

Early Modern Ethics



During the early modern period—roughly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—established conceptions of morality as obedience to external authority came increasingly to be contested by and ultimately gave way to newly-emerging conceptions of morality as self-governance. The latter conceptions of morality and their coordinate conception of ourselves as moral agents is still influential in much of current moral thought. In this course, we investigate the circumstances under which we came to this distinctly modern way of thinking about morality and about ourselves. Our investigation's main figures are Hobbes, Descartes, Hutcheson, and Kant. Along the way, we'll also discuss work by Aquinas, Luther, Montaigne, Grotius, Mandeville, Clarke, Cockburn, Hume, Rousseau, and (time permitting) Nietzsche.

Requirements

Lectures

Lectures are online this quarter due to the unusual circumstances surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. Students are expected to regularly attend these lectures on time, and participation is encouraged. Attendance will count for 5% of your grade.

We will meet via Zoom. The Zoom ID for lectures is **x**. You can access it by clicking this link: <https://ucla.zoom.us/j/x>. The password for the classroom is **x**. It is case-sensitive.

If you anticipate logistical difficulties being able to regularly attend these meetings, let me know and we will work something out.

Office hours

I will hold office hours in Zoom as well. Their Zoom ID is **x**. You can access it by clicking this link: <https://ucla.zoom.us/j/x>. There's no password.

Midterm essay

A short writing exercise (roughly 1500-2000 words in length) will be due around midterm. It will be primarily expository in character. It will account for 40% your final grade. I'll be handing out possible essay topics in advance.

Exam

We'll have a final exam during the end-quarter exam period. This will be the online course equivalent of a take-home exam, rather than an in class one, i.e., you'll have a few days during finals week to write it. It will account for 55% of your final grade.

Late Assignments

Late writing assignments will be penalized one third of one letter grade (i.e., A- becomes B+) every 24 hours, starting ten minutes after the deadline. Exceptions to the lateness policy will be made only in cases I deem exceptional.

Accessible Education Information

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations should submit their request for accommodations to the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) as soon as possible, as it may take up to two weeks for the CAE to review the request. If you are already registered with the CAE, you can request a letter of accommodation on the Student Portal, otherwise please submit your request via the CAE website. Please note that the CAE does not send letters to instructors--you must request that I view the letter in the online Faculty Portal. Once you have requested your accommodations via the Student Portal, please notify me immediately so I can view your letter.

Texts

Everything is available online this quarter.

Schedule of Topics¹

1. *Introduction*: No reading
2. Trouble in paradise: the eternal law and the natural law: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2-1 Qs 93-94; Martin Luther, "On the Double Use of the Law" from the *Commentary on Galatians*, and selections from *Secular Authority*

¹ Schedule is subject to change

3. Sixteenth century skepticism and the natural law: Michel de Montaigne, “Man has no knowledge”, from the *Apology for Raymond Sebond*; Hugo Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace*, Prolegomena I-XIX
4. Hobbes: mechanical humans and the state of nature: Hobbes, *Leviathan* chapters 6, “Of the Passions”, and 11, “Of the difference in Manners”; Hobbes, *Of the Citizen*, Dedication & Preface, chapter 1, “Of the state of man without civil society”
5. Hobbes: the natural law: Hobbes, *Of the Citizen*, chapters 2-3, “On the natural law of contracts” and “On the other laws of nature”; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 15, “Of other laws of nature”
6. Hobbes: epistemology and motivation: Hobbes, *Of the Citizen*, chapter 5, “On the causes and generation of a commonwealth”; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 14, “Of the First and Second Natural Laws, and of Contract”
7. Descartes: morale par provision: Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Parts 1-3; Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Prefaces
8. Descartes: desire and contentment: Descartes, Letters to Elizabeth, August 1645; Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, Part 1 ¶¶17-50 & Part 2 ¶¶137-146
9. Descartes: générosité and self-perfection: Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, Part 3 ¶¶ 149-156
10. The Fable of the Bees: Mandeville, “An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue”
11. Hutcheson: skepticism and the moral sense: Hutcheson, *Essay on the Passions and Affections*, §1, “A general account of our several senses and desires”; Hutcheson, *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*, Introduction, §1, “Of the moral sense”, and §3, “The sense of virtue”, ¶1.
12. Hutcheson: reason and sentiment: Clarke, *Demonstration*, IX; Clarke, *Discourse*, I & II; Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* Introduction and §1; Cockburn, *Remarks upon Rutherford*, “Remarks on Chapter V”; Cockburn, letters to her niece, 1744 & 1747
13. Hutcheson: natural law and the impartial spectator: Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* §1 (review); Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* 3.3.1, “Of the origin of the natural virtues and vices”
14. Rousseau: the general will: Rousseau, selections from *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men* and *The Social Contract*
15. Kant: heteronomy, autonomy, and the moral law: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section II, “Transition from popular moral philosophy to metaphysics of morals”

16. Kant: the moral motive: Rousseau, selections from *Emile*; Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, "On the incentives of pure practical reason"
17. Kant: endless progress: Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Fourth Meditation; Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, "Fundamental Law of Pure Practical Reason"; Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of mere Reason*, "Concerning the Propensity to Evil in Human Nature" & "The Objective Reality of this Idea"
18. Skepticism resurfaces: Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morality*, "First Treatise"
(time permitting)