

History of Moral Philosophy
Spring 2006
Phil 621

Objective

This course will examine the works of some of the central figures in the history of moral philosophy. Because the department offers a course in the history of political philosophy, we will not be reading the works of philosophers who are well-known in that field (e.g., Hobbes and Locke), even though those works might sensibly be covered in this course as well. Here are the philosophers we will cover: **Plato, Aristotle, Butler, Hume, Kant, Mill, and Nietzsche**. We will go quickly, which means we won't dwell too long over exegetical details. Our goal will be to familiarize ourselves with the major themes in these works. This course will (i) help you to see how the themes we discuss come up in the works of contemporary philosophers, and (ii) give you a good basis for teaching courses in ethical theory and the history of (moral) philosophy.

Contact information

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Office hours: Monday and Wednesday, 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m., and by appointment.

I may have reason to email you during the semester. Because I have access only to your BGSU email address, you must either occasionally check that address, or set it up so that it forwards messages to the account you normally use. You are responsible for making sure you receive any information I send via email.

Meeting times and places

12:30 p.m. – 2:15 p.m., Monday and Wednesday. 301 Shatzel Hall.

Required texts

Plato, *Republic* (Hackett).

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Hackett).

Butler, *Five Sermons* (Hackett).

Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford).

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge).

Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Oxford).

Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* (Hackett).

I don't much care which editions (or translations) you use. However, the editions I have picked out are pretty standard, and the translations (when there are translations) are well-respected. Also, in most cases, the price is right.

Assignments

1. Four reading response papers, 2 pages each: 10%.
2. Either one 15 – 20 page paper, or two 8 – 10 page papers: 80%.
3. One class presentation, about 20 minutes: 10%.

** Philosophy auditors are required to do *either* four reading responses *or* a class presentation. That's all.

Reading response

The reading response papers are designed to help you start thinking and writing about the texts. In two double-spaced pages, you should briefly state the main point of the assigned text (or a part of it), sketch its argument, and make one critical point about it. Do not go over 2 pages! Brevity is a virtue.

You are required to turn in a reading response paper on four separate occasions during the course. You are welcome to turn in a reading response paper on the week you give your presentation.

Presentation and paper(s)

The presentation should be about 20 minutes, and should consist in a sketch of the main points of the assigned reading. Ideally you will raise a critical comment or question (or two), to get the discussion going. These readings can be really hard, so don't worry if you don't understand it all. Do the best you can, and bring your questions to class.

You may do your presentation and your paper – or one of your papers, if you choose to write two 8 – 10 page papers – on the same topic. Indeed, I encourage this.

If you choose to write two 8 – 10 page papers, aim to turn the first one in about halfway through the course. Week 10 is a good goal.

Attendance policy

Attendance will not be taken, nor will it count as part of your final grade. However, I expect you to attend class regularly, and to contribute to discussions in class.

Academic integrity policy

I doubt you need to be reminded of this, but don't plagiarize. At this level, what's the point? Just in case, BGSU's official policy can be found here:

http://www.bgsu.edu/catalog/Acad_policies/Acad_policies2.html

Late policy/missed exam policy

Reading response papers will not be accepted late. If you can't get it done by the time class starts, don't bother. Do it another week. For every reading response you fail to turn in by the final day of the course, your final grade will be docked 2.5%.

Presentations must be done on time. If an emergency comes up, then you will be allowed to do your presentation on another day, or present on another topic. Otherwise, be prepared to present on the day you are assigned.

Plan to turn in your final paper(s) by May 5th. There will be no penalty for late papers. But it is in your interest to get your work done on time.

Withdrawal policy

The university's withdrawal policy can be found here:

http://www.bgsu.edu/catalog/Acad_policies/Acad_policies15.html#withdraw

Readings

Below is a *tentative* list of readings. These are subject to change, depending on time and class interest. You are expected to have completed the relevant readings *before* class meets.

Week 1: Plato

1/9: Introduction

1/11: *Republic*, Bk 1.

Week 2: Plato

1/16: MLK. No class.

1/18: *Republic* Bk 2.

Weeks 3: Aristotle

1/23: NE, Bk 1, Bk 10 (ch. 6 – 8).

1/25: NE, Bk 2, Bk 3 (6 – 12).

Week 4: Aristotle

1/30: NE, Bk 3 (1 – 5), Bk 7 (1 – 10).

2/1: Korsgaard, "Aristotle on Function and Virtue."

Week 5: Butler

2/6: Sermons I – III, "Upon Human Nature."

2/8: Sermon IV, "Upon the Love of Our Neighbor."

Weeks 6: Hume

2/13: *Treatise*, Book II, part III, sect. 3; Book III, part 1, sects. 1 and 2.

2/15: Same.

Week 7: Hume

2/20: *Treatise*, Book III, part 2, sects. 1 and 2.

2/22: *Treatise*, Book III, part 3, sects. 1, 2, and 3.

Week 8: Hume

2/27: Millgram, "Was Hume a Humean?"

3/1: Smith, from *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Guest Lecturer: Monica Gerrek).

Spring break, March 6th – 12th.

Week 9: Kant

3/13: *Groundwork*, sect. I.

3/15: Korsgaard, "Kant's Analysis of Obligation: the Argument of *Groundwork* I."

Week 10: Kant

3/20: *Groundwork*, sect. II.

3/22: Same.

Week 11: Kant

3/27: *Groundwork*, sect. III

3/29: Rawls, selections from *A Theory of Justice*, sects. 3, 4, 11, 40.

Week 12: Mill

4/3: *Utilitarianism*, parts I and II

4/5: Same.

Week 13: Mill

4/10: *Utilitarianism*, parts III and IV.

4/12: Same.

Week 14: Nietzsche.

4/17: GM, Preface and First Essay.

4/19: Same.

Week 15: Nietzsche

4/24: GM, Second Essay.

4/26: Foot, "The Revaluation of Values."