

PHIL 115: Introduction to Ethics

Spring 2008, TT 1:00-2:15

Gürsoy

Office Hours: Thursdays 4-5 pm, or by appointment @ Humanities 205

We pass judgments, on ourselves and on others with whom we interact in one way or another; we situate our own and others' actions and/or intentions within a field that is divided up into good and bad, virtue and vice, right and wrong; we are expected to fulfill certain duties (towards ourselves, friends, family, the society, etc.) and we expect others to recognize the rights we claim to have; in short, we evaluate. The focus of this course will be to provide an introduction to the problems that spur us to make value judgments and the conflicts that arise in our different ways of responding to those problems through a study of some of the fundamental texts on ethical thought in the history of philosophy. In pursuing this problematic, we will also be asking questions about two related themes: a) what is the *authority* we claim for our ethical judgments and whence does it arise; what is the basis of the difference between a force that would be legitimate, implied in that idea of authority (and its accompanying *sanctions*), and a force that lacks that authority, and hence would be violence, without qualifications? b) what is the specificity of ethics in relation to politics, on the one hand, and religion, on the other? Finally, if we have enough time in the second part of the semester, we will examine the ethical foundations of democracy, which seems to provide the ultimate horizon of any contemporary politics.

Required texts:

Sophocles, *Antigone* (A)

Plato, *Republic* (R)

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE)

J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (U)

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (G)

(I will also provide selections from contemporary articles on ethics and democracy on e-reserve.)

Particulars: The course requirements and the grade distribution are as follows: 4 quizzes (4 x 5%= 20% of your overall grade), 3 four-page papers (3 x 20=60%), final exam (15%), participation (5 %).

- The numerical/letter grade conversion scheme is as follows: 93-100=A, 90-92=A-, 87-89=B+, 83-86=B, 80-82=B-, ..., 65 and below=F.
- You will have seen that there are classes devoted exclusively to discussion. For these sessions you, as a group, will pick a topic interesting enough to stimulate debate; you will then write a one-page (double-spaced) outline of your argument that will help orient you in class. I will not grade these outlines, but they will be one of the factors determining your participation grade. During these sessions I will act only as a facilitator, and you will be speaking to each other. Our goal will be to apply some of the abstract patterns we study in class, develop and sharpen reasoning and speaking skills, and get clearer about our differences even when we do not reach a consensus.

Note: The honor code will be effective in this class. If you are uncertain about its details, you may ask me or consult your student handbook. You are expected to attend every class on time. If, however, you will have to miss a class for a legitimate reason, please notify me no later than 5 pm on the day of that class. Failure to attend more than one class without a legitimate reason will result in the reduction of 5 percentage points from your overall grade.

Jan 17 Introduction.

22 A, pp. 1-52

24 A, pp. 1-52

29 R, Books 1, 2 and 3

31 R, Books 4, 5

Feb 5 R, Books 6, 7 and 8

7 R, Books 9, 10

12 NE, Books 1, 2 and 3 (pp. 1-78) 1st paper due.

14 NE, Books 4, 5 and 6 (pp. 79-158)

19 NE, Books 7 and 8 (pp. 159-219)

21 NE, Books 9 and 10 (pp. 220-276)

26 Discussion session.

28 U, pp. 1-26

Mar 4 U, pp. 27-71

6 Review. 2nd paper due.

11 Spring Break

13 Spring Break

18 G, pp. 1-18

20 G, pp. 19-51

25 Mar 20th cont'd, and pp. 52-66

27 G, review of the text in relation to *Utilitarianism* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Apr 1 We will (re)analyze *Antigone* with the conceptual tools we will have accumulated. (You will have a short written assignment for this class.)

3 Discussion session.

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¹ The dates for which there are no readings listed will be devoted to articles I will place on e-reserve. These will cover material ranging from discussions of ethical issues to analyses of democracy from an ethical standpoint.

10

15 3rd paper due.

17

22

24

29 Review, final remarks.