (Lapsley & Power, 2005); and (c) biological and psychological explanations, such as evolutionary explanations (Wright, 1995) and psychodynamic views (Smith, 2004). We will, in keeping with the emphasis on the empirical tradition, examine ways to calibrate and assess moral thought and action.</p> <p>Beyond the content of the course, I hope that you use this course to develop further your already strong scholarly skills, including gains in critical thinking, ethical thought, writing and communication, information search and retrieval, technological skills, scientific skills, and study skills. You will may also develop enhanced insight into your own moral values and experiences, and these insights may help you better understand yourself and your relations with others. This is not, however, a course on moral philosophy and religion, or a self-development course: our focus is on studying, scientifically, moral phenomena.</p>
Teaching and learning methods	<p>This course will operate as a seminar, with all members participating in the discussion and analysis of each day's topic. Members will contribute to the discussion through presentations of particular studies, commentaries on issues, discussions of one's own scientific insights, and guided review of the text material. Topics will be drawn from selected readings, the primary texts, and a number of secondary texts. Discussions will provide you the opportunity to express your understanding in your own words, and to raise questions that you find personally interesting. In addition to discussion, we will also spend our classroom time in lecture, demonstrations, activities, and audiovisual events. All activities are designed to stimulate critical thinking. If you need addition information about a topic mentioned in the text, or you have a problem understanding a particular portion of the text, just ask.</p> <p>This class also uses World Wide Web-based instruction extensively. In some cases I will email additional materials to you, and if class must be cancelled I will hold the session on-line instead. Some discussions will occur on line as well, and so will office hours. Many of the activities, papers, quizzes, and supplemental readings will also take advantage of the WWW, primarily Blackboard and a wiki page.</p>

Textbook and readings	<p>Research suggests that students acquire as much as 50% of their learning in a course directly from the readings. The bulk of the readings will be empirical articles and chapters. We will, however, also read portions of several books, including</p> <p><i>Why we lie</i>, by David Livingstone Smith (2004)</p> <p><i>Generation Me</i> by Jean M. Twenge (2006).</p> <p><i>Habits of the Heart</i> by Robert N. Bellah et al. (1985).</p> <p>The reading load for this class will be fairly heavy, both in terms of quantity and in terms of level.</p>												
Activities and assignments	<p>Many, many assignments will be given through the semester, such as readings, writing reaction papers, reading and identifying weaknesses in an article, interviewing people about some class-relevant issue, conducting informal surveys, and so on. Many of these activities will involve substantial amounts of writing, including formal critiques of articles, cogent summaries of published studies, and brief reaction papers. The word "avalanche" aptly describes the density of these experiences. Occasionally the class will also undertake more unusual activities as they become available. You will be expected to take part in nonclass learning activities, such as the Jepson Forums.</p> <p>This course will also require a major paper, with portions due throughout the course of the semester.</p>												
Feedback about progress	<p>Your progress toward the goals of the class will be checked through quizzing and testing. Quizzes will usually be administered using the Blackboard, but occasionally in class. In-class quizzes will be closed-book, but Blackboard quizzes will be open-book. We will also have 2 examinations. All tests and quizzes will be announced, in advance, through e-mail. Naturally, items on the tests will cover all course material, no matter what its source (e.g., lecture, text, or film). The final examination will include some cumulative material, but you will be provided with a study preparation sheet for the cumulative portion of the final examination (only). Exams will be a mix of multiple choice and short answer.</p>												
Grading	<p>Your grade in the course depends on your successful completion of assigned tasks and overall engagement. A grade of A will be awarded only to those who complete assignments skillfully and are fully engaged (e.g., take an active and positive role in class). I will warn you, by the date for withdrawal, if I consider your work to be of failing quality. However, because much of your grade in class is based on material turned in after that date (e.g., your theory summary paper, final exam) this feedback will not be dispositive. Exams and major projects are weighted approximately equally.</p> <p>The grading in this class is not relative; your grade is based only on your performance (or, in the case of group activities, your group's performance). There is therefore no advantage to compete with others for a limited number of high grades. This course does, however, deal with complex subjects and is challenging. You should be careful to budget your time demands accordingly. Cut offs for grades are etched in stone, and based on the following percents:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>A+ 98-100%</td> <td>B+ 88 to 89.9</td> <td>C+ 78 to 79.9</td> <td>D+ 68 to 69.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A 92 to 97.9%</td> <td>B 82 to 87.9</td> <td>C 72 to 77.9</td> <td>D 62 to 67.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A- 90 to 91.9%</td> <td>B- 80 to 81.9</td> <td>C- 70 to 71.9</td> <td>D- 60 to 61.9</td> </tr> </table> <p>If technical or logistical problems arise (or errors in planning must be corrected), then this system may be revised. You will be notified, in class, of any changes. There is no "extra credit" in this class.</p>	A+ 98-100%	B+ 88 to 89.9	C+ 78 to 79.9	D+ 68 to 69.9	A 92 to 97.9%	B 82 to 87.9	C 72 to 77.9	D 62 to 67.9	A- 90 to 91.9%	B- 80 to 81.9	C- 70 to 71.9	D- 60 to 61.9
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Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please plan to arrive on time and remain until the final minute of class. • If you miss a class you are required to email me; you will be assigned a paper to write on a topic I select. The paper is due 1 week from the missed class. If you fail to email me you will be penalized. • If you must be absent from class for religious reasons, because you are involved in University-level athletics, or some other good reason, inform me by email of the conflict. • If you are ill on the day of an examination, please leave me a voice mail message prior to the class. You will have 1-week to make up the test. • Our classroom is OUR space. Please do not communicate with non class members during class time. You are encouraged to bring a laptop, but please turn off IM and email during class. • Please be certain to review and comply with the University of Richmond academic integrity policy and the Jepson School of Leadership policy pertaining to community standards and expectations. • Please heed the basic rules of etiquette pertaining to class discussion.
Disabilities	<p>Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 require I provide academic adjustments or accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students seeking such adjustments or accommodations should follow the procedures established by the University, and contact me as soon as possible so that adjustments or accommodations can be arranged.</p>
Sensitivity	<p>This course examines many aspects of human behavior, so students should realize that they may acquire insight into their own personalities, actions, and tendencies as a result of participation. In some cases we will complete questionnaires that measure aspects of your personalities, and our classroom discussions, the videos, and the activities will focus on many disappointing, shocking, or even disgusting aspects of human behavior. In all instances the knowledge you gain about yourself and others should be positive and useful, but it may be surprising as well. In general the goals of any particular exercise will be described beforehand except when full disclosure will undermine the educational or scientific value of the experience.</p> <p>The course also examines sensitive topics and ones where different people adopt widely differing interpretations and outlooks, including prejudice, religious values, spirituality, morality, and values. All of us should strive to remain sensitive to the feelings and perspectives of others during these discussions—but also respect each others right to express their views. We must show respect for one another and for people in general, and strive at all times to avoid the use of stereotypes, labels, and personal attacks. Feel free to debate and criticize ideas, but not individuals.</p>
Normative Assumptions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The central goal of this class: To examine morally positive and negative forms of human thought, action, and emotion from a dispassionate, scientific perspective. 2. Wax on, wax off, or: Time on task is essential; this course will require at least 9 percent of our time. Please do not miss classes and please arrive on time. 3. Our motivation is intrinsic. We study for the love of the knowledge, rather than the rewards that study will yield. 4. We are a collective, so all share responsibility for the exploration of leaders and leadership. Please be prepared to discuss all assigned texts. If you have questions or thoughts about the readings jot them down and bring them to class. 5. Nulla dies sine linea. 6. It is fine to focus on the details (the devil is, after all, in the details) while on your way to seeing the “big picture.” 7. Openness to experience is the 5th factor. 8. We are nimble.