

Introduction to Ethics: Living Well, Morality, Justice

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I. Course Summary

Ethics examines the foundations of morality: what it means to live a good life, what persons ought to or ought not to do, and what counts as right or wrong. Ethics is also concerned with topics such as the nature of rights, justice, fairness, and human virtue and vice. As such, ethics has played a central role in shaping society and its laws, and moreover, it plays a central role in clarifying and deepening one's values, responsibilities, and moral commitments.

This course serves as a philosophical introduction to a variety of ethical theories concerning the good life, human virtue, moral action, and justice. Moreover, we will approach ethics as involving the interrogation of one's own character and clarification of the kind of person one would like to become.

In our study of ethics, we will engage in a dialogue with some of the most important ethical theorist from the Western tradition. We will expand our study of ethics by devoting attention to the moral dimensions of social injustices such as racism, misogyny, and colonialism. This course also aims to introduce students to the *practice of philosophy*. As we will see, this practice involves adopting an inquiring attitude toward the world and oneself, as well as employing methods of argumentative analysis, critical thinking, cultural open-mindedness, intellectual fairness, and self-reflection.

II. Course Goals and Objectives

1. Students will read important texts that reflect on the nature of the good life, morality, and justice.
2. Students will be able to define a variety of prominent ethical theories and identify their strengths and weaknesses.
3. Students will be able to articulate, share, justify, and refine their ethical values and moral commitments.
4. This class will focus on concrete examples and situations. Students will be able to apply the conceptual frameworks discussed in this class to enrich their own lives and to a variety of social and ethical situations.
5. This class will be discussion and writing centered. Students will write papers and work on a final creative project. As a result, students will develop their argumentative and critical thinking skills, as well as their written and verbal communication skills. The final creative project allows students to develop creative thinking in addition to analytical thinking.

III. Course Materials

We will be reading the following texts:

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.
2. Epictetus, *How To Be Free*.
3. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*.
4. Jonathan Wolff, *An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*.
5. Naomi Zack, *The Ethics and Mores of Race*.
6. Additional readings available on Sakai.

IV. Evaluation

1. Philosophy Journal. *Each week I will post a journal prompt. Students will respond to these prompts and submit a copy of their journals by Friday of each week. Responses must be at least 500 words.*
2. Three papers. *Three times during the term students will submit a 3-5 page paper responding to a prompt (see calendar below for dates). Grading is based on a detailed rubric (available on Sakai). 60% of total grade = each paper is 20% of total grade.*
3. Creative project. *Students will submit a creative project on a topic of their choice. This may take the form of a traditional research paper, a piece of creative writing (e.g., poetry or prose), a podcast, graphic novel, or short film. This project will proceed in two stages. First, students will submit proposals detailing and outlining their projects (see calendar for due dates). Second, students will complete their projects according to their proposals. Due by 5pm on the Friday of finals week. 20% of total grade.*

Grade scale: A+ \geq 97 > A \geq 93 > A- \geq 90 > B+ \geq 87 > B \geq 83 > B- \geq 80 >; etc.

V. Calendar

- WEEK 1: What is Ethics?
Tuesday: Introduction, Logistics
Thursday: Wolff, Chapter 1.
Dr. King Jr. "Speech from Birmingham Jail".

- WEEK 2: Moral Relativism and Skepticism

Tuesday: Wolff, Chapter 2.

Paul Boghossian, “The Maze of Moral Relativism”, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/07/20/maze-of-moral-relativism/>

Thursday: Wolff, Chapter 3. Excerpt from Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

Häggglund, “Why Morality Makes us Free”, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/11/opinion/why-mortality-makes-us-free.html>.

- WEEK 3: Dying and Living Well

Tuesday: Epictetus, The *Encheiridion* (from *How To Be Free*).

Thursday: Nozick, “The Experience Machine”.

Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*, Excerpt.

- WEEK 4: Free Will and Moral Responsibility, Paper 1 due Thursday

Tuesday: Wolff, Chapter 4.

Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Excerpt.

Thursday: Waller, “Chanelle, Sabrina and the Oboe”.

- WEEK 5: Natural Law Theory

Tuesday: Wolff, Chapter 5.

St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part 2, Question 94.

Thursday: Plato, *Euthyphro*.

Zack, Chapter 3.

- WEEK 6: Social Contract Theory

Tuesday: Wolff, Chapter 7.

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Excerpt.

Thursday: Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*.

- WEEK 7: Charles W. Mill’s Analysis of Social Contract Theory

Tuesday: Mills, Introduction and Chapter 1.

Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Excerpt.

Thursday: Mills, Chapter 3.

- WEEK 8: Utilitarianism, Paper 2 due Thursday

Tuesday: Wolff, Chapter 8.

J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 1 and 2.

Thursday: Wolff, Chapter 9

J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 4.

- WEEK 9: Mid-semester break

- WEEK 10: Deontology: Kant

Tuesday: Wolff, Chapter 10.

Thursday: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Excerpt.

- WEEK 11: Challenges to Deontology, Paper 2 due Thursday:
Tuesday: Wolff, Chapter 11.
Thursday: Zack, Chapter 7.

- WEEK 12: Virtue Ethics
Tuesday: Wolff, Chapter 12.
Thursday: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1.

- WEEK 13: Virtue Ethics, Paper 3 due Thursday
Tuesday: Wolff, Chapter 13.
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2.
Thursday: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 10.

- WEEK 14: Justice, Creative Project Proposal Due Thursday
Tuesday: Plato, *The Republic* Books 1 and 2.
Thursday: Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, Excerpt.

- WEEK 15: Luck and Punishment
Tuesday: Kadish, “The Criminal Law and the Luck of the Draw”.
Thursday: Lewis, “The Punishment That Leaves Something to Chance”.

- WEEK 16: Imprisonment

Tuesday: Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Excerpt.
Thursday: Creative Project Workshop.

- FINALS WEEK: Creative Projects Due Friday at 5pm

VI. Student Wellbeing

Maintaining and promoting students’ social, emotion, and mental wellbeing is a priority. If you or someone you know needs help, there are a variety of counseling and wellness related resources available at the student health center. Please contact me if you would like more information regarding such services. It is important to me that students take sleep and rest seriously; they should aim for about 8 hours of sleep each night. If a student needs an extension for any assignment, please talk to me before or after class or send me an email.