

PL105 In Search of the Good: An Introduction to Ethics

Instructor: Tracy Colony
Course Times: Tuesday and Thursday 17:30-19:00
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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 ethics within our own current 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 of 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). *On 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).

A limited number of the required books are available on loan from the library. Students on financial aid have priority in requesting library books. All other readings will be made available as shared google docs.

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 19. There will be a final essay of 3000 words due at 23:59 May 20. Each person will be required to give one 15 min. 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. 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.

Grade Breakdown

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

Schedule

February 1 Introduction, No Readings.
February 3 Plato, *Euthyphro*.

February 8 Plato, *Apology of Socrates* pp. 63-89.
February 10 Plato, *Apology of Socrates* pp. 89-97.

February 15 Plato, *Symposium* pp. 1-27.
February 17 Plato, *Symposium* pp. 28-54.

February 22 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1.
February 24 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 2.

March 1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 3.
March 3 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 10.

March 8 Holiday No Class
March 10 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* pp. 73-130.

March 15 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* pp. 131-156.
March 17 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* pp. 1-18.

March 22 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* pp. 19-51.

March 24 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* pp. 52-66.

March 29 Schopenhauer, *WW&R* vol. 2 "On the Vanity and Suffering of Life" pp. 573-588.

March 31 Mill, *Utilitarianism* pp. 1-26.

April 5 Emerson, *Experience* pp. 307-319.

April 7 Emerson, *Experience* pp. 319-326.

Spring Break

April 19 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* Essay 1.

April 21 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* Essay 2.

April 26 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* Essay 3.

April 28 Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* pp. 413-436.

May 3 Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism* pp. 214-265.

May 5 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* pp. 11-52.

May 10 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* pp. 289-307.

May 12 Final Summary, No Readings.