

## **Introduction to Ethics, Spring 2013**

Humanities Hall 201, Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays, 3:45-4:50 PM,

Instructor: Apaar Kumar

Office Hours: Humanities Hall 205, 4:50-5:50 PM

Email: [akumar6@emory.edu](mailto:akumar6@emory.edu)

### **Course Description**

The discipline of ethics deals with two sets of issues. On the one hand, it concerns itself with the general question of how we ought to live our lives. This, in turn, includes questions like: What kinds of actions are right or wrong if we want to live a good life? What kind of person should one be? What might happiness mean? On the other hand, ethics also deals with questions about morality itself. Hence, it broadly raises the question of whether there are any moral truths at all. In this introductory course, we will touch upon both sets of issues. The aim of this course is twofold: exploring how the theories of erstwhile moral philosophers will help us better negotiate these issues/questions that arise inevitably in our everyday lives, and learning how to write about these issues in a thoughtful and accessible way.

### **Texts**

Plato, *Republic*

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Epictetus, *Enchiridion*

Epicurus, *The Essential Epicurus*

Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*

Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*

Mills, *Utilitarianism*

Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*

Vaughn, *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays*

(All these books are available at the Oxford Bookstore)

### **Honor Code**

It is assumed that you are familiar with the honor code and understand the implications of academic misconduct. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you're caught, you will be referred to the honor council.

### **Absence Policy**

You will not be penalized for absences if there is a valid reason and if you have informed me in advance. In cases of illness, a letter from the Student Health Center is required. Three unexcused absences will cost you a letter grade.

### **Course Requirements**

**I Reading:** As is usually the case, you will read the material in advance before we discuss it in class – so, for instance, when you come to class on January 18<sup>th</sup> you will have read Plato's *Republic*, Book I.

**Note:** The pace of the course will be dictated by our progress in class, and the syllabus may have to be changed to accommodate it. New versions of the syllabus (if required) will be sent to you in advance via Blackboard. CHECKING BLACKBOARD IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.

**II Homework:** To ensure that you come prepared to class, I will assign homework after every class (via Blackboard). You will send me this work via email to the following address: [akumar6@emory.edu](mailto:akumar6@emory.edu) with the subject heading "Ethics-2013." The homework assigned for a Monday class needs to be sent to me by 8pm on Sunday, the homework assigned for a Wednesday class needs to be sent to me by 8pm on Tuesday, and the homework assigned for a Friday class needs to be sent to me by 8pm on Thursday. For the most part, homework will be directly related to the reading assigned for a class.

You will be required to submit **two** kinds of assignments.

1. **Summaries:** In this type of homework assignment, you are required to summarize the reading for every class. This means that you will articulate the main point of the assigned reading. The length of these summaries should be between 100 and 150 words each.
2. **Response Journals:** These are pre-reading responses. Before starting work on a new author on the syllabus, I will send you one or two questions (a total of ten questions over the course of the semester). For instance, one of the response journal questions for the Plato reading asks you to articulate clearly your view of what a good person is. In your answers, you must clearly state your own view. These responses must be at least 400 words each.

**III Writing:** You will be required to write two short preparatory pieces, and two essays.

**Short preparatory pieces:**

1. **Argument Reconstruction:** You will be required to reconstruct the argument of an author (say, Plato's argument against Thrasymachus in Book I of the *Republic*). You will need to recognize the premises and the conclusion of the assigned text, and write out the argument of the author in a clear, narrative fashion with references from the text. This assignment is 3 pages long.
2. **Original Argument:** You will be required to either endorse or refute a sub-argument made by an author by making an original argument of your own. This assignment is 3 pages long.

**Essays:**

3. **Mid-Semester Essay:** A 6-7 page essay in which you will have to reconstruct an argument briefly and either endorse or refute it by making an original argument of your own. You will also have to consider and refute an argument that goes counter to your argument in this essay.
4. **Final Essay:** You will be required to write a 10-12 page essay for this course. For this essay, you will need to submit a paper proposal, the structure of which will be discussed in class. Once the proposal has been approved by me, you will then write the first draft of the paper. I will comment extensively on this draft. The final draft must take these comments into account.

**Grading**

Overall grades for the course will be calculated according to the following 1000-point scale:

A =	950-1000	B- =	800-832	D =	600-699
A- =	900-949	C+ =	767-799	F =	Less than 600
B+ =	867-899	C =	733-766		
B =	833-866	C- =	700-732		

The grade distribution is as follows:

Final Essay: 30%  
 Mid-Semester Essay: 25%  
 Argument Reconstruction: 10%  
 Original Argument: 10%  
 Homework\*: 15%  
 Class Participation: 10%

\*Homework Grading: The homework grade (15%) is based on the response journals and summaries. I will not provide feedback or assigning letter grades for this work. The grading here is negative: if you do the work honestly and send it me in a timely fashion, you will get 15% of the grade; but you lose 10 points from the overall grade each time you fail to do so.

#### Note

“Student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford College and Emory College faculty and staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.”

#### Reading Schedule

January 16	Introduction
January 18	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book I, pp. 1-14 [339b]
<b>January 21</b>	<b>Martin Luther King, Jr. Day [Holiday]</b>
January 23	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book I, pp. 14-31
January 25	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book II, pp. 33-44 [369c]
January 28	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book II, pp. 44-59
January 30	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book IX, pp. 241-63
February 1	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book IX, pp. 241-63 (cont.)
February 4	<i>Writing Philosophy</i> , Chs. 1, 2, 3, & 6 [Preparation for assignment “Argument Reconstruction”]
February 6	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I, pp. 1-18
February 8	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II, pp. 18-30
February 11	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II, pp. 30-45
February 13	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book V, pp. 67-84

#### Argument Reconstruction Due

- February 15 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, pp. 86-99
- February 18 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII, pp. 99-119
- February 20 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, pp. 119-29
- February 22 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX, pp. 141-53
- February 25 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, pp. 153-71
- February 27 *Writing Philosophy*, Chs. 4, 5, 7 & 8 [Preparation for assignment "Original Argument"]
- March 1 Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, pp. 11-45
- March 4 Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, pp. 11-45 (cont.)
- March 6 Epicurus, *The Essential Epicurus*, pp. 61-8, pp. 69-76 & pp. 77-86
- March 8 Epicurus, *The Essential Epicurus*, pp. 61-8, pp. 69-76 & pp. 77-86 (cont.)

#### **Original Argument Due**

#### **March 11-15 Spring Break**

- March 18 Kant, *Grounding*, pp. 1-17
- March 20 Kant, *Grounding*, pp. 19-29
- March 22 Kant, *Grounding*, pp. 29-48
- March 25 Kant, *Grounding*, pp. 49-62

#### **Paper Topics for the 6-7 Page Essay Assigned**

- March 27 Kant, On the Axe-Murderer case, pp. 63-67
- March 29 Hume, *Enquiry*, pp. 13-26
- April 1 Hume, *Enquiry*, pp. 27-42
- April 3 Hume, *Enquiry*, pp. 42-72

#### **6-7 page Essay Due**

- April 5 Hume, *Enquiry*, pp. 72-93
- April 8 Mill, *Utilitarianism*, pp. 1-26
- April 10 Mill, *Utilitarianism*, pp. 27-41
- April 12 Mill, *Utilitarianism*, pp. 42-64
- April 15 Mill, *Utilitarianism*, pp. 42-64 (cont.)

#### **Proposals for Final Essay Due**

- April 17 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp. 15-56
- April 19 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp. 57-76
- April 22 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp. 76-96

April 24	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy</i> , pp. 97-118
	<b>First Draft of Final Essay Due</b>
April 26	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy</i> , pp. 118-142
April 29	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy</i> , pp. 142-163
May 8	<b>Final Essay Due, 8pm</b>

**Homework for the January 18<sup>th</sup> class [Due January 17<sup>th</sup> 8pm via email]: Both questions are to be answered before you've read the text.**

(a) Portray a good person and a bad person and say why you think they are good/bad. Make sure that you depict and exemplify the qualities/actions of this person (it could be a character in a novel, film, someone you know, etc.), and clearly explain why you think these qualities/actions make them good or bad.

(b) Do you think that the strong (as opposed to the weak) decide what justice is? You can interpret "strong" or "weak" in any way that you want as long as you make it clear what you mean by these terms.