

Prof. Benjamin Huff
class: Fox 102
11:10am-1:10pm MTWRF

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office hrs: 3-4pm Mon-Th

Philosophy 408—Virtue

January term 2009

In ancient Greece, philosophical discussions of ethics typically centered on a notion of good character, or virtue. This approach fell out of favor during the modern period as broadly Kantian (duty-oriented) and utilitarian (consequence-oriented) approaches came to dominate philosophical ethics. In recent decades, however, there has been a strong revival of interest in virtue as a central concept in ethical theory. We will spend the first section of the course looking at historical sources for virtue ethics, including texts by Plato and Aristotle, then turn to contemporary work.

One remarkable feature of ancient virtue ethics is *eudaimonism*, the idea that one must develop and exercise the virtues in order to live a fully happy life. In this version of the course, we will focus particularly on the connection between virtue ethics and eudaimonism, and the challenges to formulating a version of eudaimonism that would be appropriate for the contemporary world. We will address questions including: What is happiness? What is the relationship of happiness to material goods? Is happiness an appropriate basis for an ethical theory? Are we responsible for our character? How can we justify an objective account of virtue? We will draw on the ethical discussions in Phil 212 and 251 as we address a number of topics raised in recent discussions of virtue ethics.

Course texts

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (I recommend the Irwin (Hackett) or Crisp (Cambridge UP) translations)
- Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford UP, 1999.
- Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. U. Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- other readings to be distributed in class.

Assignments and grading

Students will be expected to actively participate in discussion, and hence must carefully read beforehand the texts to be discussed each day. They will write three shorter papers (5 pages), one longer paper (10-12 pages), and a final exam. The exam will test broad competence on the course material. Papers and discussion should demonstrate intelligent engagement with the issues being considered, for which a sound comprehension of course texts is a necessary foundation.

Paper topics: Students are to formulate their own paper topics and for each paper submit a paragraph describing the topic for approval prior to writing the paper. I may require a student to meet with me before approving the paper topic. Paper topics are due **by 4pm** on the due dates

listed on the course syllabus. I will not accept a paper unless the topic has been approved in advance. If the topic is submitted late or does not show a serious effort, I may penalize the paper one grade step (e.g. B to B-), or two steps in case of both problems.

Because you are formulating your own paper topics, I encourage you to start thinking about topics you would like to write on from the very start of the course. Each day as you read for class, and as we discuss the readings, be thinking about which of the ideas we touch on might make an interesting topic for a paper, and feel free to run topics by me as they occur to you. The idea is for you to use the assignments to explore the topics that appeal to you, so seize the day! You must write at least one paper which deals in a significant way with a historical text (i.e. pre-20th Century) by an author other than Aristotle. *The long paper may build on one of the short papers.*

Drafts /outlines: To strengthen student writing and deepen engagement with the issues, students will be required to submit *in advance* a full draft or detailed outline for at least one short paper, and a full draft or detailed outline for the longer paper. A draft or outline is due in class, according to the dates listed on the syllabus, and students will then be required to meet with me to discuss the draft or outline later that day. I will grade a draft as though it were a paper itself, but about one letter grade more generously. I will grade an outline for precision and completeness, as representing the full train of thought of a paper. *Outlines must be formulated in complete sentences throughout.*

Presentations: Each student will also be required to present and defend one of her/his short papers in class, after I have graded and commented on it. The paper will be distributed to the other students the day before, and the other students will be expected to read and be prepared to respond to it, as with other course texts. I will try to grade your papers promptly to allow you to present while the subject is relatively fresh, but if you are thinking you might like to present on a given paper, it may help to mention it when you turn in the paper so that I can move quickly on returning comments. While I have set aside some days on the syllabus for presentations, I will adjust the timing of presentations in light of the timing of the papers to be presented.

This is a 400-level course. Work for this course will be graded according to a higher set of expectations than work for 200- or 300-level courses.

Grade Breakdown

Class participation	15%
Short papers (5pp ea.)	36% (12% each)
Draft/outline (short paper)	4%
Presentation (short paper)	4%
Draft/outline (long paper)	6%
Long paper (10-12pp)	20%
Final Exam	15%

Reading Schedule
(subject to revision)

Phase I: Themes from history

<i>date</i>	<i>due</i>	<i>theme</i>	<i>texts</i>
M	5	Intro—Why ethics? Why virtue? History & course overview	
T	6	Eudaimonism—Happiness as excellent activity	<p><i>NE</i> I.1-5, 7-8</p> <p><i>Euthydemus</i> 278e-279c, 280b-282d</p> <p>Cicero <i>OME</i> I.33-9, 43-6, 58-9</p> <p>Cicero <i>OME</i> II.23-5, 40-41 & 45-7, 61, 63-5, 118</p> <p><i>Gorgias</i> 491e-495a, 503c-505c</p> <p>What is virtue?</p> <p><i>NE</i> I.13; II.1-7 (especially 6-7); VI.1-6, 12-13</p> <p><i>Gorgias</i> 516e-519d (on master vs. servant arts)</p> <p>Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> selections</p>
W	7	Is virtue what we should praise?	<p><i>NE</i> III.1-5, I.12</p> <p>Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> selections</p> <p>Foot, "Virtues and Vices"</p> <p>Role of Goods of Fortune I</p> <p><i>NE</i> IX.7-8</p> <p><i>Republic</i> selections (Thrasymachus)</p> <p>Wiggins, "Eudaimonism and realism in Aristotle's ethics"</p>
R	8	<i>TI</i> Role of Goods of Fortune II	<p>Cicero <i>OME</i> III, 16-24; IV, 40-41, 48</p> <p>Foot, <i>Natural Goodness</i>, selections</p> <p>Williams, "Acting as the Virtuous Person Acts"</p> <p>Role of Goods of Fortune III</p> <p><i>NE</i> I.8, 10; X.8</p> <p>Cooper, "Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune"</p>
F	9	<i>d/o</i> Perfectionism and Moral Competition	<p>Annas, "Self-Love in Aristotle"</p> <p>Kraut, "Comments"</p> <p>Friendship and Shared Action</p> <p>A.W. Price, <i>Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle</i> selections</p>

Reading Schedule, continued (subject to revision)

Phase II: Rosalind Hursthouse

<i>date</i>	<i>due</i>	<i>theme</i>	<i>texts</i>
M 12	P1	Contemporary Virtue Ethics	— Hursthouse <i>VE</i> Intro, Chap 1
T 13		Emotion and Virtuous Motives	— Hursthouse <i>VE</i> Chap. 4-6
W 14	T2	Virtue's Benefits	— Hursthouse <i>VE</i> Chap. 7-8
R 15	d/o	Naturalistic Virtues	— Hursthouse <i>VE</i> Chap. 9-10
F 16	P2	Objectivity & Moral Persuasion	— Hursthouse <i>VE</i> Chap. 11, review
M 19		Politics	— <i>NE</i> X.9 Nussbaum, "Aristotelian Social Democracy" Slote, "Virtue Ethics and Democratic Values"
T 20		Presentations	

Phase III: Alasdair MacIntyre

<i>date</i>	<i>due</i>	<i>texts</i>
W 21	T3	MacIntyre, <i>After Virtue</i> preface, ch. 1-4
R 22	d/o	<i>After Virtue</i> ch. 5, start of 6, 9-11
F 23	P3	<i>After Virtue</i> ch. 12-14
M 26	T4	<i>After Virtue</i> ch. 15-17
T 27		<i>After Virtue</i> ch. 18 to end
W 28	d/o	Presentations
R 29		Review and Reflection
F 30	P4	Final Exam

abbreviations: **T**—paper topic description; **d/o**—draft/outline; **P**—paper

AV—*After Virtue*

NE—*Nicomachean Ethics*

OME—*On Moral Ends*

VE—*On Virtue Ethics*