

Politics & Ethics
Political Science 4098 & Philosophy 4098
Fall -- 2020

Introduction: Intuition, Thoughtfulness, and Moral Sensibility

The faculty of judging particulars (as Kant discovered it), the ability to say, “This is wrong,” “This is beautiful,” etc., is not the same as the faculty of thinking. Thinking deals with invisibles, with representations of things that are absent; judging always concerns particulars and things close at hand.

Hannah Arendt

Topics: The Origins of the Moral Sense
 The Nature of the Moral Sense
 Intuition & Reason
 Egotism & Altruism
 Moral Boundaries
 Conscience & Consciousness
 Moral Literacy:
 Thoughtfulness & Judgment

Readings: Plato, [Euthyphro](#)
 **[Arendt: “Thinking and Moral Considerations”](#)
 Sophocles, [Antigone](#)

Reflection 1: Thinking and Moral Sensibility

Aristotelian Interlude I: Politics and the Good

Reading: [Nicomachean Ethics](#), Book I and Book 10, section 9

The Ethics of Virtue and the Virtue of Ethics

We are not concerned to know what goodness is, but how we are to become good men, for this alone gives the study [of ethics] its practical value.

Aristotle

Topics: Aretaic Ethics
 Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics
 Correspondence of Virtues to Principles
 Feminist Care Ethics

Readings: Aristotle, [Nicomachean Ethics](#), Books II, III, & IV

Covenants and Contracts

Days are coming . . . when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. . . ; but this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days . . . I will put my law within them.

Jeremiah

Readings: [Deuteronomy](#) 17: 14-20
[Hobbes, Leviathan](#), Chapters 13 to 19
[Locke, Second Treatise on Government](#), Chapters 9, 10, 11.

The Principle of Duty: Deontological Ethics

Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a Good Will.

Immanuel Kant

Topics: The Categorical Imperative
Respect for the Individual
Respect for Autonomy
Humane Uncertainty of the Will and of Truth

Readings: [Immanuel Kant, Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals](#), First Section
[Immanuel Kant, Idea for a Universal History Perspective from a Cosmopolitan Perspective](#)

Utilitarian or Consequentialist Ethics

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne.

Jeremy Bentham

Topics: The Calculus
Act Utilitarianism
Rule Utilitarianism
What Goods Shall We Maximize?

Readings: [Jeremy Bentham, Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation](#), Chapter 1
[John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism](#), Chapter 2
[Peter Singer, Singer Solution to World Poverty](#)

Reflection #2: Hybrids of Virtues, Rules, Covenants, and Consequences

Second Aristotelian Interlude: General and Particular Justice

Reading: [Nicomachean Ethics, Book V](#)

John Rawls and the Question of Distributive Justice

The natural distribution is neither just nor unjust; nor is it unjust that persons are born into society at some particular position. These are simply natural facts. What is just and unjust is the way that institutions deal with these facts.

John Rawls

Reading: John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*

Paul Wolff and the Question of Anarchy

Individuals have rights and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights). So strong and far-reaching are these rights that they raise the question of what, if anything, the state and its officials may do. How much room do individual rights leave for the state?

Robert Nozick

Reading: [Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism*](#)

[Mancur Olson, "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development"](#), *APSR*, 1993.

Third Aristotelian Interlude: The Twofold Nature of Being

Reading: [Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book VI](#)

Human Flourishing – Capabilities – Authenticity – Equality

Human activity always goes on in complex interdependence. The task of politics must be to imagine forms of interdependence that are human rather than slavish, and to forge those circumstances, where possible, in the world.

Martha Nussbaum

Topics: Modern Implications of Aristotle's notion of Happiness
Sen: What is the idea of justice?
Heidegger and Dwelling
Nussbaum and Capability
Anderson and Equality

Reading: [**M. Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking"](#)

[**Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Developmental Approach*](#)

[**Elizabeth Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?"](#)

Thoughtfulness & Judgment Revisited

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

T. S. Eliot

God could create only by hiding himself. Otherwise, there would be nothing but himself. Holiness should then be hidden too, even from consciousness in a certain measure. And it should be hidden in the world.

Simone Weil

Readings: ****[Arendt: “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”](#)** (Revisited)
****[Howes, Dustin. “Consider if this is a Person: Primo Levi, Hannah Arendt, and the Political Significance of Auschwitz”](#)**
****[Heidegger, “What are Poets For?”](#)**

FINAL (REFLECTION) EXAM: Friday, May 3, Due at Noon: What is Justice, then?

Course Objectives & Requirements

Our tasks in this course are many: to understand the relationship between thinking and moral judgment; to become acquainted with a variety of ethical theories; to consider the nature of Aristotle’s relevance to our understanding of ethics and politics in the 21st century. Most important, in the process of fulfilling those objectives, we shall constantly examine the role of moral thinking in our dialogue with ourselves and with our communities of discourse.

The course requirements are three reflection essays, 4-6 pages each, on the following:

First Reflection: 30% (On Thinking About One’s Moral Sensibility)

Second Reflection: 30% (On Constructing an Ethical Hybrid)

Third and Final Reflection: 40% (On What, Then, is Just?)

I will provide extensive guidelines for each of the reflections and publish them on Moodle. The assignments will be submitted on Moodle. The third reflection is your final examination. It will be due: Tuesday, December 8, by 2:30 PM.

The Grading Scale for the course, and for each assignment, will be as follows (in percentiles).

97-100 = A+	
93-96 = A	73-76 = C
90-92 = A-	70-72 = C-
87-89 = B+	67-69 = D+
83-86 = B	63-66 = D
80-82 = B	60-62 = D-
77-79 = C+	Below 60 = F

Readings: You are asked to purchase two readings for the course: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Belknap Press. There is no textbook for the course, but a good general introduction to Politics and Ethics is Michael Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing To Do*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux. The LSU Bookstore was asked to order all three of these books; and, of course, they can be purchased online. The Aristotle selection is available on the Internet Classics Site and I have provided a link to it on Moodle. However, it is not the translation I will be using in class.

There are a number of other required readings in the course. All are available free and on the internet. Links for those readings are provided in the Electronic Reserve Readings Section of the course Moodle Site.

Office Hours:

My office hours this semester will be Tuesday and Thursday from 3:00 to 5:00 PM. I will set up a Zoom meeting room, with face to face audio/video. Links will be posted in Moodle so that you can easily access them. If you find these hours inconvenient, please let me know and I will arrange another time for us to meet. I encourage you to communicate by e-mail as well, particularly with questions about course material. My e-mail address is poeubk@lsu.edu.

Presence:

To be present is to be mindful, aware, sensitive, engaged. It begins, of course, in physical presence, but quickly moves to all of the aforementioned states of being, and more. This course needs your presence; the subject needs your presence. We need your presence. Mostly, you need your presence. This course will be synchronous online, which means we will meet in Zoom at the regular class time: 11:30 to 12:30 MWF. Establishing and maintaining presence in an online course is very difficult. Doing the course in synchronous fashion can help; creating a regular space for your viewing and participation in the course can also help. I will be experimenting with a variety of Zoom activities that, I hope, will enhance presence. Finally, I will, and more literally, I will be taking attendance via Zoom and will give bonus points for regular “presence” in the class.

Beginning on the last day to add classes, I shall assume that everyone has the occasional desire to meet a friend, sleep late, or recover from a difficult moment. Thus, three absences will be discounted, unquestioned. Similarly, some will have other, good, and excusable reasons for absence. They will be honored, if properly documented. The remaining class days of the semester will be counted and a 90% attendance rate will be granted four bonus points; 80% will be given three; 70% two bonus points; 60% one bonus point; and below 60%, none will be granted. The bonus points will be added to your course total.