

TEACHERS GUIDE

A Course on Ethical Theory or Applied Ethics.

RATIONALE

The use of narrative fiction to facilitate courses in ethics. Ethics is the science of the right and wrong in human action. Ethical theory discusses the foundations of such speculation while applied ethics explores *how* principles of normative theory are used to solve actual ethical situations.

Theory rationale

The theme of worldview choice and the place of desire are central to authentically and sincerely making a choice of worldview. One of the most crucial components to this is desire so that any theory that is meant to apply to actual humans living in the world must also take desire into account.

Applied rationale

The empirical richness of a narrative allows students to fully picture and situate ethical choice instances. The moments of ethical choice become alive in a narrative in ways that they do not in traditional, dry cases.

KEY THEMES OF THE BOOK

The protagonist is forced to make many ethical choices in the course of the narrative. Some he gets right and others he doesn't. Applying principles of traditional moral theory to these instances offers a chance to enlighten each. In addition, questions of freedom, ethics, worldview, and love (and our affective side) can be highlighted. For those interested in feminist ethics, the love/affective angle is very promising.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To be made aware of the activity of rational self-examination as a necessary ingredient in both ethical theory and in applied ethics.
- To understand the principal ethical theories and how they work to guide our lives.
- To understand the role of rational worldview examination both academically and experientially as one comes to the issues of living a good life.
- To be able to project such self-examination onto characters s/he can relate to.
- To be able to write about self-examination to become good from an academic and experiential point of view (including personal self-analysis).
- To situate these principles into actual problems presented first in the novel and then from contemporary social and political situations facing us today.

SAMPLE SEMESTER SYLLABUS (Ethical Theory)

Assigned books:

Overview book on ethical theories:

Michael Boylan, *The Extinction of Desire*

Julia Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals*

A reader on primary texts in ethics or the texts themselves in short versions, ***The Extinction of Desire***.

Weeks One through Nine

Alternate between the overview book and the primary texts covering the principal ethical theories. Go over four major theories for two weeks each.

Test or Paper on the major ethical theories.

Weeks Ten through Twelve

Discuss the novel in six classes:

- (a) the facts of the book and how they work together to highlight ethical issues.
- (b) highlight two incidents in light of each ethical theory.
- (c) discuss Michael's situation in light of the key ethical theories. How might things have turned out differently if one or another theory was highlighted?
- (d) How does 'desire' play a role in understanding ethical imperatives?
- (e) Evaluate the characters of Michael and Aisling vis-à-vis the reader's ethical judgments of each.
- (f) What does the reader make of the Buddhist worldview overlay? Does this alter our ethical judgment?

Two short papers on two of the six class topics.

Weeks Thirteen and Fourteen

Challenge students to come up with modern examples that focus upon the clash of theoretical approaches to ethics with an aim at understanding what each theory has to offer and where it might be deficient.

Five page paper on this assignment.

Final Project.

Find a way to integrate the three parts of the course into a single 12-page essay.

SAMPLE SEMESTER SYLLABUS (Applied Ethics)

Assigned books: Overview book on ethical theory such as Michael Boylan, *The Extinction of Desire* or Julia Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals*. A textbook on general practical problems in ethics or one in public policy (an instructor generated reader from the bookstore would also serve here). ***The Extinction of Desire***.

Recommended reading:

Hugh LaFollette, *The Practice of Ethics*

Edited by Hugh LaFollette, *Ethics in Practice, 3E*

Weeks One and Two:

Go over the major ethical theories from the overview book with class discussion.

Short Quiz on the ethical theories.

Weeks Three through Five:

Discuss the novel in six classes:

- (a) the facts of the book and how they work together to highlight ethical issues.
- (b) highlight two incidents in light of each ethical theory.
- (c) discuss Michael's situation in light of the key ethical theories. How might things have turned out differently if one or another theory was highlighted?
- (d) How does 'desire' play a role in understanding ethical imperatives?
- (e) Evaluate the characters of Michael and Aisling vis-à-vis the reader's ethical judgments of each.
- (f) What does the reader make of the Buddhist worldview overlay? Does this alter our ethical judgment?

Two short papers on two of the six class topics.

Weeks Six through Fourteen:

Go through your practical ethics text (general or specific—such as medical ethics or business ethics or environmental ethics, et al.). As you highlight cases, return both to the theory section and to the presentation of situated ethics in ***The Extinction of Desire***.

Final: One long examination of a particular practical problem or several shorter presentations to show facility at working on different problems.