

Amoralism throughout the Ages

Instructor: Merrick Anderson

Time and Location: TBA

Office Hours: W, 4-6, Marx 114

Overview and Objectives

Why should I do the right thing? What am I to do when morality suggests one course of action, but my own desires and interests point to another? These questions have been of central concern to the moral philosophers of the past. In this class we will survey some of the greatest challenges to morality and the responses that these challenges have elicited. Beginning with the Greeks and working our way to the contemporary period, we will follow the historical dialectic between those who have challenged and those who have defended the moral life. Attending to this dialectic should bring us to grapple with these questions too. By the end of the course, each and every student will be expected to think about these questions for themselves.

Aside from addressing the philosophic theme of morality and its relationship to happiness, this introductory course also aims to help students develop the fundamentals of critical thinking and clear, philosophical writing.

Requirements and Evaluation

There will be three assignments throughout the term as well as one exam. The first assignment will be a 'problem-set', in which students will be required to answer very specific and detailed questions about two related but distinct philosophic positions. The second assignment will require students to use the analytical skills tested in the first assignments in order to create a road-map of an argument of their own choosing. Finally, the students will be asked to write one short but complete philosophical essay. Thus, over the course of the term, students will be introduced to the fundamentals of philosophical writing and thinking. In addition to these three assignments, there will be a mid-exam evaluating the students' comprehension of material addressed in the lectures and the readings. Students are expected to attend classes regularly and participate in precepts.

- 15% Problem-set
- 45% Longer Papers
- 25% Mid-term
- 15% Participation
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Administrative Issues

Late Assignments: Late work will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade (from an A- to a B+, for example) for the first two days an assignment is late and each day after that, unless there are legitimate extenuating circumstances.

Required Texts

Joseph Butler, Five Sermons, edited by Stephen Darwall

Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, edited by Edwin Curley

Immanuel Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, translated by James Ellington

Plato, Republic, translated by Grube and Reeve
Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, translated by Walter Kaufman
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, translated by Walter Kaufman

Other required texts can be found in the course packet.
The recommended readings will be made available online.

Course Outline and Readings

Week One: Deontological Beginnings

1. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: Preface and Section One
2. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: Preface and Section One

Suggested Readings: Bailey, 'Analysing the Good Will: Kant's Argument in the First Section of the *Groundwork*'

Week Two: Ancient Doubts

1. Prichard, *Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?*; and *Duty and Interest*
2. Plato, *Gorgias*: 479d-495a; and Thucydides, 'The Melian Dialogue' V.84-116

Suggested Readings: Williams, 'Socrates Question'

Week Three: Ancient Responses

1. Plato, *Republic*: Book I
2. Plato, *Republic*: Book II

Suggested Readings: Vlastos, 'Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*'

Week Four: Ancient Responses Continued

1. Plato, *Republic*: Book IV
2. Plato, *Republic*: Book IX and Book X, 612c-621d

Suggested Readings: Reeve, 'Beginning with Eudaimonia'

Week Five: Modern Misgivings

1. Hobbes, *Leviathan*: Chapters 6-11
2. Hobbes, *Leviathan*: Chapters 13-16

Optional Readings: Feinberg, 'Psychological Egoism'; and Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*: Selections from Part II

Week Six: A Response to Egoism

1. Butler, *Five Sermons*: Preface and Sermons 1-2

2. Butler, *Five Sermons*: Sermons 11-12

Suggested Readings: Henson, 'Butler on Selfishness and Self-Love'

Break

Week Seven: Ancient Doubts Radicalized

1. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*: Preface and Part 1
2. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*: Part 5 and Part 9

Suggested Readings: Mary Higgins, 'Rebaptizing our Evil: On the Revaluation of All Values'

Week Eight: Ancient Doubts Radicalized Continued

1. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*: Preface and First Essay.
2. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*: Second Essay

Suggested Readings: Janaway, 'Beyond Selflessness'

Week Nine: 'The Profoundest Problem of Ethics'

1. Sidgwick, *Method of Ethics*: Book II.1 and Book IV.2-6
2. Foot, 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives'; and Williams, 'Internal and External Reasons'

Suggested Readings: Lazari-Radek and Singer, 'The Profoundest Problem of Ethics'

Week Ten: Metaphysical and Scientific Worries

1. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*: Part I
2. Street, 'A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value'

Suggested Readings: Strawson, 'The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility'

Week Eleven: Contemporary Responses

1. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*: Selections from Part II
2. Brink, 'Self-Love and Altruism'

Suggested Readings: Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement*: Chapter 1

Week Twelve: Reconciliations and Compromises

1. Williams, 'The Archimedean Point'; and Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*: Chapter 2
2. Make up session; Review and Conclusion