

**King's College London**  
**Moral Philosophy (6FFLFK512)**  
**General Information and Syllabus, 2023**

Module Leader: Dr Jonathan Gingerich  
Email: [jonathan.gingerich@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.gingerich@kcl.ac.uk)  
Office hours: Wednesdays, 15.00-17.00 and Thursdays, 11.00-12.00

### **Module Description**

What is the best way to live? How should we live together with other people? What obligations do we have to one another? What does it mean when we say that we have a moral duty to do something or avoid doing something? How can we be free when we are subject to the wishes and desires of other people? What is the relationship between freedom and responsibility? This module will introduce these central questions in ethics by reading some of the most important (and provocative!) texts from the history of philosophy, including readings from Plato, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Simone de Beauvoir.

As we address these questions, we will search for the best answers to them, but we will also think about whether these are sensible questions at all, and we will consider how we might become more comfortable with the possibility that some or all of these questions do not have any definitive answers. By taking this module, students will learn to: carefully read and explain difficult philosophical texts; clearly articulate and defend philosophical views about ethics, both orally and in writing; write clear and persuasive argumentative essays; refine and defend their beliefs about what makes a life go well, and (if all goes well!) take pleasure in the challenges of rigorous reading and thinking about philosophy.

### **Texts**

All texts will be available on the course website or through the library. The library's reading list for this module is [here](#). We will read all or most of several books:

Plato, *Republic*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), ISBN 1603840133.

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), ISBN 1107401062.

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism in Utilitarianism and On Liberty*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Mary Warnock (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), ISBN 0631233520.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clarke and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), ISBN 0872202844.

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Open Road Media, 2018), ISBN 1504054229.

If you wish to purchase hard copies of any of these texts, I recommend that you purchase the edition indicated here, so that we have the same page numbers and the same translation.

### **Online Discussion Board**

**Each week, I ask that you post a one-paragraph response to the week's reading on the weekly discussion board on the module's KEATS page by the end of the day on the day before our seminar meeting.** Your one paragraph response need not address all

of the assigned readings for the week—it might raise a question or interpretation of a single sentence or paragraph. It might also make a comparison between different assigned texts for a week, notice connections between readings for one week and material studied in an earlier week, or suggest a connection between topics we are studying in class and contemporary events or problems. While there are many formats that reading response posts might take, I ask that you post something substantive and thoughtful about the readings each week, as these posts will help us to have an enriching and engaging discussion in our seminar meetings.

### **Seminar Meetings**

This is a small seminar that will meet once a week, for two hours. Our meetings will be heavy on discussion, and it is important that you come to our meetings prepared to converse about the week's assigned readings. My role will largely be to guide, encourage, and participate in our discussion.

### **Lectures**

While this module is not primarily delivered as a lecture, each week, I will post approximately one hour of recorded video lectures on the course website. These recorded lectures are an optional supplement (in lieu of a textbook) that provides added context for the reading assignment each week.

### **Examinations**

This module will be examined exclusively by an assessed essay, to be written during March and April on a topic that I set. Further details will be provided at the beginning of the semester.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

All students are welcome in my classroom. The King's policy on dignity states: 'King's College London is committed to protecting the dignity of its students in their learning and participation in university life, and in their interactions with others. This includes providing a university environment that is free from discrimination, bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct and hate crime. It should be noted that discrimination, bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct and hate crime do not only take place face to face. They may also occur in written communications, by email, or by phone, or online.'

All students have a right to expect good conduct from others, including both staff and other students. Information about reporting and resolving incidents of misconduct is available on the King's Dignity website, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/hr/diversity/dignity-at-kings/student-guidance/faqs>. The King's diversity and inclusion team can be contacted at [diversity@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:diversity@kcl.ac.uk). If you need help in responding to misconduct or contacting other resources at King's, I am happy to help.

### **Accessibility**

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact Disability Support (<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/disability>) at [disability@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:disability@kcl.ac.uk) or (0)20 7848 1234.

Disability support is located on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor of Bush House, South East Wing. Disability Support offers one to one learning support and group sessions, in addition to arranging for learning accommodations.

## **Schedule of Readings**

### **Week 1: Why be just?**

Plato, *Republic*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004) book I-II.

### **Week 2: What is justice?**

Plato, *Republic*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004) book III-IV.

### **Week 3: Morality and a good will**

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), parts I & II (to 4:432).

### **Week 4: Morality and freedom**

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), part II (from 4:432) & part III.

### **Week 5: Morality as maximising happiness**

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism in Utilitarianism and On Liberty*, ed. Mary Warnock (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), chapters 1-3.

### **Reading Week: No meeting**

*Optional Formative Essay:* A topic for an optional essay of up to 1000 words will be made available on KEATS in the first half of the term. Details will be announced in class.

### **Week 6: Happiness and justice**

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism in Utilitarianism and On Liberty*, ed. Mary Warnock (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), chapters 4-5.

### **Week 7: Morality and power**

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, trans. Maudemarie Clark & Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), preface and first treatise.

### **Week 8: Scepticism about moral language**

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, trans. Maudemarie Clark & Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), second and third treatises.

### **Week 9: Morality and self-creation**

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1948), §§ 1-2.

### **Week 10: Existentialist ethics**

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1948), §3.