

# Origins of Western Morality

SPRING 2017

Meeting Time: M/Th 10:55 – 12:15

Meeting Location: CDL 109

Professor Kocar  
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Office Location: Room 112 Loree Building  
Office Hours: Th 9 – 10:30 or by appointment

## Course Description

This course is an introduction to some of the most important ancient thinkers and writers in the Western Canon on morality. We will consider Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Christian intellectuals as they strove to articulate and defend their views on how best to live our lives. As we shall see, they often do not agree with one another. How do we account for why and how they disagree with one another? Are some moral arguments superior to others? And is it possible to evaluate the persuasive force of ethical claims, especially when they come into conflict with one another? Throughout this course, we shall repeatedly return to these questions as we survey the competing views of ancient moralists, with an eye towards both their historical contexts and their continued significance in modern ethical debates.

## Plan for the Course

Each class will be organized around a particular theme and a primary or series of primary (ancient) readings in translation. We shall discuss together the major issues found in these readings. My hope is to have time in each session for active debate as we examine various topics throughout the course. This course will be divided into four major units. At the end of each of the first three units, you will have a 5 – 7 page paper due; these unit papers will address specific authors and questions from that unit. At the end of the term, you will submit a final paper, which will be a revised and extended version of one your unit papers. This final paper will be 10 – 12 pages long and should build upon your previous draft. To help with this process, we shall have a paper workshop during the final unit of the class; during this workshop, students will provide constructive criticisms on their peers' previous drafts. There will also be a final exam that will be cumulative for the whole term.

## Policies and Requirements

Attendance: You are expected to attend every. It will be difficult for you to complete the written assignments and perform well on the final exam if you do not attend class. I would be happy to discuss missed material in office hours provided that class was missed due to illness of some personal emergency.

Readings: The amount of reading varies from week to week. Try to plan ahead. The lectures and class discussion will be far less useful if the material has not been read beforehand.

Class Participation: Debate and disagreement are to be expected in class on morality. Ideally we will have opportunities to disagree and debate one another on issues as they arise throughout the course. I expect, however, that students will remain civil and collegial in their comments, questions, and debates.

### Final Evaluation

Class participation (unannounced quizzes and discussion prep.)	30%
3 Unit Papers	30%
Final Paper	20%
Final Exam	20%

All written assignments will be penalized a grade for being late and another for every day after that until they are handed in. No extensions without medical reasons or serious personal disasters. Please do not email assignments without prior approval.

**NB:** *Significant improvement and/or excellent class participation can lift the final grade by up to 1/3 (e.g., from a **B** to a **B+**)*

### Required Textbooks and Readings

*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*

Sophocles' *Theban Plays*

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Additional readings listed, marked with \*\*, will be provided by the instructor online.

## **Tentative Schedule For Topics and Reading Assignments**

*Please Note: These are subject to change*

### **Week 1:**

January 19 – Introduction to the course

### **Week 2:**

M January 23 – Moral Incommensurability

Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958). \*\*

## **Unit 1: Moral Relativism and the Foundations of Morality**

Th January 26 – Horrendous Evils

Thucydides' Melian Dialogue (5.84 – 116) \*\*

Deuteronomy 2 – 3; 20

Livy 1.9 – 13 \*\*

### **Week 3:**

M January 30 – No Class Today

Sophocles' *Oedipus*

Th February 2 – Popular Morality  
Sophocles' *Antigone*

**Week 4:**

M February 6 – The Platonic Tradition  
Plato's *Apology* and *Phaedo* (selections: Death scene)

Th February 9 – Aristotle and Virtue Ethics  
Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 1 – 2

**Week 5:**

M February 13 – Divine Commandments  
Exodus 19 – 24  
Matthew 5 – 7  
Genesis 21 – 22  
Iliad Book 2 \*\*

**Unit 2: Meaning and Value – How do we recognize Good or Evil?**

Th February 16 – Religion and Morality  
Plato's *Euthyphro*

**Paper #1 is due in Class**

**Week 6:**

M February 20 – Creator: Good, Bad, or Neutral?  
Genesis 1 – 3  
John 1  
Gospel of Judas \*\*  
Hesiod's *Theogony* (selections)\*\*

Th February 23: Creation: Good, Bad, or Neutral?  
Gospel of John  
Genesis 6 – 9  
1 Corinthians 15  
Recommended: CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (selections) \*\*

**Week 7:**

M February 27: Vertical or Horizontal Orientation: Part 1 – Platonizing Christianity  
Hebrews

Th March 2: Vertical / Horizontal Part 2: The End-times

Daniel 7 – 12

1 Thessalonians 4 – 5

Mark 13

Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (selections) \*\*

**Week 8:**

M March 6: Heaven and Hell: Post-mortem Rewards and Punishments

Psalms 141

Genesis 42:35 – 38

Isaiah 25 – 26

Ezekiel 37

Daniel 12:2

Matthew 25

Revelation 12 – 22 (focus on the final three chapters)

Th March 9: Anthropogony: Rationality and Morality

Gen 1 – 3

Romans 6 – 8

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 3

**Paper #2 is due in Class**

## **SPRING BREAK**

### **Unit 3: Social Practices – How are we supposed to live?**

**Week 9:**

M March 20 – Family and Community

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Books 8 – 9

Philemon

Ephesians 5 – 6

Th March 23: Social Ethics

1 Corinthians

Romans 12 – 15

**Week 10:**

M March 27 Marriage or Renunciation?

1 Corinthians 7

Paul and Thecla \*\*

1 and 2 Timothy

Th March 30: Violence and Martyrdom

2 Maccabees 7

Letter of Pliny to Trajan \*\*

Martyrdom of Polycarp \*\*

Celsus' *On the True Doctrine* (selections) \*\*

**Week 11:**

M April 3: Poverty and Justice

Hosea

Amos

Matthew 5:3 – 12

Luke 6:20 – 26

James

Th April 6: Sin and Repentance

Leviticus 16

Psalms 32

Jonah

Matthew 3 – 4

Hebrews 6:4 – 6; 10:26 – 31; 12:17

**Paper #3 is due in class**

**Unit 4: What They've Left us**

**Week 12:**

M April 10: Gender and Sexuality

Genesis 1 – 3

Romans 16

Galatians 3

Thunder, Perfect Mind \*\*

Th April 13: Just War and Violence

G.E.M. Anscombe, "The Justice of the Present War Examined" \*\*

Paul Ramsey, "Justice in War" \*\*

Recommended: Reinhold Niebuhr, "Augustine and Christian Realism" \*\*

**Week 13:**

M April 17: Politics and Justice: Can You Morally Dissent?

Plato's *Crito*

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.9

Romans 13

1 Peter

Revelation 16 – 19

Review: Antigone

Th April 20: Writing Workshop

**Week 14:**

M April 24: Sin and Free Will: The Problem of Evil/Suffering

Job

Romans 9 – 11

Th April 27: Pluralism and Polyphonic Ethics

Richard Rorty, "Religion in the Public Square" \*\*

Wayne Meeks, "Postscript" to his *The Origins of Christian Morality* \*\*

**Week 15:**

M May 1: Review and Discussion

**Final paper due in Class**

**Final Exam May 8<sup>th</sup> 8:00 AM**