Syllabus
1-28-2015
(Watch for Updated Reading Assignments on NYU CLASSES)

Texts

All texts will be provided on NYU CLASSES. All weekly Response Paper Assignments are also on NYU CLASSES. (If you find any conflict between readings listed in this Syllabus, and readings assigned in The Response Paper Assignments, follow the latter.)

Approach

1. This is an introductory course. No background is assumed. Therefore: ask ‘naïve’ questions! (Your question may seem elementary to you, but half of your classmates will probably have the same question in mind and be grateful to you for asking.)

2. This is a course in ethical philosophy. We will read classic texts from Socrates to Sartre. Regrettably, we can't also cover practical ethics, or dissenting social movements.

3. The content of this course necessitates lectures as well as discussions – for background and interpretation. Knowledge of lecture material as well as material from the texts is expected of students. Detailed note taking is recommended – during discussion as well as lecture! – because important ideas will emerge in our conversation.

4. We’ll proceed historically from the ancient Greeks to recent times. As this is a survey, it will move all too rapidly over individual texts and authors. The work is cumulative, however, as each philosopher’s views are understood in the light of their predecessors. Tracing these influences and following particular themes will provide continuity and development.

5. This course is about dissent in a double sense: criticizing accepted ethical values, and especially providing alternatives to mainstream ways of philosophical thought about ethics. Typical ethics courses and scholarly writings, today, center on “Kantian ethics of duty,” and “utilitarian ethics.” We will draw, instead, from virtue ethics, Stoicism, ethics of care, Hegel/Marx, pragmatism, feminism, humanistic psychology, developmental psychology, and nonviolence.

Written Work:
*Response Papers*. Weekly, one page. Assignments for each Response Paper will be posted on NYU CLASSES, under Resources > Assignments.

Note: “Reading Guides” will also be posted for most readings. These will provide important background and interpretive tools. They will, to some extent, take the place of lectures.

**Midterm Paper**: Classical ethics & dissent.

1. Topic development meeting with Professor Caspary. We will meet one-to-one outside of class to help you pin down a relevant topic. I'll also provide suggestions on sources and approaches. To be scheduled.

**Final Paper**: Relating class texts from the second half of the semester to an interest of yours (ca. 1,250 words [5 pages]). Due May 16.

**Mini-colloquium**: half hour oral conversation on books and topics of the semester.

**Standards** of evaluation will be rigorous (no grade inflation here). Writing style as well as content will be considered. Serious effort and competent work earns B grades. Grades of A are reserved for academic excellence: interpretive insight, accuracy, writing skill, originality. Grades of C are for flawed and/or superficial work. Final grade will be based on 1. midterm and final papers, 2. response papers, and 3. class participation.

**Attendance**

Class attendance is **required**, continued absence will reduce your grade.

In case of unavoidable absence: (a) provide written explanation (and for health reasons, documentation). (b) Obtain lecture/discussion notes from a classmate.

Attendance is required in order (1) obtain background and interpretations of readings from lecture and discussion; (2) maintain continuity and solidarity of seminar group for productive discussion. (3) **Participate in discussion** – which will contribute to your grade.

**Reading**: All readings will be posted on NYU CLASSES (and most are available free on the internet, since these are all classic texts in public domain). Many are available inexpensively in print, in used bookstores and at Amazon.com and other websites

**(material included next to a date will be discussed on that date)**

**Jan. 28.** Introduction: Ethics before Philosophy

- Handouts (during class): Excerpts from:
  1. *Iliad*, Culture of Honor
  2. Biblical Prophets;
Feb. 4. Socrates


Feb. 18. Plato, continued
Communal Society, Equality of Women, Education, Theory of Knowledge Republic, selections from Books III, IV, VI (see Reading Guide on NYU CLASSES).


March 4. Aristotle, continued

March 11. Late Classical and Medieval
Seneca. Letters. #3 Friendship; 5 Moderation; 7-9 Crowds; 47 Slaves*; 76:virtue/honor; Nature;
Seneca. Letters. #90 Golden Age* (common property), #92 The Happy Life 124. Reason and the True Good.

Medieval
Augustine/Plato: asceticism/other-worldly life; (Lecture, no reading). (Augustine influenced by Plato and Stoics and anticipates Luther & Calvin).
Aquinas/Aristotle-. humanism (Lecture, no reading). (Aquinas influenced by Aristotle. Anticipates humanists.)

March 25. Renaissance.
Justice, Equality, Communal Property (roots in the utopian aspect of Plato)
Thomas More, Utopia. (Selections on NYU CLASSES)

Republicanism (roots in Aristotle’s Politics and Nichomachean Ethics)
Machiavelli, Discourses:
  Bk.2, Ch.ii; Freedom!
  Bk.1, Ch.1: Machiavelli on Aristotle’s 6 forms of constitution.
  Ch. 2-18: Virtuous citizens and rulers in a republic.

  Hobbes, De Cive, Part I: sections 1 & 2. (individualism, misanthropy)
  Hobbes, Leviathan, Part I: ch.8, 10 – 14. (power/honor; chaos/authority)
  Locke, Second Treatise on Government. Ch. V (property)
  Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality. Part II (envy/property)
  Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Women.

April 8. Late 18th, early 19th cty. Romanticism's dissent from enlightenment rationalism.
  “Expressive Individualism”
  Schiller, On the Esthetic Education of Man. Creativity, unity of the self.
  Sixth Letter, Fifteenth Letter, Twenty sixth (last) Letter.
  Emerson, “The American Scholar,”
  Blake, the Marriage of Heaven and Hell. Rejection of asceticism, dualism

April 15. Hegel and Marx. The Master/Slave allegory: oppression & emancipation
  Hegel, “Lordship & Bondage,” from Phenomenology of Spirit.

April 22. Nietzsche, the elite dissenter. (convergence of influences from honor culture,
  stoicism, romanticism. Rousseau’s envy; Emerson’s great men;
  Schopenhauer’s will, critique of Kant, power of music, the unconscious
  (anticipation of Freud)
  Nietzsche:
  “Schopenhauer as Educator” in Untimely Meditations.
  “The Problem of Socrates, in Twilight of the Idols,
  Genealogy of Morals, Part I.

20th century dissenting schools: Pragmatism, Existentialism, Feminism,
  HumanisticPsychology, Nonviolence (rejection of Kant and Bentham).

April 29. Pragmatism. Moral Imagination. Deliberation as dramatic
  rehearsal/unification
James, “A Certain Blindness . . .” “The Moral Equivalent of War”

May 6. Sartre and Existentialism; Gilligan and Feminism. Stoics influence on Sartre
 critique of Kant. Self-reflection and awareness in Gilligan; link to
 pragmatism.
Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism,” in Existentialism
Gilligan, In a Different Voice, pp. 71-127: Research study on abortion
decisions

May. 13 Final class. Professor Caspary's apartment, West Village.

May 13-19: Final papers and Min-Colloquia.
Overview

**Periods** in History of Ethical Philosophy, and **Influences**.

I. Classical - **Communitarian**

A. Pre-philosophical: Homeric honor culture; Biblical prophets, Taoism (etc.)

B. Classical Period. Communitarianism
   2. Plato: middle and late dialogues, e.g. *Republic*
   3. Aristotle: e.g.: *Nichomachean Ethics*, and *Politics*, Book 1.
   4. Stoics, Epicureans, Skeptics (late Greek, and Roman)

C. Medieval
   1. Augustine (Stoic and neoPlatonist)
   2. Aquinas (Aristotelian)

D. Renaissance
   1. Machiavelli. (Aristotelian)
   2. Thomas More (Plato as utopian)

II. Modern - **Individualist**

E. Dawn of Modern Age: **Possessive** Individualism (17th century)
   1. Hobbes. (modern individualism, defined in opposition to Aristotle)
   2. Locke. (atomistic individualism, property rights)

F. Mainstream Approaches (late 18th, early 19th century)
   1. Kant. (duty ethics)
   2. Bentham. (utilitarian ethics)

G. Romantic Rebellion against Scientism: **Expressive** Individualism
   (late 18th, early 19th century)
   1. Schiller (creativity)
   2. Hegel (master and slave)
3. Marx (critique of alienation)

H. Hegel: Rejecting Kant, Influenced by Aristotle, Blending the Rational and the Romantic. (late 19th & 20th century)

1. Pragmatism (experience)
2. Existentialism (engagement, authenticity)