

PL130 Ethics and Authenticity

Syllabus v1 (Jan 8 2019)

Registered students should consult the updated syllabus on google classroom

Instructor: Katalin Makkai
Course times: Monday and Wednesday 15:45-17:15
Email: k.makkai@berlin.bard.edu
Office hours: Monday, 13:30-15:30 and by appointment
Office: P98 004

Course description

Ethics has traditionally been understood to concern the broad question of how one should live. In an oft-quoted remark, Oscar Wilde suggests a characteristically modern reply to such a question: “‘Know Thyself’ was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, ‘Be Thyself’ shall be written.” The new dictum points in the direction of an ideal of “authenticity.” Over the past few centuries, authenticity has become a prominent value, arguably even occluding or replacing older ideals, for example that of autonomy. But what does it mean to be true to one’s individual self? How could one fail to be true to oneself? Is authenticity an ethical ideal, or is it outside ethics? Is it in conflict with ethics, since it pull us away from our moral obligations to others? Does authenticity entail individualism, or is it only realizable within a social world? This course examines the ideal of authenticity historically as well as analytically. We study the various ways in which it has been articulated, defended, and criticized. We also consider the view that it has been coopted.

Texts

Registered students are responsible for obtaining the following four textbooks, in the editions indicated.

Textbooks to purchase:

- (1) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN-13: 978-0521424455
- (2) Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Hackett. ISBN: 9780872202832

BCB library textbooks:

- (3) Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 9781107401068
- (4) Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. W. W. Norton and Co. ISBN: 9780393301588

All other readings will be provided during the semester in printed form and/or electronically. Any reading that is provided only electronically must be printed out and brought to class as a printout.

Electronic devices

Students may not use any electronic devices (laptop, tablet, mobile phone) in the classroom.

Requirements

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Bard College Berlin expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III: Academic Misconduct.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is, absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) will affect the participation grade for the course. The two “free” absences are meant for minor illness, unavoidable appointments or travel, etc. In general, there are no “excused” absences. For regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence, please consult the Student Handbook.

Per BCB policy, a student who misses 30% or more of class meetings cannot receive a passing grade for the course.

ASSESSMENT

Participation

Each student is expected to arrive to class on time and prepared. Being prepared means: having carefully read the assigned texts in the assigned editions, bringing a print (=non-electronic) copy to class along with writing materials, and being ready to initiate and to contribute to seminar discussion. In addition to absences in excess of two (see “Attendance” above), factors that will negatively affect the participation grade include:

- repeated and/or significant lateness
- not completing the reading, or only “skimming” it
- not bringing a print copy of the reading (in the assigned edition) to class
- not bringing writing materials to class

Contributions to seminar discussion should be productive as well as regular, and should engage responsively and respectfully with the contributions of others.

Written assignments

Midterm essay (2000-2500 words), due Friday March 22

Final essay (2500-3000 words), due Wednesday May 15

Two online posts (300-400 words each)

Policy on late submission of papers

From the Student Handbook on the submission of essays:

“Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the

deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.”

Grade breakdown

Participation	20%
Online posts	10% (5% each)
Midterm essay	30%
Final essay	40%

Schedule

(See updated syllabus for assigned pages and any changes)

Week 1

- M Jan 28 Introduction
- W Jan 30 Charles Guignon, from *On Being Authentic*

Week 2

- M Feb 4 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*
- W Feb 6 Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*

Week 3

- M Feb 11 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
- W Feb 13 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Week 4

- M Feb 18 Harry Frankfurt, from *The Reasons of Love*
- W Feb 20 TBA

Week 5

- M Feb 25 TBA
- W Feb 27 Rainer Maria Rilke, from *Letters to a Young Poet*

Week 6

- M Mar 4 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”
- W Mar 6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*

Week 7

M Mar 11 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*
Nietzsche, from *The Gay Science*

W Mar 13 Charles Taylor, from *Sources of the Self*

Week 8

M Mar 18 Stanley Cavell, from *Pursuits of Happiness*

W Mar 20 film TBA

F Mar 22 **Midterm essay due 23:59**

Week 9

M Mar 25 Jean-Paul Sartre, from *Being and Nothingness*

W Mar 27 Jean-Paul Sartre, from *Being and Nothingness*

Week 10

M Apr 1 Simone de Beauvoir, from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

W Apr 3 Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*

Week 11

M Apr 8 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

W Apr 10 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

[spring break: M Apr 15-M Apr 22]

Week 12

W Apr 24 D. W. Winnicott, "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self"

M Apr 29 Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power"

W May 1 [no class: federal holiday]

Week 14

M May 6 Jane Flax, from *Thinking Fragments*

W May 8 Tommie Shelby, from *We Who Are Dark*

Week 15

W May 15 Completion Week
Final essay due 23:59