

[The following syllabus is tentative and open to revision by instructor prior to beginning of course.]

Instructor: Casey Ford
Email: ford@c@uoguelph.ca
Office Hours: TBA and by appointment
Office: MacKinnon 325
University of Guelph
Department of Philosophy

TA: Kelly Jones
Email: jonesk@uoguelph.ca
Office Hours: TBA
Office: TBA
University of Guelph
Department of Philosophy

Meeting Time and Location: Mon/Wed/Fri 12:30 – 1:20
MACK 031

PHIL 2120: Ethics

“You’re not you when you’re hungry.”
– *Snickers* slogan, Mars Inc.

Course Description

The tradition of philosophical ethics has a long and rich history. The word “ethics” is derived from the Greek ἦθος [*ethos*], meaning the development of one’s character, values, and conduct. This course will examine the structure of certain “ethical” questions through a selection of readings in the history of philosophy. These questions include, but are not limited to: What does it mean to be an ethical subject? How are and how should one’s individual or collective values and conducts be determined? Are ethical concerns and responses defined by social and political contexts? Do our physical bodies in their diverse states in some way affect our ethical questions? This course will begin with readings from both Ancient Greece and Rome where the question of ethics was posed in regard to the constitution of the individual as a subject of “virtue.” From Aristotle to the Roman Stoics, these inquiries focused on the different techniques and principles that an ethical subject must necessarily adopt in relation to the human “passions” if one is to live a “good life.” (We will give special consideration to the passions of pleasure and hunger.) We will then move to the modern era in order to examine how this conflict became intertwined with the concept of reason. We will then read a number of highly provocative texts that attempt to locate the origin of our value-claims, and the form of relation to ourselves, in certain historical and political contexts. Finally, we will conclude the course with a film viewing that takes up many of these ethical themes within the context of the prison system. The aim of the course is both to introduce students to important texts in the history of the philosophy that have approached the question of ethics, as well as to examine the different ways in which ethics as a field is tied up with other social, political, and even biological questions.

Texts

Required texts available for purchase from university bookstore:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Hackett)

Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters* (Hackett)

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork on the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Vintage)
Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Vintage)

Digital texts provided on CourseLink:

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (selections)

Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"

Franz Kafka, "The Hunger Artist" and "The Penal Colony"

Assignments

Short Writing Assignment 20%

Short exegetical questions pertaining to Aristotle, Epicurus, and Stoicism. Students will be evaluated on the comprehensiveness, clarity, and conciseness of explaining philosophical arguments.

Short Analytic Essay 40%

An analytic and critical essay between 5-7 pages in length in which students are expected to explain the arguments of one or more thinkers, and to critically assess their argumentative value.

Film Response 10%

A 1-page, single-spaced response in which students must analyze the predominant themes and ideas of the film and tie them into the ethical and philosophical problems dealt with in course.

Final Exam 30%

A comprehensive evaluation of the material dealt with in course involving both short answer and essay format responses.

Reading Schedule

All students are expected to complete the entirety of the assigned readings before the class for which readings are scheduled, and to come to class prepared to contribute to discussion of the material.

Week 1

F Sept. 7 Introduction to course

Week 2

M Sept. 10 Introduction to ethics of "virtue"

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 1

W Sept. 12 Aristotle (cont'd)

F Sept. 14 Aristotle (cont'd)

Week 3

M Sept. 17 *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. II [Focus: Chs. 8-9]

W Sept. 19 Aristotle (cont'd)

F Sept. 21 Aristotle (cont'd)

Week 4

M Sept. 24 Epicurus, *Letter to Menoecus*
W Sept. 26 Epicurus (cont'd)
F Sept. 28 Introduction to Stoicism
Aurelius, *Meditations* selections: 4.3, 6.8

Week 5

M Oct. 1 Aurelius (cont'd)
W Oct. 3 Aurelius (cont'd)
F Oct. 5 Introduction to Spinoza

Week 6

M Oct. 8 Holiday – Class cancelled (rescheduled to Th Nov. 29)
W Oct. 10 Spinoza, Bk. III, “Preface”
Short Writing Assignment Due
F Oct. 12 Spinoza, Bk. III

Week 7

M Oct. 15 Spinoza, Bk. IV
W Oct. 17 Spinoza, Bk. IV
F Oct. 19 Spinoza, Bk. V

Week 8

M Oct. 22 Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*
W Oct. 24 Kant (cont'd)
F Oct. 26 Kant (cont'd)
Recommended: Kafka, “The Penal Colony”

Week 9

M Oct 29 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay
W Oct 31 Nietzsche (cont'd)
F Nov. 2 Nietzsche (cont'd)
Analytic Essay Due

Week 10

M Nov. 5 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay
W Nov. 7 Nietzsche (cont'd)
F Nov. 9 Nietzsche (cont'd)

Week 11

M Nov. 12 Foucault, “The Body of the Condemned,” pp. 3-31
W Nov. 14 Foucault (cont'd)
F Nov. 16 Foucault (cont'd)

Week 12

M Nov. 19 Foucault (cont'd)

W Nov. 21 Foucault (cont'd)

F Nov. 23 Cancelled for Film

Recommended: Kafka, "The Hunger Artist"

Week 13

M Nov. 26 Cancelled for Film

Final Exam Study Session Scheduled

W Nov. 28 Cancelled for Film

Th Nov. 29 Film Viewing and Discussion Film, Class rescheduled from Oct. 8 TBA

T Dec. 04 **Final Exam, 8:30 – 10:30 AM**