

Independent Study on Virtue Ethics

Fall 2022

Prof. Jeremy Reid

1. Course Description

The purpose of this course is to give students a philosophical understanding of contemporary virtue ethics, and a sense of how the dominant Aristotelian strain emerged in the mid-20th century. As students in the independent study already have a good grounding in some historical virtue-centered schools, particular emphasis will be placed on how the virtue ethical framework has been updated and how it can contribute to debates in contemporary normative ethics. Important questions to focus on include: Why was a virtue-based approach taken to be an alternative to subjectivist accounts of ethics? In what sense was virtue ethics taken to be objective or desire-independent? How are particular strains of virtue ethics grounded in an account of human nature? How do we work out what the relevant virtues are and how should we understand them? How does virtue ethics get applied to particular issues (e.g. abortion, environmental preservation)? What role does eudaimonism play in varieties of virtue ethics and is it essential? How do some contemporary virtue ethical approaches (like Exemplarism and Target-Centered approaches) differ from Aristotelian varieties of virtue ethics? In what sense (if any) is virtue ethics feminist? Do virtue ethical approaches integrate considerations about children, the emotions, community, and moral change better or worse than alternative normative approaches? In what ways is it inferior to alternative approaches?

2. Format

Students will meet each week independently over Zoom to discuss the readings and writing assignments. Prof. Reid will join when confusions become insurmountable.

3. Assessment

50% weekly writing assignments
50% final paper (5000–8000 words)

For the writing assignments, each week one student will write up a summary of the readings (think of these as notes for your future selves) and the other student will write a discussion piece. 2 pages single-spaced is ideal, but it is ok if the notes go over that—you've done your hard work getting your writing concise, so now your focus should be on quality. Writing assignments should be completed before each student meeting and shared with each other to serve as a basis for discussion.

Final papers are due Sun Jan 15 at 11:59pm at the very latest—though I strongly encourage you to complete them and submit them for assessment before then. Students will present an outline of their final papers in the final week of semester.

4. Schedule of Readings

1. Lipscomb, *The Women Are Up To Something*.
2. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy";
Anscombe, "Mr. Truman's Degree";
Anscombe, "Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt the Youth?";
Solomon, "Elizabeth Anscombe's 'Modern Moral Philosophy' 50 years later" (first 8 pages, up to the end of §II)
3. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*.
4. Foot, "Moral Beliefs";
Foot, "Does Moral Subjectivism Rest on a Mistake?";
Foot, "Utilitarianism and the Virtues";
Hursthouse, "Memoir of Philippa Foot".
5. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, introduction–chapter 3;
Hursthouse, "The Grammar of Goodness in Foot's Ethical Naturalism".
6. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, chapter 4–postscript;
Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, part 3.
7. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, part 1;
Hursthouse, "Are the Virtues the Proper Starting Point for Morality?";
Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion".
8. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, part 2;
Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics";
Hursthouse, "Discussing Dilemmas".
9. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues";
Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, chapters 1–2;
Hursthouse, "On the Grounding of the Virtues in Human Nature".
10. Annas, "A Philosopher's Path";
Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, chapters 1–5;
Annas, "Why Virtue Ethics Does Not Have a Problem With Right Action".
11. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, chapters 6–10;
Annas, "Eudaimonist Virtue Ethics".
12. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, chapters 1–4.
13. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, chapters 5–8.

14. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, Part I.

15. Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*, Part II.

I would especially encourage you to purchase hard copies of Lipscomb's *The Women Are Up To Something*, Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics*, and Foot's *Natural Goodness*, as I do not have high quality pdfs of those that could serve as a basis for academic study. Pdfs of other texts I will supply.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Liberal & Creative Arts will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

Disability Access

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/415-338-2472, video phone/415-335-7210) or by email (dprc@sfsu.edu).

Student Disclosures of Sexual Violence

SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Title IX Coordinator by completing the report form available at <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>, emailing vpasem@sfsu.edu or calling 338-2032.

To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

- The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/
- Counseling and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208; <http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/>
- For more information on your rights and available resources: <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>

