

PL 105 Introduction to Ethics

Instructor: Dr. Thomas Hilgers

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Course Time: Thu 15:45-19:00

Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. Credits

Office: 98a.U.10 (Platanenstraße 98a, downstairs)

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

What does it mean to lead a good life? What makes a person – or rather her character – good or bad? What makes a particular action good or bad? Can we universally determine what to do in general, and what not to do in general? Is it, for instance, always wrong for a person to kill, to steal, or to lie – and if so, how could we justify such universal rules or laws? What is the nature of evil? What is the nature of morality? These are some of the most fundamental questions asked in the philosophical field of enquiry called “ethics.” In this course, we will address all of these questions by studying and discussing some of the most influential texts within the history of Western philosophy and some more contemporary texts. More precisely, we will read and discuss texts by Aristotle, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Friedrich Nietzsche, Philippa Foot, John Rawls, Bernard Williams, Martha Nussbaum, Cora Diamond, and Jorge L. A. Garcia.

Classroom Presentations and Term Papers

In this seminar, students will learn how to give a classroom presentation on a philosophical text, and they will learn how to write a term paper on a philosophical topic. We will talk in great detail about how to do research for such a paper, how to compose it, and how to write it in an academically acceptable manner. Moreover, before actually writing her paper, each student must write a paragraph that explains her project. The instructor will then provide her with some feedback on her paragraph and with some advice on how to approach her topic.

Attendance, Academic Integrity, and Requirements

Attendance at all classes is expected. Unexcused absence from more than two sessions of 90 minutes in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. For regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence, students should consult the Student Handbook for regulations. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity (for example cases of plagiarism) will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Each student must give one classroom presentation and write two papers.

If students need to miss classes for COVID-19 related reasons, the instructor will arrange to teleconference the class sessions so that students may participate remotely during the scheduled class times.

Grade Breakdown

The grade breakdown for this seminar will be as follows:

Final Paper (3500 words): 50 %

Midterm Paper (1500 words): 25 %

Participation (including one Classroom Presentation): 25 %

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Papers that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Papers that are turned in even later will still be accepted within four weeks of the deadline, but they will not receive a grade higher than C.

Schedule and Deadlines

09/03/20	Introduction Bernard Williams, <i>Morality</i> , Chapters 1-4.
09/10/20	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 1. Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 2.
09/17/20	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 3. Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 10.
09/24/20	David Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</i> , Sections 1 and 2. David Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</i> , Sections 3 and 4.
10/01/20	David Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</i> , Section 5. David Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</i> , Appendix I. Paragraphs for Midterm Papers Due
10/08/20	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Preface and Part One. Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Part Two.
10/15/19	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Part Two. Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Part Two.
	Fall Break
10/20/20	Midterm Papers Due
10/29/19	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Part Three. Jeremy Bentham, <i>Principles of Legislation</i> , Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 7.
11/05/19	John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Chapters 1 and 2.

	Bernard Williams, <i>Morality</i> , Chapter 10.
11/12/19	Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> , Preface and Part One (Sec. 1-7). Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> , Part One (Sec. 8-17).
11/19/19	Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> , Part Two. (Sec. 1-11) Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> , Part Three (Sec. 12-25) Paragraphs for Final Papers Due
11/26/19	Bernard Williams, <i>Morality</i> , Chapters 5-7. Philippa Foot, "Goodness and Choice."
12/03/20	John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness." Martha Nussbaum, "Sex and Social Justice," Introduction.
12/10/20	Jorge L. A. Garcia, "Philosophical Analysis and the Moral Concept of Racism." Cora Diamond, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy."
12/20/19	Final Papers Due

Literature

Some readings for this seminar will be combined as a reader, which can be purchased at the library. Moreover, there are several books that students must either buy or borrow.

Books to buy or borrow from the library

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.
2. Hume, David, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*.
3. Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*.
4. Mill, John Stuart, *Utilitarianism*.
5. Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals*.
6. Williams, Bernard, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*.

The library at Bard College Berlin should hold a sufficient number of copies of these books. Please, only use the published versions – specifically the translations – of these books that are reserved for this seminar. There is one exception: Bernard Williams' *Morality*. The library only holds three copies of this book, one of which will have to remain at the library. So, you might have to buy *Morality*, which is, however, a rather cheap book.

Throughout the seminar, the instructor will suggest further readings and helpful secondary literature. A very useful source for the purposes of philosophy is the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which is an online encyclopedia that offers many excellent articles on topics and philosophers that will be discussed in this seminar.

Computers (including all forms of tablets and smartphones) are not allowed during classes.