

Friendship, Just Love, Unselfing, and Moral Progress

Instructor

Raja Rosenhagen

Office Hours and location: [TBA]

contact: raja.rosenhagen@gmail.com

Course Description

How can we make ourselves better? To the Irish philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch, this is one of the most important questions moral philosophers should attempt to answer. But if we want to improve morally, how are we to proceed? What steps do we need to take and what resources are available to us? In this course, we will try to find some answers to these questions by looking at material from different philosophical traditions. More specifically, we will look at material from Plato and Aristotle, at selected writings from Immanuel Kant and Iris Murdoch, and at selected texts from Buddhist sources. The aim is to bring out the importance the various thinkers discussed attribute, as they think about moral progress, to love, justice, and friendship, thus providing students with the opportunity to productively engage with these important aspects of the human condition and to reflect on the value they play in their own lives. By the end of this course, students should

- (1) be familiar with classic conceptions of love as *eros* (Plato) and love as *philia* (Aristotle)
- (2) be familiar with various conceptions of moral progress, including Platonic, Aristotelian, Kantian, Murdochian, and Buddhist accounts
- (3) understand the importance these thinkers attribute to love, justice, and unselfing and have some grasp of the different conceptions of human nature that underlie the accounts discussed
- (4) be able to reflect on the value that friendship, love, and unselfing play in their own lives

Prerequisites: none.

Assessment

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Short Homework Questions: 10%

Creative Online Tasks: 20 % (option for 10% extra credit for outstanding contributions)

One 1-page summary of one of the assigned readings: 10% (option for 10% extra credit for a second summary)

Midterm exam: 30%

Final exam: 30%

Notes on Assessment:

Short Homework Questions: For every reading assigned, a set of short questions is posted online – some of these are multiple choice questions, others true/false, and some questions ask students to write a one or two-sentence response. Students' responses account for 10% of their grade.

Creative Online Tasks: Twice in the semester, students will post passages to the online discussion board from the assigned readings, the content of which they take to be especially suitable for being transferred to a different medium. Next, Students pick one passage provided by another student (i.e. not their own) and transfer it to a medium of their choice (e.g. visualization, poem, work of art). Whoever originally posted the passage is then tasked to offer constructive criticism of the contribution(s) submitted and everyone else is invited to join in.

One 1-page summary of one of the assigned readings: Students summarize the important points in one of the assigned readings on one page. Note: students will receive extensive feedback on their summary and the best contributions will be collected and distributed to everyone.

Schedule

Week 1	<u>1st meeting:</u> Introduction, course overview, housekeeping issues; <i>no readings</i> <u>2nd meeting:</u> <i>Readings from Plato's Republic</i> ; theme: Glaukon's ring, justice/injustice
Week 2	<u>1st meeting:</u> <i>Readings from Plato's Symposium</i> ; theme: the role of eros <u>2nd meeting:</u> <i>Readings from Plato's Lysis</i> ; theme: the role of friendship for the (non-)virtuous
Week 3	<u>1st meeting:</u> Recap session Plato on love, justice, and friendship; <i>no new readings</i> <u>2nd meeting:</u> <i>Readings from Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics (NE) I [friendship]</i> , theme: kinds of friendship (<i>philia</i>)
Week 4	<u>1st meeting:</u> <i>Readings from NE II [friendship], John Cooper, and Magna Moralia 1213a10-26</i> ; theme: the necessity and the benefit of friendship <u>2nd meeting:</u> <i>Readings from NE III [friendship], Julia Annas</i> ; theme: a contrast with Plato?
Week 5	<u>1st meeting:</u> <i>Readings from Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics III [friendship]</i> theme: NE IX.9, a puzzling argument and a tentative proposal (based on NE IX.7) <u>2nd meeting:</u> Recap Aristotle on (true) friendship, its benefits, and its necessity; no new readings
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Week 6	<u>1st meeting:</u> <i>Midterm review</i> <u>2nd meeting:</u> <i>In-Class Midterm</i>
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Week 7	<u>1st meeting:</u> <i>Readings from Kant</i> on the importance of the good will, categorical imperative (1) – how to test maxims; <u>2nd meeting:</u> categorical imperative (2), different versions
Week 8	Recap Kant, <i>Readings from Simone Weil's diaries and Murdoch</i> , Intro Weil/Murdoch, love as just attention
Week 9	<i>Readings from Murdoch's Sovereignty & Darkness of Practical Reason</i> ; theme: love as just attention, attention as creating value
Week 10	<i>Readings from Iris Murdoch, Setiya, & Rosenhagen (ms.)</i> ; theme: strong moral internalism, love and privacy
Week 11	<u>1st meeting:</u> <i>reading: Mark Hopwood on Murdoch</i> ; theme: no friendship in Murdoch, Murdoch and eros?; <u>2nd meeting:</u> <i>Readings from Iris Murdoch on unselfing</i> ; theme: unselfing and the ideal agent
Week 12	<u>1st meeting:</u> Recap Murdoch; <u>2nd meeting:</u> Intro Buddhism (emphasize metaphysics of emptiness and compassion)
Weeks 13-14	<i>Selected readings from Garfield, Heim, and Buddhaghosa</i> ; theme: unselfing and the transformation of experience in Buddhist Ethics
Week 15	<i>Final review & Final Exam</i>

Course Policies [TBA: Academic Integrity, Disability Services, Statement on Classroom Recording, Statement on Course Materials]