

## **CHOICE POINTS:**

### **A Conversation on Moral Leadership, Power, and Responsibility**

Professor:	Thierry Senechal tsenechal@sloan.mit.edu
Lectures:	Mondays, 15.45-18.45 (1 <sup>st</sup> session: 16.45-19.45)
Teaching Assistant:	Georges Laimé georges.laime-moreno@ens.uvsq.fr
Office Hours:	By appointment

#### **I. COURSE OBJECTIVES**

High political turbulence, social disequilibrium, fast-emerging new challenges, multi-party conflicts, organizational pressures against personal honesty and integrity, inappropriate behavior in cultures where values differ from your own, clashing obligations to multiple constituencies, ill-used power, ... In a world in which most organizations, communities, and societies face enormous adaptive pressures, the practice of moral leadership is critical – the practice of mobilizing people to meet the challenges that will enable them to thrive in changing and challenging times.

The course aims to develop knowledge, skills, and strategies that will enable you to examine high-stakes moral dilemmas, understand their complexity, and take meaningful action to remedy them. It focuses on how men and women who face difficult decisions in complex systems can create moral clarity when their consciences, institutional values, or broader moral principles don't provide it.

#### **II. INSTRUCTOR**

Thierry Senechal is a senior expert on peacebuilding and dispute resolution. He was an international civil servant (UN Security Council and UNDPPA) involved with several critical peacebuilding and conflict-related initiatives in the Middle East and Africa, helping to pioneer modern war reparation and transitional justice programs, and he continues to be seconded to peace assignments today. Thierry has worked with multiple transitional justice processes, including peace accords, war-reparation commissions, post-war reconstruction initiatives, DDR and ex-combatant reintegration programs, and track II diplomatic efforts. He has led extensive fieldwork in more than 30 conflict-affected zones, including Iraq, the Central African Republic, West Bank/Gaza, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Somalia, Ukraine (Crimea), Pakistan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), Lebanon, among others. Thierry received his bachelor's in economics and philosophy with the highest honors (Phi Beta Kappa). He earned a master's in public administration from Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government (international security), and a master's in management from MIT as a Sloan Fellow in Global Leadership.

#### **III. COURSE DESIGN**

We operate under the assumption that modern and classical literature can serve as a point of departure for a conversation on some of the most critical dimensions of moral leadership. Literature, in addition

to its aesthetic interest, serves as a mirror of human experience in its complexity and ambiguity. Although some of the works are centuries old, e.g. *Antigone*, their relevance remains vital. They will permit us to discuss in their setting some of the most difficult leadership challenges of our time related to questions of trust, conscience, responsibility, and cultural awareness.

In each class, we examine a ‘great book’ specifically selected to discuss a particular attribute or issue of moral leadership. In addition, “case-in-point” learning and group work are extensively used to analyze the social and political dynamics of problem-solving common to many organizations and societies facing critical challenges. In each class, we assume that you are facing a sudden and severe adversity, a problem way out of the ordinary, and one that takes a rapid determination of the issues and the available options, an evaluation of those options, and then a decision that is morally grounded.

These various methods help us focus on choice points and choices -- on how problems are seen; how the power to act is legitimized and exercised; how purposes and ultimate ends are balanced; and on which actions are taken and why. And the decisions taken (or not taken) turn on a mix of values and virtues -- views on how one should make hard decisions, exercise genuine moral agency and create public value while practicing public service.

#### **IV. LEARNING GOALS**

In this course, you will learn to:

- Assess moral dilemmas that individuals confront in situations of sudden and severe adversity
- Discuss moral and ethical arguments found in course materials
- Critically evaluate moral perspectives from differing points of view, including learning to appreciate moral disagreements and ambiguities.
- Make deliberative moral judgments that lead to action while assessing risks and pitfalls surrounding some difficult decisions.
- Build a foundation of moral and ethical literacy

#### **V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Prerequisites:** There are no other formal prerequisites for this course.

**Attendance:** Class attendance is strictly mandatory.

**Expectations:** The conversation on choice points will be engaging if participants are willing to take risky or unpopular points of view; participate in debates, and role plays; use logic, precision, and evidence in making arguments, apply course materials appropriately; and are constructively critical. It is emphasized that it is impossible to teach such a course without touching upon issues that will be challenging for some students. Part of our task is to learn how to discuss these topics productively. A non-negotiable norm will be to create a safe space to tackle these matters. Safe, however, does not mean avoiding difficult, troubling, upsetting, unsettling, and sometimes emotionally charged topics. Great care will be taken to confront these issues responsibly.

**Grading:** The course is demanding in terms of time, effort, and written analysis. Note that the whole class is divided randomly into small groups of 4 students and all written assignments are group-based.

The grading is as follows:

1. **Classroom work and participation (30%, individual):** You must be prepared for each class. Active and informed participation is crucial. You must conscientiously do the readings, prepare for and carry out your role in the structured group exercises whenever expected, and be ready to share insights with the class. Failure to prepare for the class will adversely affect your class participation grade and impair your learning experience.

2. **Weekly memos (40%, in group):** Each group will prepare a 2-page memo for each class to present recommendations on a specific adverse situation. In some classes, groups will be expected to present their analysis assuming that rebuttal views may be provided.
3. **End-of-term Policy Analysis Exercise (30%, in group):** As a final project, participants will develop an analysis of a recent international crisis and incorporate the lessons derived from the course reading.

**Academic Integrity:** Students are expected to follow University policies on academic honesty and integrity. Violations of policy are not tolerated. Although study groups are required to complete assignments, each student is responsible for complying with academic citation rules. The academic tradition honors the work of predecessors. Therefore, sentences and paragraphs copied from one source to one's own or a group work must be cited.

## VI. SCHEDULE AND READINGS

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### SESSION 1 – DEALING WITH HARD CHOICES: SETTING THE FRAME

*(Monday 3 October, 16.45-19.45)*

On the conflict between society and individual  
 Pursuing the greatest good and protecting individual rights  
 Law and order versus matters of personal conscience  
 Leadership with and without authority  
 Sensing the world around you  
 Failing to spot game-changing events and develop well-calibrated options  
 Diagnosing the adaptive challenge (adaptive versus technical work)  
 Introducing the concept of cognitive bias

**Main reading:** Antigone, Sophocles (Ancient Greece, 441 BC)

**Case:** Defining Torture in the War on Terrors (A): “Checking with the Professionals” (Case C15-06-1853.0)

**Further reading:**

- “Mr. Order Meets Mr. Chaos”, Robert Wright, Foreign Policy, May/June 2001 (Finding greys in a world of black and white)
  - Talking about Terror, Philip Heymann, 2004 (<https://hls.harvard.edu/today/talking-about-terror/>)
  - Elke Weber, “The Influencers of Choice and Decision Making”, in Ecology, Ethics, and Interdependence, Wisdom Publications, 2018, pp. 177-201
  - After Virtue, Alasdair Macintyre, The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today and the Claims of Emotivism (Chapter 1)
  - See also: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/a-framework-for-ethical-decision-making/>
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### SESSION 2 – USING FORCE AND POWER

*(Monday 10 October, 15.45-18.45)*

Combating evil (but what is ‘evil’?)  
 What moral compass help recognize right or wrong?  
 Standing on principles or accepting moral trade-offs? (How flexible is my moral code?)  
 Do I have unsettling role models?  
 Distinguishing moral from nonmoral approaches  
 Use of force and the concept of ‘just’ war (ethics of intervention)  
 Does the end justify the means?

**Main reading:** The Tyger, William Blake (England, 1794)

**Case:** New Peril, Old Adversary: George W. Bush, 9/11, & Iraq (B) The Road to War (Case KSG KS 1268)

**Further reading:**

- “Moral Theory, Frameworks, and the Language of Ethics and Business”, Darden Business Publishing, 2017
- The uses of force in the post-cold war world, J. Bryan Hehir, professor, Harvard Divinity School, <https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Hehir.htm>
- After Virtue, Alasdair Macintyre, The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today and the Claims of Emotivism (Chapter 2)
- Leslie H. Gelb and Justine A. Rosenthal, “The Rise of Ethics in Foreign Policy: Reaching a Values Consensus”, in Foreign Affairs, 1 May 2003
- Michael Walzer, The Triumph of Just War Theory (and the Dangers of Success), 2012

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### SESSION 3 – DEFINING AND TESTING YOUR ETHICAL POSTURE

*(Monday 24 October, 15.45-18.45)*

Using a framework to respond to practical ethical issues  
Choosing between values, weighing priorities, and responding to tradeoffs  
Outlining clear options and weighting all possible alternatives  
Process of consensus building, social learning and group dynamics  
Recognizing and reducing decision biases in judgment  
Encouraging, rewarding real dialogue

**Main reading:** Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe (Nigeria, 1958)

**Case:** Royal Dutch/Shell in Nigeria (A), HBS Case 9-399-126

**Further reading:**

- Why Environmental Scanning Works Except When You Need It, HBS BH104
- “Ethical Theory”, in Ethics in Practice: An Anthology, Wiley Blackwell, 2014, pp. 23-70
- After Virtue, Alasdair Macintyre, The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of a Tradition (Chapter 15)
- Lawrence Susskind, Breaking Robert’s Rules: Consensus-Building Techniques for Group Decision Making, 2006

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### SESSION 4 – TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

*(Monday 7 November, 15.45-18.45)*

Picking up the right battle and pushing your cause  
Promoting agendas  
Being accountable  
Maintaining integrity  
Standing on principles  
Taking extreme measures

**Main reading:** The Secret Sharer, Joseph Conrad (Polish, 1910)

**Case:** Edward Snowden Hero or Traitor (HKS Case 798)

**Further reading:**

- Arthur Applbbaum, “Rules of the Game and Fair Play,” selection from Chapter Six of Ethics for Adversaries (1999), pp. 121-135
  - Jennifer Saul, “Is Lying Worse Than Merely Misleading?,” from Lying, Misleading, and What Is Said (2012), 69-86
  - Bernard Williams, Moral Luck, “Utilitarianism and moral self-indulgence”, pp. 40-53
  - William E. Scheuerman, “Snowden and the Ethics of Whistleblowing,” May 2014, Boston Review, <https://bostonreview.net/articles/scheuerman-snowden-greenwald-harding-sagar/>
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## SESSION 5 – CREATING VALUE

(Monday 14 November, 15.45-18.45)

Value-based leadership, to lead or mislead  
 Humility, empathy, balance, listening, self-reflection  
 Quiet leadership, restrain, tenacity  
 Buying (a little) time and the concept of strategic stalling  
 Perseverance in the face of profound uncertainty  
 Duties in the face of abuse

**Main reading:** Bull, Mo Yan (China, 1998)

**Case:** Fallen Idol? Aung San Suu Kyi & The Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis (HKS Case KS1277)

### Further reading:

- Three Quiet Virtues: Essential Characteristics for Practicing Quiet Leadership, Joseph L. Badaracco Jr., February 2002.
  - Amartya Sen, “Culture and Human Rights”, in Development as Freedom, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 227-249 (22 pages)
  - Gary Haugen and Victor Boutros, “And Justice for All: Enforcing Human Rights for the World’s Poor”, in Foreign Affairs, 1 May 2010 (8 pages)
  - Ethics & International Affairs, Sri Lanka 2.0: Independent Inquiry Shows UN “Systemic Failure” in Myanmar, July 2019, <https://www.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/2019/sri-lanka-2-0-independent-inquiry-shows-un-systemic-failure-in-myanmar/>
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## SESSION 6 – ENGAGING COURAGEOUSLY

(Monday 21 November, 15.45-18.45)

Manage complexity and high-intensity conflicts  
 Comfort versus calling  
 Staying on the balcony versus engaging on the dancing floor  
 Using inspiration and creativity  
 Inspiring people, speak from the heart  
 The power of persuasion

**Main reading:** John Rabe (Film, Germany, China and France, 2009 -  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pmZBBCrvyk> and/or  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6ycUopX1zA>

**Case:** Greenland and the Paris Agreement (HKS Case 2201.0)

### Further reading:

- Raleigh Morgan, Chinese, Japanese, and United States Views of the Nanking Massacre: The Supreme Court Trial of Shiro Azuma, American Journal of Chinese Studies, October 2002
- The Power to Persuade, HBS, 9-800-323, July 2000

- Colby, A., & Damon, W. Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment. Free Press. Pages 4, 27, 29-32 (2014)
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**SESSION 7– STAYING ALIVE**  
*(Monday 05 December, 15.45-18.45)*

Failures, assassination  
The personal challenge versus duties toward society  
Emotions, feelings, intuitions  
Arguing for policy change and crafting a compromise  
Gaining support for your decisions

**Main reading:** The Fur Hat, Vladimir Voinovich (Russian, 1988)

**Case:** Danone S.A.: Becoming A Mission-Driven Company (HBS Case Study 9-722-354)

**Further reading:**

- Argyris, Teaching Smart People How to Learn, in Harvard Business Review
  - Peter Senge, The Leader’s New Work: Building Learning Organizations, Sloan Management Review, Fall 1990
  - Creating Shared Value, How to reinvent capitalism-and unleash a wave of innovation and growth, Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer, 2017
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**SESSION 8 – LAYING THE PAST TO REST**  
*(Monday 09 January, 15.45-18.45)*

Dealing with a personal challenge  
How should I act in the world?  
Managing disappointment  
Regret and disillusionment  
Becoming who you are

**Main reading:** The Snows of Kilimanjaro, Ernest Hemingway (USA, 1936)

**Final presentations:** In group