

**PHIL 6200: THEORETICAL ETHICS  
CONTEMPORARY VIRTUE ETHICS  
FALL 2008**

**Course Director:** A. MacLachlan

**Office:** S418 Ross

**Office Hours:** M 1.00-3.00pm, or by appointment

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**Phone:** (416) 736 2100 x77587

**Class Location:** S421A Ross

**Class Time:** T, 11.30-2.30pm

\*\* Email is the best way to reach me. I check email daily, and will respond within 24 hours.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Are there any moral virtues? If so, what should be their role in ethical theory?

Traditionally, both deontological and consequentialist philosophers have included a doctrine of virtue alongside an account of moral duty, or what it is we owe to one another. In the second half of the 20th century, however, propelled by dissatisfaction with rule-based normative ethics, virtue ethics re-emerged a self-standing normative theory. Its proponents claim to have a theory robust enough to be action-guiding, and subtle enough to represent the phenomenology of moral life more accurately than either consequentialism or deontology. Most contemporary virtue ethicists also claim to be neo-Aristotelian, grounding their claims in Aristotle's account of virtue, practical wisdom, and human flourishing, but the movement can also be traced to the British moral sentiment theorists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this seminar we will examine the origins and the major claims of the contemporary virtue ethical movement. We will also look at the growing field of virtue epistemology, and the relationship between moral and intellectual virtues. The course concludes with a discussion of the *politics* of virtue, both moral and intellectual.

**COURSE READINGS:**

Readings for this course are primarily drawn from three texts, available at the York University Bookstore:

Darwall, Stephen, ed. *Virtue Ethics*. New York: Blackwell, 2003.

Lear, Jonathan. *Radical Hope: Ethics in the face of cultural devastation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Statman, Daniel, ed. *Virtue Ethics: A Critical Reader*. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1997.

All other readings will be available as pdfs on the Moodle course website, or as links to the following e-book, available as part of the Scott library's online holdings:

Crisp, Roger, ed. *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*. New York: OUP, 1996.

## **FURTHER READINGS:**

Note: in order to survey the major trends and debates in virtue ethics, our readings are composed primarily of short papers. I do, however, recommend the following books:

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

Hursthouse, Rosalind. *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Driver, Julia. *Uneasy Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Swanton, Christine. *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

McKinnon, Christine. *Character, Virtue Theory and the Vices*. Toronto: Broadview Press, 1999.

Tessman, Lisa. *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Finally, some interesting critiques of virtue ethics:

Doris, John M. *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Hurka, Thomas. *Virtue, Vice and Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

If you would like to pursue any of the weekly topics further, or are interested in writing on an aspect of virtue ethics we have *not* covered in class (e.g. moral perception, character vices, the role of emotions in ethics, Nietzschean approaches to virtue, or the applications of virtue theory to issues in politics or practical ethics), please email or visit my office for suggestions.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

### **1. Class Presentation and Participation (20%)**

A sign-up sheet for class presentations will be passed around on the first day of class. You are expected to prepare a handout to accompany your presentation, and email it to me by 9am.

### **2. Reaction Papers (4 in total) (40%)**

3-4 paged papers, critiquing at least one of the week's readings. You must come to class to submit a paper, and may not submit when you are presenting.

### **3. Long Paper, due December 8th (40%)**

One longer paper (approx. 5000-7000 words) on a topic of your choice, discussed and approved by me (by November 21<sup>st</sup>).

Late work will only be accepted without penalty if you have prior approval from me, or in the event of a documented emergency. All other work will be penalized at a rate of 3% per day. After 5 days it will not be accepted.

York students are required to maintain high standards of academic integrity and are subject to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty:

<http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/senate/acadhone.htm>

Students are also expected to review the materials on the Academic Integrity website.

(<http://www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity>).

Important information for students regarding the Ethics Review process, Access/Disability, Academic Honesty and Integrity, Student Conduct and Religious Observance Days:

[www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate\\_cte\\_main\\_pages/ccas.htm](http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate_cte_main_pages/ccas.htm)

## PHIL 6200: SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Date:	Topic:	Required Readings:	Suggested Further Readings:
9/9	Introduction: Why Virtue Ethics?	Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy" (Moodle)  Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories" (Moodle)	SEP entry on Virtue Ethics (Moodle)  Williams, "Morality: the Peculiar Institution" (Moodle)
16/9	Historical Origins I	Aristotle, <i>NE</i> (Darwall, pp. 7-35)  Irwin, "The Virtues: Theory and Common Sense in Greek Philosophy" (Crisp, pp. 37-55)	Simpson, "Contemporary Virtue Ethics and Aristotle" (Statman, pp. 245-259)  Santas, "Does Aristotle have a Virtue Ethics?" (Statman, pp. 260-285)
23/9	Historical Origins II	Hutcheson, <i>Inquiry</i> (Darwall, pp. 51-62)  Hume, <i>Enquiry</i> (Darwall, pp. 63-102)	Schneewind, "The Misfortunes of Virtue" (Moodle)  Wiggins, "Natural and Artificial Virtues: A Vindication of Hume's Scheme" (Crisp, pp. 131-140)
30/9	<i>Rosh Hashanah</i> No Class	<i>None</i>	
7/10	Modern Virtue Ethics I	Foot, "Virtues and Vices" (Darwall, pp. 105-120)  McDowell, "Virtue and Reason" (Darwall, pp. 121-143)	Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of the Good over Other Concepts" **
14/10	Modern Virtue Ethics II	MacIntyre, "The Nature of the Virtues" (Darwall, pp. 144-167)  Watson, "On the Primacy of Character" (Darwall, pp. 229-250)	Mason, "MacIntyre on Modernity and How it has Marginalized the Virtues" (Crisp, pp. 191-209)
21/10	Supplement or Rival Normative Theory?	Hursthouse (Darwall pp. 184-202)  Slote (Darwall, pp. 203-227)	Hurka, "Against Virtue Ethics" (Moodle)
28/10	Kantian and Utilitarian Virtues	O'Neill, "Kant's Virtues" (Crisp, pp. 77-98)  Driver, "The Virtues and Human Nature" (Crisp, pp. 111-130)	Herman, "Making Room for Character" (Moodle)  Louden, "Kant's Virtue Ethics" (Statman, pp. 286-299)  Slote, "Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism, and Symmetry" (Crisp, pp. 99-110)

\*\* (Murdoch available on reserve at Scott Library, in text of same title and in *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Crisp and Slote)

## PHIL 6200: SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS, CONTINUED

Date:	Topic:	Required Readings:	Suggested Further Readings:
4/11	Situationist Challenges to Virtue Ethics	Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology" (Moodle)  Kupperman, "The Indispensability of Character" (Moodle)	Doris, "Persons, Situations and Virtue Ethics" (Moodle)  Sreenivasan, "Errors about Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution" (Moodle)  Sabini & Silver, "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued" (Moodle)
11/11	Intellectual Virtues	Aristotle, <i>NE</i> Bk 6 (Darwall, pp. 35-50)  Code, "Toward a 'Responsibilist' Epistemology" (Moodle)	SEP on Virtue Epistemology (Moodle)  Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence vs. Foundation in the Theory of Knowledge" (Moodle)
18/11	Moral and Intellectual Virtues	Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue" (Moodle)  Calhoun, "Standing for Something" (Moodle)	Zagzebski, "The Search for the Source of Epistemic Good" (Moodle)
25/11	The Politics of Virtue I	Okin, "Feminism, Moral Development and the Virtues" (Crisp, pp. 211-229)  Tessman, "Critical Virtue Ethics: Understanding Oppression as Morally Damaging." (Moodle)	Fricker, "Epistemic Injustice and a Role for Virtue in the Politics of Knowing" (Moodle)  Baier, "What do Women Want in a Moral Theory?" (Darwall, pp. 168-183)
2/12	The Politics of Virtue II	Lear, <i>Radical Hope</i> .	