

West Los Angeles College

Philosophy 20 Ethics

Fall 2015

Instructor

Rick Mayock, Professor of Philosophy

“My guard stood hard when abstract threats, too noble to neglect,
Deceived me into thinking I had something to protect,
‘Good and bad,’ I defined these terms, quite clear, no doubt, somehow,
Ah, but I was so much older then, I’m younger than that now.”
--Bob Dylan, “My Back Pages”

Required Texts

Johnson, Oliver A., *Ethics: Selections from Classical and Contemporary Writers*
Rosenstand, Nina, *The Moral of the Story: An Introduction to Ethics*

Course Objectives

This class will examine major philosophical ideas of human values as expressed both in their historical and contemporary settings. Students will become familiar with various ethical theories and concepts and will develop the skills to sympathetically present these ideas. In addition, students will learn how to critically evaluate philosophical ideas and to foresee their implications for life and society. Specific topics of discussion include defining ethical communities, the problem of relativism, utilitarianism, deontological theories and virtue theories. We will explore these ideas in the context of discussions relating morality to religion, science, business, medicine, the law, the arts, the media and politics. As we examine the theoretical aspects of morality, we will explore some current ethical issues such as the morality of abortion and the death penalty, animal rights and our moral responsibility to the environment.

Grading Procedure

Grades will be determined by three take-home exams and several in-class group projects. The take-home exams will comprise questions that evaluate students’ understanding of the material and ability to express philosophical concepts coherently. Exam questions will be given in advance of the due dates, which will be strictly enforced.

Internet research and citations will not be accepted. All essays should be typed and double-spaced. Essays not in this format will not be accepted. Late essays will not be accepted.

Essays should be given to the instructor personally, on or before the appointed due date. If an essay is not handed to the instructor personally, the student will not receive credit. Essays should **not** be left in the instructor's office or mail box, or given to any other instructors, secretaries, administrators, or anyone but the instructor. **Essays sent to the instructor by email will not be accepted.**

The in-class group projects will be designed to facilitate understanding of the material and to stimulate discussion of ethical issues in a philosophical setting. The study of philosophy involves communication, so students are expected to attend class and to participate in class. The group projects will be graded CR/NCR and students who participate in the projects will be given full credit. The in-class group projects will also be designed to ensure that students stay current with the reading assignments. If students are reading the assigned material carefully and do not fall behind, no additional preparation for the group projects will be necessary.

The study of philosophy involves communication, so students are expected to attend class and to participate in class. The idea is to discuss philosophy and to allow ourselves to explore philosophical concepts in an atmosphere that is tolerant, stimulating and intellectually nurturing.

Attendance Policy

The instructor will keep records of attendance and timeliness of assignments. Excessive absences will adversely affect the final grade for the course.

Students are expected to attend every meeting of all classes. Violation of this regulation may result in exclusion from the class. **Whenever absences "in hours" exceed the number of hours the class meets per week, the instructor will consider whether there are mitigating circumstances that justify the absences. If the instructor determines that such circumstances do not exist, the instructor may exclude the student from the class. Three cases of tardiness may be considered equivalent to one absence.**

It is the student's responsibility to consult with his or her instructor regarding absences that would alter the student's status in the class. If a student is not present when the instructor takes role, he or she will not receive credit for attendance. If a student comes late to class, it is his or her responsibility to inform the instructor after class; otherwise he or she will not receive credit for attendance.

Cell Phone Policy

Cell phones are not permitted in the classroom. A ringing cell phone that is audible during the class is a disruption of the class and the owner will be asked to leave the classroom and will not be given credit for attendance. If the cell phone goes off a second time the student will be excluded from the class. This policy also applies to pagers,

beepers and any kind of electronic device that disrupts the class. **Students are not permitted to make audio or visual recordings of any portion of the class or lecture without the consent of the instructor.**

Cheating and Plagiarism Policy

The following is based on the provisions of the California Educational Code, the California Penal Code and the LACCD Board of Trustees: Board Rule 9803.12: “Dishonesty, such as cheating, or knowingly furnishing false information to the Colleges.” Any student who cheats on a quiz or plagiarizes an essay will be given no credit for that quiz or essay and will be referred to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. In addition, that student will have the equivalent value of that assignment subtracted from the total points earned for the class. In other words, if an exam is worth 33 points, and plagiarism has been detected, the student will receive no credit for the exam **and** will have 33 points subtracted from the total points for the class.

Exams with internet references or citations will be considered plagiarism and will not be accepted. There is much scholarship available in philosophy, but most of what is on the internet is spurious at best. Students are warned to be cautious and skeptical regarding philosophical internet sites. All of the material needed to write the essays is contained in the assigned readings and will be discussed at length in class. Students who wish to read additional secondary sources may consult the reading list or discuss other sources with the instructor. **Any material downloaded from the internet and presented as the student’s own work will be considered plagiarism.**

Reading Assignments

Students are expected to stay current with the reading assignments. Reading the material **before** it is discussed greatly increases your understanding and enriches your philosophical experience.

In addition to the assigned readings there will be occasional handouts. Students are responsible for all material distributed in the class.

It should be noted that this schedule is tentative, and may be subject to amendment.

Introduction

Rosenstand, chapter 1
Johnson, Introduction

Ethical Relativism

Rosenstand, chapter 3
Benedict, Ruth, “In Defense of Moral Relativism” (handout)

Pojman, Louis, "A Critique of Moral Relativism" (handout)
Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil* (from Johnson)
Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (handout)

Normative Ethics: Utilitarianism

Bentham, Jeremy, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (from Johnson)
Mill, John Stuart, *Utilitarianism* (from Johnson)
Rosenstand, chapter 5

Normative Ethics: Duty Theory

Kant, Immanuel, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (from Johnson)
Rosenstand, chapter 6

Normative Ethics: Virtue Theory

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (from Johnson)
Franklin, Benjamin, *The Autobiography* (handout)
Rosenstand, chapter 9
Skoble, Aeon J., "Virtue Ethics in TV's 'Seinfeld'" (handout)

Contemporary Moral Problems

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, "Nature" (handout)
Godfrey-Smith, William, "The Value of the Wilderness" (handout)
Leopold, Aldo, "The Land Ethic," from *A Sand County Almanac* (handout)
Seattle, Chief, "Letter to President Pierce" (handout)
Singer, Peter, "The Case for Animal Liberation" (handout)
Cohen, Carl, "The Case Against Animal Rights" (handout)

Commentaries

The readings in this class are largely original sources rather than commentaries. In other words, we will be reading the philosophers in their own words rather than reading what others have written about them. For commentaries the following works are recommended:

Copleston, Frederick, S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vol.
Edwards, Paul, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vol.

Both works are in our library, and should be consulted for specific topics. Also, both works contain excellent bibliographies.