

Office: Fillippi Academic Hall 240-8
Office Hours: MW 10:00-12:00
Or by Appt.
(If not in office, check by
fountain)
Office Phone: 631-4455
Home Phone: (925) 406-4317
Email: pdowney@stmarys-ca.edu

Ethics 130

Prof. Downey
PHIL 130:01
2:50-4:20
Dante 121

Course Description: Ethics is all about ruling and being ruled. These two terms may not seem to have anything to do with “ethics,” but it is hoped by the end of two semesters you will think of nothing else when thinking through an “ethical” issue. The notion of “ruling oneself” may be more familiar to you, but since we are not alone, ruling or being ruled by others brings out the latent political content in any ethical question. Plato, Aristotle, and the Bible recognized this, which is why we will begin with them. Alongside the notion of ruling and ruled, we will discuss such notions as habituation and shareability, virtue and vice, pleasure and pain, good and evil, being and having, appearance and reality, poetry and philosophy, violence and lying. Above all, this class will concern itself with the question of our own happiness. If the question of what happiness is and what will make us truly happy is kept ever before our eyes, we just might find our way through this labyrinth of terms and arguments.

Because this is the first part of a two semester sequence (although it is not required to take both or even one before the other) there are certain ways of asking after human happiness that will tie both semesters together. This semester might be styled “Athens or Jerusalem?” or the “philosophical way of life” and the “Christian way of life”—what if anything do they have to do with each other? Within the Catholic intellectual tradition the answer has been almost everything, with Athen’s natural desire to see God meeting Jerusalem’s satisfaction of that desire along with its healing. To make sense of that tradition we will be reading the Bible in terms of types and figures that provide a narrative answer to philosophical questions. Of course a narrative answer raises the question of the old quarrel between “the poets and the philosophers”

Rep. (607b) so the possibility remains that Athens and Jerusalem is a continuation of that same quarrel and hence unresolvable. Either way, the first semester of Ethics will equip us to raise the question for ourselves and enter into the possibility of a lived and ongoing answer to it.

Second semester, Ethics 131, will begin with the inception of modernity and its major permutations by reading Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Nietzsche, who as philosopher/poets began and continued a new quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns. Living as we do in “modern” times, we will not be able to distinguish “ancient” thought from its modern recasting until we have first examined these moderns in their rejection of the ancients. In this sense, first semester can only be understood in its own terms after the second. To take but one example, only after we have read Descartes, Rousseau and Kant will we be able to discern how and why our figural reading of the Bible first semester differed from the current scholarly approach of higher criticism. Again, the paramount concern is our own happiness. So only when we have laid out the full range of the different ways of asking that question, with their different possibilities of answer, will we be able to fully and lucidly ask after it ourselves.

This course will be a more fast-paced reading of texts you may have had elsewhere. The topics that structure the course all find their basis in the details of what we read, so keeping up with the reading is imperative. If it seems the reading is being neglected I will resort to such punitive measures as daily quizzes. Otherwise, your grade will be based upon an oral mid-term, a written final, class participation, and overall attentiveness and physical presence (90% of life is just showing up).

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course the student will be able to:

Grasp means/ends relationships in terms of *techne* (art) and architectonic knowledge

Understand action and deliberation in relation to character and habit

Draw the analogy between ethical rule and political rule in terms of slavery and freedom

Intelligently raise questions regarding the difference between nature and convention

Distinguish the practical life from the theoretical life in terms of the highest good

Interrelate poetry to the gods, architectonic knowledge, and ethical mimesis

Distinguish knowledge and true opinion in terms of shareability and property

Play with the relation between medicine (*pharmakon*) as both poison and cure in relation to health and a sc

Read the Bible in terms of types and antitypes

Relate the narrative arc of the Bible to the above ethical questions of rule, shareability, knowledge, freedom, nature, poetry, and happiness

Evaluate the Bible as read in class to Aquinas “Four senses of Scripture”

Relate Aquinas “natural desire for a supernatural end” to the question of human happiness

Examine Aquinas’ account of natural law in terms of ruler and ruled

Required Texts:

Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics trans. Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins,
Plato’s Republic trans. Allan Bloom
Ion, Plato, download from internet
Meno, Plato, use seminar text
Oedipus the King Sophocles, use seminar text
The Bible, any translation, preferably the RSV

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Supplemental Text:

Desperately Wicked:Philosophy, Christianity and the Human Heart Patrick

CALENDAR

Tuesday, August 30	Introduction
Thursday, September 1	Plato’s Apology
Tuesday, September 6	Sophocles Oedipus the King
Thursday, September 8	Plato’s Meno, Ion

Tuesday, September 13	Plato's Republic Book I
Thursday, September 15	Plato's Republic Book II through 367e
Tuesday, September 20	Plato's Republic Book II 368a - Book IV
Thursday, September 22	Plato's Republic Book V
Tuesday, September 27 592a-b	Plato's Republic Book VII 514a-520d; Book VIII-Book IX 580c;
Thursday, September 29	Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics Book I
Tuesday, October 4	Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics Book II-III
Thursday, October 6	Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics Book IV Ch. 3; Book V, Chs. 1-7
Tuesday, October 11	Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics Book VII 1-4; Book X Chs. 6-9
Thursday, October 13	MIDTERM HOLIDAY
Tuesday, October 18	Aristotle's Politics Book X
Thursday, October 20	Mid-Term Review for Oral Exams
Tuesday, October, 25	Genesis 1-3
Thursday, October 27	Genesis 3-22
Tuesday, November 1	Exodus 1-20, Deuteronomy 5-10, 29:29-30:20
Thursday, November 3	2 Samuel 11-12:24, Isaiah 1-11
Tuesday, November 8	Hosea, Isaiah 52-54

Thursday, November 10 Gospel of John Prologue; Gospel of Mark

Tuesday, November 15 Gospel of Mark

Thursday, November 17 Romans 1-3

Tuesday, November 22, Romans 3-8, Revelation 21-22

Thanksgiving Recess November 23-27

Tuesday, November 29 Aquinas' Summa Theologiae Q1, A1

Thursday, December 1 Aquinas' Summa Theologiae I-II Q 94 a2

Tuesday, December 6 Athens or Jerusalem

Thursday, December 8 Final Review

Final Exam Tuesday December 13 @ 2:00-4:00 in Dante 219