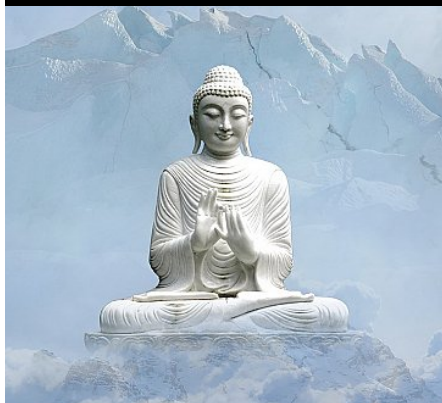




SCHEDULE

Tuesdays and Thursdays

9:30am - 10:45pm

ROOM

Cambridge Community Center

Room 1115

PROFESSOR

Dr. David Yager

ddyager@umd.edu

ZOOM appointments:

- better than regular office hours
- schedule them through the
CANVAS calendar

Appointment days:

Sundays 1:00 - 5:30

Mondays 1:30 - 6:00

Tuesdays 12:30 - 6:00

PREREQUISITES

PSYC 100

Should not take both PHIL 140
and PSYC 309D

CREDITS

Three

PSYC 309D

Living the Moral Life: Introduction to Ethics for Psychology Students *Fall, 2025*

The ancient Greeks had a word for it: *eudaemonia*. It is the fulfilled, truly happy life achieved by virtuous behavior, by challenges accepted and met, by honorable and faithful friendship, by respected membership in society.

Isn't that what you want to achieve in your own life?

If so, you'll need to understand how to interact successfully with other people, be they family, friends, strangers, enemies, lovers, bosses, patients, or colleagues. You'll need to understand why some behaviors are acceptable and others are not. What is good and what is evil.

In other words, you'll need to live a moral life. That is the subject of this course.

How do you choose the right action in the moral decisions you make every day?

Are there rules of morality that apply to everyone, all the time? If so, where do those rules come from? Are you born with them? Do they come from Nature? From God?

Should you follow moral rules if you don't agree with them or if they don't suit your personal needs?

What if there are no universal rules at all? Can you make up your own rules of morality?

We will spend the semester grappling with those and similar questions in the context of contemporary life. We will start the semester with an introduction to the major frameworks of ethical thought from a psychology perspective. We will use class discussions of moral dilemmas to examine how applying those frameworks can help find rational, ethical solutions to real-world problems.

With that background, we will spend the bulk of the semester discussing examples of ethical issues you are likely to encounter in your personal and professional lives. Actual case histories will anchor our analyses. Some of the major topics:

Interpersonal ethics - telling the truth, fairness, altruism, bullying, ghosting

Ethics in medicine and related fields - patient autonomy, consent, transplantation, hard decisions about sick children, euthanasia

Ethics in academia - cheating, research with human subjects, data falsification, authorship

Ethics and government - freedom, making just laws, military service, the death penalty

Ethical issues at the societal level - discrimination, poverty, cross-cultural morality, gay marriage, technology ethics

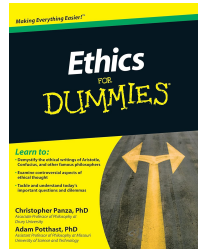
At the end of the course, you will be able to: (*detailed Learning Outcomes are on CANVAS*)

- explain the major ethical theories and the ethical principles derived from them
- identify and analyze the ethical issues raised in commonly occurring situations
- use ethical principles to propose a 'right' behavior in those common situations
- explain the pros and cons of multiple opinions about ethical behavior in major societal issues such as euthanasia, racial discrimination, and research fraud.

READINGS

Required books

1

**Ethics for Dummies**

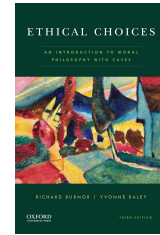
by: C. Panza and A. Potthast

ISBN: 978-0470591710Prices: **\$11 (used)**

(None of you are dummies, of course. Just a surprisingly useful book with an unfortunate title.)

The numbers indicate relative importance. You can get these at the [UMD Bookstore](#) or from on-line sellers (prices shown are from Amazon).

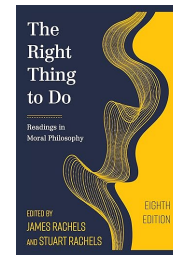
2

**Ethical Choices****3rd Edition only**

by: Richard Burnor

ISBN: 978-0190074449Price: **\$32 (used)**

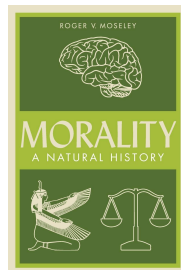
3

**The Right Thing to Do**

by: James Rachels and Stuart Rachels

ISBN: 978-1538127926Price: **\$32 (used)**

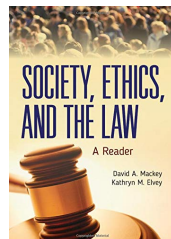
Optional books

**Morality: A Natural History**

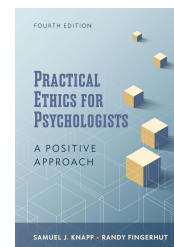
by: Roger Moseley

ISBN: 978-1525537295Prices: **\$14 (used)**

An excellent book that brings an evolutionary perspective to morality. It is especially good on the nature/nurture question, but also has sections on religion, neuroscience, and sociology. A bit more 'academic' than the required texts, but still quite readable.

**Society, Ethics, and the Law**

by: D.A. Mackey and K.M. Elvey

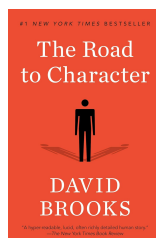
ISBN: 978-1284199642Prices: **\$35-\$65****Practical Ethics for Psychologists**

by: S.J. Knapp and R. Fingerhut

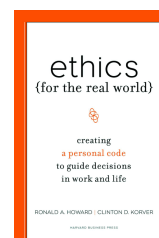
ISBN: 978-1433842498Price: **\$58**

David Brooks is a wonderful writer and popular columnist for the *New York Times*. His views on personal fulfillment have a strong link to virtue ethics.

The last book comes from experts on management and decision-making. They bring a pragmatic perspective to day-to-day ethical decisions and to developing a strong personal moral code.

**The Road to Character**

by: David Brooks

ISBN: 978-0812983418Prices: **\$14****Ethics for the Real World**

by: R.A. Howard and C.D. Korver

ISBN: 978-1422121061Prices: **\$17**

COURSE DESIGN

Summary

The PSYC 309D ELMS-CANVAS site is an extension of this syllabus. It describes in great detail all aspects of class activities, policies, and assessments.

You really, really, **really** need to understand all of the policies and instructions presented both here and on the ELMS-CANVAS site.

The course will have two sections:

- 1) *ethical theories, principles and analysis techniques*
- 2) *examination of specific issues drawn from several areas of contemporary life*

Each class will comprise small-group and full-class discussions along with brief lectures. Typically, we will use case studies to focus attention on a particular concept or idea.

ASSESSMENTS

Quizzes/Exams

Assessments are opportunities for appreciating your accomplishments as well as for feedback on ways to strengthen areas of difficulty. PSYC 309D this semester has four assessment types: *(extensive details and instructions for each assessment type are on ELMS)*

There will be a **seven online, 30-minute quizzes (50 points each)**. The quizzes are not cumulative. The lowest quiz score will be dropped.

Because the kindness exercise will replace one quiz (see below) and one quiz score is dropped, the total possible quiz points is **250** rather than 350.

The first quiz will be on Thursday, September 4th and will cover course policies and procedures.



Short papers

Each student will write **two papers of 700-900 words (200 points each)**. For each paper, you will choose and analyze a topic or specific ethical dilemma. The goals of these papers are: 1) explore an ethical issue in depth; 2) practice using rational thinking to assess multiple possible solutions; and 3) hone your skills in organizing and presenting material with clarity and efficiency. You will get feedback on a **required draft** before submitting the final version. of the paper.

Practical morality

Every student will complete real-world exercises in three aspects of practical morality: gratitude (**50 points**), elevation (**50 points**), and kindness (**200 points**). There will be a brief written report for each.

The kindness exercise will replace one of the quizzes (student chooses which one).

Final paper

In lieu of a final exam, students will write a **1500-2000-word paper (300 points)** on a subject of their own choosing. The subjects should fall into one of the main subject areas covered in the course, but preferably NOT address specific topics we discussed in class.

(option)

Note: Students may propose a final project culminating in production of an infographic or equivalent product that could be used for public education regarding an ethical issue facing society.

Other

Surveys and appointments together will add an additional **200 points**.

Course grade

The final course score will simply be the total number of points earned as a percentage of the total possible points (**1450**). Conversion of the course score to a letter grade will use an equal division scale, e.g. 80.00 to 83.29 = B- 83.30 to 86.69 = B 86.70 to 89.99 = B+

PARTICIPATION

The study of ethics - and philosophy in general - is based on discussion. Analyzing an issue involves detailed conversations that examine opposing views.

Therefore, the success of the course depends on active participation by everyone during each class meeting. What you get from the course depends on what you put into it, and that goes far beyond simply completing assignments - you need to consistently engage in class activities.

Engagement in class discussions and activities requires attendance. *Therefore attendance will play a role in your final course grade as described in detail in the ELMS site.*

I'll be happy to talk with anyone about how best to adapt their participation style to this particular course.

Just to emphasize this key point:

Discussion is an integral component of learning about ethics, therefore regular class attendance is essential.

SURVEYS

Your semester in PSYC 309D will be a journey. Naturally, there will be a strong intellectual component. However, I expect that you will be taking a personal journey as well.

Throughout the course, you will be making an honest, sincere attempt to understand a broad range of moral views. That inevitably will lead you to reassess your own moral stances. Some may change, some may not. The journey is more important than the destination.

To document your journey and to help me provide the best possible learning experience for you, there will be required pre-course and post-course surveys. The questions will cover some academic topics, especially regarding your goals and your likes and dislikes. There will also be questions related to your experiences thinking about ethics and your opinions on some familiar and unfamiliar ethical issues.

LEARNING RESOURCES

Class notes

I will post information about the primary concepts, ideas, and issues from each class on ELMS. Because many of the important ideas will come from in-class discussions, the posting will be a day or two after each class.

Feedback and discussions

The most important learning resource each student will have is discussion with me and with other students in the class. This is where appointments shine. Discussing questions from class, questions from outside class, your case study analyses, and anything else related to the course during appointments is one of the very best ways to learn and improve.

ZOOM appointments

Traditional office hours have some advantages, but my experience over the last few years is that online, one-on-one conversations are much more convenient, productive, and pleasant.

I will be available during 12 hours every week for individual, 20-minute ZOOM meetings that can be scheduled through the calendar function on ELMS.

You can find extensive details regarding appointments on ELMS.

Every student is required to attend at least two appointments, although I hope you'll stop by more often. One required appointment should be within the first three weeks of the semester and another should be sometime around the middle of the semester.



Emails

I am happy to respond to emails for class business, confirming appointments, and brief questions about course content. I am almost always able to respond within 24 hours, and usually much sooner.

PSYC 309D ONLINE

Do this!!



COURSE POLICIES

Classroom
communityElectronics in the
classroom

To reiterate this very important point:

We have an ELMS-CANVAS site that is the heart of the course. It is your best source of information regarding assignment details and explanations.

Be sure to read everything related to each activity and assessment.

If you need assistance, there are online tutorials and the folks at the [DIT Help Desk](#) can also help.

Go to your ELMS Account and be sure your notification setting for Announcements is 'Right Away' so that you don't miss time-critical information like schedule changes or assignment details.

If you use a phone to access Canvas, be sure to go to the HOME PAGE which leads you to all the information about the course.

PSYC 309D will adhere to the [University-wide Policies for Undergraduate Courses](#). What follows are policies specific to this course and brief descriptions of some of the University policies for your convenience.

One of the most valuable and satisfying parts of PSYC 309D is the discussions of moral dilemmas. Students enrich each others' experience by sharing their ideas and opinions. It's wonderful that our class members come from such diverse cultural backgrounds so that we will have a broad range of perspectives in our discussions.

A positive, constructive classroom atmosphere is essential. Every student should feel free to express their opinions with the assurance that they will be heard and respected. To that end:

You will treat every one of your classmates with respect and consideration.

All the time.

No exceptions.

Even when you disagree strongly with another student's opinion, you will make a whole-hearted, sincere effort to understand their point of view.

Neither I nor the students in the class will tolerate comments or actions that are explicitly or by implication disparaging, demeaning, discriminatory, or disrespectful in any way.

For more information, visit the [Psychology Department Equity and Inclusiveness site](#).

Research studies have shown unequivocally that electronics in the classroom interfere with learning. The culprits include laptops, tablets, and especially phones.

Despite their continuing electronics use, I think most students know that this is true.

Research also shows that taking notes by hand is much more effective for conceptual learning.

A growing number of faculty are banning all electronics from their classrooms. That will be the policy in PSYC 309D as well. Specifically:

All computers, tablets and phones must be stored in backpacks, handbags, or the equivalent while in our classroom. That includes the period before the class officially starts.

(Students with ADS accommodations or special circumstances should contact me during the first week of classes to discuss their needs.)

Extensions and missed assessments

Following University guidelines, a due date extension or a makeup assessment can be given in cases where an unexpected, major problem prevents a student from completing an assignment or assessment on time. Examples of things that **do not** qualify for extensions/make-ups: planned family events, vacation travel, changes in employment schedule.

The student or a representative must inform me of the situation as soon as the problem arises.

At the earliest possible time, the student must present me with documentation establishing the reason for their request. (Once during the semester, a student can use a completed, signed [Attestation Form](#) as their documentation for a missed assessment or deadline.)

If the student does not follow these procedures, there will be no extension or makeup.

To be fair to everyone, I strictly follow this policy.

Academic integrity

I'm including below the official policy statement on academic integrity, but first, my personal opinion based on long experience with students, plus many years on the PSYC Undergraduate Committee and as Associate Chair for Undergraduate Education:

Cheating is just plain dumb. For so many reasons ...

It doesn't matter how you justify it - if you cheat, you are a cheater. Cheaters sacrifice self-respect and sacrifice the respect of others. Cheaters can't be truly happy people.

OK, here's the official blurb:

Essential to the fundamental purpose of the University is commitment to the principles of truth and academic honesty. Accordingly, the [Code of Academic Integrity](#) is designed to ensure that the principle of academic honesty is upheld. Although all members of the University share this responsibility, the Code of Academic Integrity is designed so that special responsibility for upholding the principle of academic honesty lies with the students.

It is the responsibility of each student to understand what actions constitute a violation of the Code and understand the [consequences of Code violation](#).

The University of Maryland Honor System is fully described at [Office of Student Conduct](#).

As an additional resource, I recommend the [MIT Handbook for Academic Integrity](#) for excellent and thorough explanations of all academic integrity topics, but especially plagiarism.

Use of AI in PSYC 309D

We will discuss AI and its uses/misuses relevant to PSYC 309D. Two basic policies:

#1 - Anything you submit to fulfill an assignment or to contribute in a formal way to the course must be entirely your own work.

Submitting assignments or contributions produced completely or in significant part by AI constitutes plagiarism and thus is an [Honor Code violation](#).

#2 - You should not use AI for any aspect of your writing assignments. Not for coming up with, formulating, or organizing ideas. Not for producing rough drafts. Not for editing or polishing your text. Do not use Grammarly or any other AI-powered writing aids.

Your use of AI in PSYC 309D should be limited to supplementing the reading assignments, helping you flesh out your class notes, and similar activities.

I understand that #2 may sound a bit harsh - even unrealistic - but I have well-considered reasons that focus on maximizing your learning experience in our course.

Resilience, stress,
and success**Please make your personal well-being a top priority.**

Sleeping long and well, exercising regularly, being thoughtful about what you put into your body, and enjoying meaningful connections with others will make you resilient and help you engage more fully in your academic experiences.

Beyond being a student, you are a unique person carrying your own history, thoughts, emotions, and identities with you. It is important to acknowledge any stressors you may be facing, be they social, emotional, physical, cultural, or financial.

There are ways to reduce the impacts of such stressors on your academic and personal well-being.

Don't be hesitant about asking for help to find the ways that best fit your own situation. UMD has [a variety of resources](#) for addressing stress and mental health concerns. There are also excellent resources [for help with basic living needs](#).

Accommodations

If your effective learning requires accommodation of any type, you can find information and assistance at [Accessibility and Disability Services](#). Students with documented needs should apply to ADS for accommodation each semester.

Be sure to let me know your ADS status at the beginning of the semester.

Good communication is crucial so we can work together to optimize your learning experience. Be sure to keep me posted on how the course is going for you.

Special arrangements for specific assessments should be made at least a week ahead of time.

COVID-19

One of your ethical responsibilities as a member of our community is to adhere to the [University rules and guidelines regarding COVID-19](#).

If you are experiencing any symptoms that even remotely resemble those of COVID-19, do not come to class. You can contact me directly to be sure you don't miss anything important.

Although not currently required, you are welcome to wear a mask while in class.

Religious observance

The University System of Maryland policy provides that students should not be disadvantaged because of observances of their religious beliefs. When assignments or assessments overlap with religious obligations, we will work out a way to accommodate both.

Good communication is crucial. Let me know your plans as far ahead of time as possible.

By University policy, it is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor in advance of any intended absences for religious observances. This normally means at the beginning of the semester or course.

Course evaluations

CourseEvalUM will be open from approximately November 28th through December 12th for you to complete your evaluations for Fall'25 courses. Your feedback is confidential. You can go to the website directly ([CourseEvalUM](#)) or access it through ELMS.

The learning context for PSYC 309D evolves continually, so your comments and opinions are vital to guide its improvement. If you have a suggestion, don't wait for the formal course evaluation - let me know right away! We can talk about it and see if it might be possible to implement an improvement immediately.

Copyright

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All course materials, including instructions, presentations, assessments, content outlines, and similar materials are the intellectual property of the course instructor and protected by legal copyright. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own personal use. You may not, nor may you allow others to distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly, whether or not a fee is charged, without the express written consent of the instructor. For example, it is a violation of this copyright and therefore illegal to upload to or provide for posting on the internet any assessment questions or answers to such questions.

Tentative Class Schedule

First section: the Big Questions - theories and principles

Week of	Tuesday	Quiz 1	Thursday
September 1st	What is morality and why is it important to anyone? Course introduction	How we make moral decisions Emotion ('intuition') vs. Reason Intellectual humility	

Week of	Tuesday	Thursday
September 8th	Are we inherently moral or evil? Morality from nature or from nurture? Evolution and moral decision-making	Development of morality Do babies make moral decisions? Moral life of babies

Week of	Quiz 2	Tuesday	Gratitude	Thursday
September 15th		Rational moral decision-making Theories of natural law - divine commands, virtue ethics		Rational moral decision-making Theories of reason - focus on consequences

Week of	Paper 1 draft	Tuesday	Thursday
September 22nd		Rational moral decision-making Theories of reason - focus on intentions and actions	How should we treat strangers? The puzzles of altruism Donating a kidney to a stranger

Second section: major topics in contemporary ethics

Interpersonal ethics

Week of	Quiz 3	Tuesday	Thursday
September 29th		Evil and morality Guest lecture Dr. Scott Roberts	Empathy and compassion Neuroscience of empathy Empathy burnout

Week of	Paper 1 final	Tuesday	Elevation	Thursday
October 6th		Moral circles Whom should we care about? High school cliques and bullying		Telling the truth Honesty, honor, and reputation Handling painful truths

Ethics and government

Week of	Tuesday	Thursday
October 13th	No class	The Social Contract Thomas Hobbes vs. John Locke Surrogate mothers

Week of	Quiz 4	Tuesday	Thursday
October 20th		What is a 'person?' The concept of individual rights Libertarianism, firearm ownership	What is fair? What is just? John Rawls and the Veil of Ignorance Laws regarding the homeless

Ethics in academia and research

Week of	Tuesday	Thursday
October 27th	Academic dishonesty Cheating and plagiarism Do honor codes work? When? Why?	Destroying reputations Fraud and fabrication Francesca Gino case at Harvard

Week of	Quiz 5	Tuesday	Thursday
November 3rd		Ethics of scientific publication Authorship, peer review Purchasing research publications	Persons as ends, not mere means Working with human subjects Informed consent

Ethics in medicine and related fields

Week of	Paper 2 draft	Tuesday	Thursday
November 10th		Paternalism and Autonomy Respecting the patient Privacy, confidentiality	Beneficence and non-maleficence When is it moral to cause pain? 'Burn out' in medical providers

Week of	Tuesday	Quiz 6	Thursday
November 17th	Just distribution of resources Medical care in rural communities Who gets a new kidney?		At the end of life Debates about assisted suicide and euthanasia

Ethics at the societal level

Week of	Paper 2 final	Tuesday	Thursday
November 24th	Moral obligations to others Reducing world poverty through charitable giving		No class

Week of	Tuesday	Thursday
December 1st	Different societies, different moral codes Purity, honor and the roles of women	Laws, morality, and religion Religion in public schools Individual rights of LGBTQ people

Week of	Tuesday	Quiz 7	Thursday
December 8th	The dark side of moral circles Explicit and implicit racism Affirmative action - college admission	Technomorality Technology and the moral landscape AI chatbot companions	

Tuesday	Tuesday
December 16th	Final paper - due by 12:30 pm