

1-2014

PHL 210E.01: Moral Philosophy

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Spring 2014
MW 1:40-3:00
LA 138

Philosophy 210: Moral Philosophy

Humans, when perfected, are the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, the worst of all.

—Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a31-33

Our objective is to develop an appreciation for three leading approaches to moral philosophy through a careful reading of classical texts in the Western tradition together with some of their recent descendants. Our investigation of each approach will center around the following three questions: how do I tell if an action (or way of living) is 'good' as in morally right on?; what *makes* an action (or way of living) morally good?; what is supposed to motivate me, or anyone, to act (or live) in a morally good way?

Requirements

This is a seminar-style course, so your regular attendance and thoughtful participation are all-important. Occasional absences will diminish your grade; frequent absences will lead me to ask you to drop the course. Reading the assigned works carefully before you come to class is **essential**. Please always be sure to bring the readings to class with you.

Your final grades will be based on the following percentages:

1. Three Papers: 85% (20%, 25% and 40%, respectively)
2. Participation: 15%. This portion of your grade takes into account (a) your attendance and the *quality* of your comments in class; (b) the quality of your workshop comments; (c) other short assignments. Every absence beyond two will diminish your participation grade and more than four will *seriously* hurt it.

In determining final grades I will take into account the extent to which your work improves over the course of the term.

Please note: All of the assignments are due according to deadline. As a rule, I won't accept late work or 'make-up' work.

Please note also that you must participate in the workshops in order to receive credit on the papers for which they are designed. No exceptions.

If you have to miss a class or anticipate difficulties in meeting an assignment, talk to me about the situation as soon as you can.

Papers

The point of the papers is to give you a chance to develop a position on a fundamental yet focused topic connected to our readings.

You must complete each of the paper assignments to receive credit for the course.

Academic Misconduct

You plagiarize when you represent someone else's work as your own. Plagiarism is a form of theft, specifically, the theft of someone else's *thoughts* or *words* which you then claim as your own. Plagiarism is prohibited by the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php). Examples of plagiarism range from the blatant, e.g., handing in work that you did not do (perhaps you bought a paper from the internet or simply borrowed a paper from another student) to the more subtle, e.g., using material—perhaps no more than one idea, or a sentence—from an outside source, such as a book, a website, a published or unpublished paper, without documenting that source. Let me know if you ever have questions about whether something constitutes plagiarism (asking will not bring you under suspicion!). It is also a violation of the Student Conduct Code to hand in work that you already submitted for a previous course. You will *at a minimum* receive an "F" on any work that plagiarizes.

Books

Plato, *Republic* (ca. 380 BCE)
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (ca. 350 BCE)
Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)
Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)
Bentham and Mill, *The Classical Utilitarians* (1800s)
Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2010)
Klinkenborg, *Several Short Sentences about Writing* (2013)

All of these books are available at the University Bookstore.

Moodle

A number of readings have been posted on Moodle. Please print hard copies to bring to class.

Coursepack

I will distribute a packet of my notes on the readings. Please bring these to class as well. They are *definitely* not a substitute for reading the texts yourself and are probably best read *after* your own reading of the text.

Note

Please let me know if you have a disability so we can make suitable arrangements.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

This is a provisional schedule; we will probably make some changes to it as we go. It's your responsibility to keep on top of the changes. (M)=Moodle.

Jan

- M 27 Introductions
- W 29 Allen Wood, "Relativism" (Handout)

Feb

- M 3 Plato, *Republic* (Rep.) I 327a-336a (Cephalus and Polemarchus)
- W 5 Rep. I 336b-344c (Thrasymachus); Cohen, "Judge Judy" (M)
Also: Klinkenborg, 1-13 and Wilkerson, 1-46

- M 10 Foot, "Moral Beliefs" pp. 125-131 (M); NYT, "Profiling Report" (M)
- W 12 Phillips, "Does it Pay to be Good?" (M)
Also: Klinkenborg, 13-32 and Wilkerson, 47-94

- M 17 President's Day. No Class.
- W 19 Rep. II 357a-367e (Ring of Gyges)
Also: Klinkenborg, 32-47 and Wilkerson, 95-122

- M 24 **Paper #1 draft due in class. Workshop.**
- W 26 Film: *Eyes on the Prize* "Awakenings" (Emmett Till and the CRM 1954-1956)
Paper #1 rewrite due Thursday February 27 by 5p in LA 101 (mailbox "Clarke")

March

- M 3 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, §§I-III
- W 5 Hume, *Enquiry*, §§V-VIII, focusing on §V
Also: Klinkenborg, 47-59 and Wilkerson, 123-164

- M 10 Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chaps. I and IV (pp. 8-22) and "Push-Pin versus Poetry" (p. 94) in *The Classical Utilitarians*
- W 12 Rawls, "Classical Utilitarianism" (M)
Also: Klinkenborg, 59-70 and Wilkerson, 165-204

- M 17 R.M. Hare, "What is Wrong with Slavery" (M)
- W 19 Film: *Eyes on the Prize* "Mississippi: Is this America?" (Voter reg. and the CRM 1963-1964)
Also: Klinkenborg, 70-85 and Wilkerson, 205-221

- M 24 **Paper #2 draft due in class. Workshop.**
- W 26 No class.
Paper #2 rewrite due Thursday March 27 by 5p in LA 101 (mailbox "Clarke")

March 31-April 4 Spring Break

April

M 7 Kant, *Groundwork* (G.) Preface and Section I

W 9 G. section II (406-427)

Also: Klinkenborg, 85-94 and Wilkerson, 222-259

M 14 G. section II (428-end)

W 16 MLK, Jr. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail [1963]" (M); *Brown v Board of Education* [1952] (M)

Also: Klinkenborg, 94-107 and Wilkerson, 260-301

M 21 Film: *Eyes on the Prize "Fighting Back"* (Little Rock and the CRM 1957-1962)

W 23 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* [NE] 1.1-1.9, skipping 1.6 (the *telos* of human life)

Also: Klinkenborg, 107-116 and Wilkerson, 302-331

M 28 NE 1.13-all of NE 2 (virtue of character); Comte-Sponville, "Politeness" (M)

W 30 NE 3.6-4.9 (some particular virtues of character)

Also: Klinkenborg, 116-126 and Wilkerson, 332-363

May

M 5 Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn" (M); NE 7.1-7.4 (*akrasia*)

W 7 **Paper #3 draft due in class. Workshop.**

Also: Klinkenborg, 126-135 and Wilkerson, 364-412

Paper #3 rewrite due Monday May 12 by 5p in LA 101 (mailbox "Clarke")

Paper Topics

First Paper Topic

Explain, in your own words, the point that Glaucon seeks to establish with the story of the ring of Gyges. Then consider whether Foot and/or Phillips would be able to justify morality to someone who possesses the ring (to give such a person compelling reasons to behave morally). Be sure to develop and defend your answers with specifics from the texts we've read.

Length: Four double-spaced pages, normal font size (11 or 12) and margins. 1000-1200 words, depending on the font. Please indicate the word count at the top of your paper.

▲Due in class Monday February 24.

Rewrite due Thursday February 27 by 5p in LA 101 (mailbox "Clarke")

Second Paper Topic

Critically discuss the charge that utilitarianism is too permissive. Carefully explain what the charge is and why you do, or do not, take it to be justified. Make use of the pieces we read by Rawls and Hare in your discussion.

Length: Four double-spaced pages, normal font size (11 or 12) and margins. 1000-1200 words. Please indicate the word count at the top of your paper.

▲Due in class Monday March 24.

Rewrite due Thursday March 27 by 5p in LA 101 (mailbox "Clarke")

Third Paper Topic

(a) Consider whether Huck Finn's decision *not* to turn Jim in to the authorities is an example of courage, as Aristotle conceives it. Explain why or why not. Then (b) consider whether Huck's decision is consistent with Kant's categorical imperative. Explain why or why not. (Here I recommend focusing on *one* formulation of the imperative.) Finally, (c) briefly discuss which of these ideals—Aristotle's conception of virtue or Kant's conception of moral goodness—you find more compelling, and why. Be sure to use specifics from the relevant texts in developing your answers. Huck Finn's decision is described in Bennett, pp. 124-127.

▲Due Monday May 12 by 5p in LA 101 (mailbox "Clarke")

Length: Six double-spaced pages, normal font size (11 or 12) and margins. 1350-1450 words. Please indicate the word count at the top of your paper.