

prof. Bernardo Andrade
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Office: Bowden Hall TBA
Office Hours: TBA
and by appointment

MWF, 8:30-9:20am, Bowden Hall TBA

Course Description

No concept is a-historical. In this course, we will investigate the history of a series of ethical concepts: happiness, the good life, duty, virtue, and moral character. The main thread of our course, however, will be the history of responsibility. We will investigate, in particular, how the responsible subject changes in philosophical discourse across the centuries. Starting with a subject who is responsible *only insofar* as she acts freely, knowingly, and voluntarily, we will see that philosophers then attribute responsibility to the subject who is passive, vulnerable, and dependent on others. There is a reversal of responsibility from the ego to the other, from activity to passivity, from freedom to subjection. What should we make of these changes? What makes us responsible for our actions? Crucially, *to whom* are we responsible—ourselves, others, the entire earth?

Course Objectives

Students will:

1. understand how ethical theory changes its subject-matter across its history: from concerns over the ‘good life’ (Antiquity) to concerns over duty (Modernity) to concerns over the human condition (contemporaneity);
2. understand how the concept of ‘responsibility’ itself changes across history: from an emphasis on voluntariness, knowledge, and freedom (in Antiquity and Modernity) toward an emphasis on vulnerability, passivity, and dependence on others (in contemporaneity);
3. understand the three main trends within the field of normative ethics: virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism, identifying them in philosophical texts;
4. be able to explain complex philosophical concepts in their own words;
5. be able to develop critiques of, and objections to, those concepts;
6. be able to produce two kinds of texts: exegetical (involving textual analysis), and argumentative (involving a reasoned defense of a position or contention).

N.B.: No background or previous training in philosophy is required. This class is open to all levels.

Recommended Text

Gordon Marino (ed.), *Ethics: The Essential Writings*. New York: Modern Library, 2010. ISBN: 978-0812977783.

All texts will also be electronically available on Library Course Reserves.

Assignments

20% Attendance and Participation

I will take attendance each day at the start of class. You are allowed two unexcused absences; each additional unexcused absence will lead to a grade reduction of half a letter grade (5%). However, these absences may be excused by obtaining the appropriate documentation from the Dean of Students Office. Please let me know at the beginning of the semester if there are special circumstances that we need to address. Arriving ten minutes late to class more than once will also constitute an absence. If there is a particular reason why you cannot arrive on time, let me know!

I will grade participation based on contribution to the class and active listening. This means that participation does not simply entail speaking up in class, but also listening to others, paying attention to the lectures, and contributing to discussions with relevant questions and comments.

30% Ten Reading Responses

By midnight every Wednesday, you are required to submit via Canvas a short reflection of approximately 200 words. You may choose to critique, expand on, compare or otherwise react to the week's texts. These entries provide an opportunity for students to check in with themselves and the professor as they encounter the themes and authors of the course. They can also serve as a space for students to develop ideas over the course of the semester that could then become the foundation for final papers.

These responses will be graded on a scale of 1 to 3 based on the quality of the writing (grammar and overall clarity) and the level of engagement with the week's texts. I will evaluate this engagement according to three criteria: *depth*, *accuracy*, and *originality*. A response should not stay at the surface but discuss something central to the text; it should present the text's ideas accurately; and if it criticizes an idea from the text, it should do so with originality—albeit without losing sight of accuracy and depth.

Notice that, on five different Wednesdays, reading responses will not be due. This is either because of a break (such as Thanksgiving) or because of another assignment due that same week. Since we have fifteen weeks in the term, we are left with a total of ten weeks when responses are due.

20% Two Exegetical Papers

By midnight on Sep. 29th and Oct. 27th, an exegetical paper of 800-1000 words will be due. These papers are narrow in scope and meant for close reading of primary texts. A list of prompts will be distributed in advance.

30% Final Paper

By the end of the exam period (Dec. 16th, 5pm), a final paper of 1700-2500 words will be due. A list of possible prompts will be made available, but you are encouraged to develop your own theme in consultation with me.

Policies and Resources

Readings: come to class prepared. You should have read the assigned text for each week at least once before you come to class. As you read, mark passages that you find particularly difficult to understand and write down questions you want to ask during class. Every student should have a copy of the text in class.

Email: please use your Emory email account when corresponding with me. Feel free to reach out with questions; I am typically able to respond within 48 hours.

Submission of Assignments: every assignment must be submitted online in the designated section of Canvas. A late assignment will result in the reduction of half a letter grade (5%) for each day that it is late. However, I am happy to give short extensions if you reach out to me *prior* to the due date—just let me know!

Electronics: laptops or other devices are allowed only for note-taking purposes. However, with the use of laptops there is a temptation to also use the internet. I am willing to allow laptops only if participation is not compromised; if these devices seem to be causing distraction, they will no longer be allowed in class.

Plagiarism: students cannot copy the ideas or words of another person without appropriate citation and credit. I will refer any act of plagiarism to the relevant university office. A completely or partially plagiarized assignment will lead the student not only to fail that assignment but also the whole course. If you are unsure whether you need to cite something, send me an email, and/or simply cite, even if it might not have been necessary. Always err on the side of caution.

Accommodations: please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any kind of accommodation. You may also need to reach out to Access, Disability Services, and Resources (ADSR) at adsrstudent@emory.edu to get the proper document.

Writing Center: this is an invaluable resource for polishing your papers and for improving your writing in general. Tutors are available to support students as they work on papers, reading responses, and other projects. Several tutors can attend to the needs of English Language Learners and have received additional training to do so. To schedule an appointment, access writingcenter.emory.edu.

Class Schedule

Introduction

8/23-25 Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*, Introduction
*no reading response

Responsibility and Voluntariness

8/28-9/1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I-II
*reading response due midnight on Wednesday, 8/30

9/4-8 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III
*no class on Monday—Labor Day
*reading response due midnight on Wednesday, 9/6

9/11-15 Plotinus, *Ennead VI.8.1-6*
*reading response due midnight on Wednesday, 9/13

Responsibility and Autonomy

9/18-22 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, First Section
*reading response due midnight on Wednesday, 9/20

9/25-29 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Second Section
*no reading response
*first paper due midnight on Friday, 9/29

The Calculations of Responsibility

10/2-6 Mill, 'What Utilitarianism Is'
Malick, *A Hidden Life* (film)
*reading response due midnight on Wednesday, 10/4

The Fictions of Responsibility

10/9-13 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay
*no class on Monday—Fall Break
*no reading response

10/16-20 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay
*reading response due midnight on Wednesday, 10/18

The Burden of Responsibility

- 10/16-20 Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*
*reading response due midnight on Wednesday, 10/18
- 10/23-27 Sartre, *No Exit* (play)
*no reading response
*second paper due midnight on Friday, 10/27

The Ambiguity of Responsibility

- 10/30-11/3 Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Part I
*reading response due midnight on Wednesday, 11/1
- 11/6-10 Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Part II
*reading response due midnight on Wednesday, 11/8

The Reversal of Responsibility

- 11/13-17 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, selections
*reading response due midnight on Wednesday, 11/15
- 11/20-24 Thanksgiving Break
- 11/27-12/1 Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Chs. 1 and 3.
*no reading response
- 12/4 Final Class, Review
*final paper due at the end of exam period—12/16, 5pm