

PL105 In Search of the Good: An Introduction to Ethics

Seminar Leader: Tracy Colony

Course Times: Tuesday and Thursday 15:45-17:15

Email: t.colony@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: TBA

Course Description

What is the basis for ethical action? Since its beginnings, philosophy has confronted this question. In this course we will read some of the central texts in Western philosophy that have attempted to come to terms with it. Starting with Socrates and focusing on the works of Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Emerson, Nietzsche, and Levinas we will trace a tradition which has sought to understand and elaborate the possible grounds and scope of ethical action. The approach of the course will be predominantly chronological and we will engage in close readings of these seminal texts with an eye to their historical context and reception. However, we will also approach their concepts and vocabularies as possible starting points for conceiving and reflecting on our own ethical responses to our circumstances and wider historical situation.

Course Readings

Books to be purchased:

Aristotle (Joe Sachs, tr.). 2002. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing. (ISBN: 1585100358).

Hume, D. (Tom Beauchamp, ed.). 1998 (1751). *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. New York: Oxford University Press. (ISBN: 0198751850).

Kant, I. (Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann, tr.). 2012 (1785). *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. New York: Cambridge University Press. (ISBN: 0521626951).

Mill, J.S. (George Sher, ed.). 2001 (1861). *Utilitarianism*. Indianapolis: Hackett. (ISBN: 087220605X).

Nietzsche, F. (Douglas Smith, tr.). 1996 (1887). *The Genealogy of Morals*. New York: Oxford University Press. (ISBN: 019283617X).

Plato (Seth Benardete, tr.). 2001. *Symposium*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (ISBN: 0226042758).

Plato (T. West and G. West tr.). 1998. *Euthyphro and Apology in: Four Texts on Socrates*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. (ISBN: 9780801485749).

All other readings will be made available at the beginning of the course as handouts in hard copy.

Requirements

Attendance is required in all classes. Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as an absence. More than two absences in a semester will affect your participation grade for the class. For periods of illness or leaves of absence consult the Student Handbook. Assessment and Writing Assignments: There will be specific reading assignments for each meeting. Everyone is expected to have done all assigned reading in advance. There will be a midterm essay of 2000 words due at 23:59 on March 15. There will be a final essay of 3000 words due at 23:59 May 17. Each person will be required to give one 15 minute in class presentation introducing the specific reading for that meeting. Policy on Late Submission of Papers: All written work must be submitted electronically and on time. As the Student Handbook states: 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 higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Midterm Essay 20%
Final Essay 30%
Presentation 20%
Participation 30%

Schedule

January 29 Introduction, No Readings.
January 31 Plato, *Euthyphro*.

February 5 Plato, *Apology of Socrates* pp. 63-89.
February 7 Plato, *Apology of Socrates* pp. 89-97.

February 12 Plato, *Symposium* pp. 1-27.
February 14 Plato, *Symposium* pp. 28-54.

February 19 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1.
February 21 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 2.

February 26 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 3.
February 28 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 10.

March 5 Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* pp. 73-130.
March 7 Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* pp. 131-156.

March 12 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* pp. 1-18.
March 14 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* pp. 19-51.

March 19 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* pp. 52-66.

March 21 Schopenhauer, *WW&R* vol. 2 “On the Vanity and Suffering of Life” pp. 573-588.

March 26 Mill, *Utilitarianism* pp. 1-26.

March 28 Emerson, *Experience* pp. 307-319.

April 2 Emerson, *Experience* pp. 319-326.

April 4 Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* Essay 1.

April 9 Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* Essay 2.

April 11 Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* Essay 3.

Spring Break

April 23 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* pp. 413-436.

April 25 Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism* pp. 214-265.

April 30 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* pp. 11-52.

May 2 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* pp. 187-219.

May 7 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* pp. 289-307.

May 9 Final Summary, No Readings.