

Phil 890: Contemporary Virtue Ethics

Prof Jeremy Reid

Course and Contact Information

Meeting time: T 4:00pm–6:45pm

Email: jwreid@sfsu.edu

Office hours: By appointment

Format: Online, with synchronous Zoom meetings

Description

Virtue ethics has firmly established itself in recent decades as one of the major approaches to normative ethics. Although many aspects of the system are frequently misunderstood, it is clear that character-based ethics has made a number of important and insightful contributions to our ethical understanding more generally.

This course has four primary goals: firstly, to provide a solid grounding in Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (as represented by Anscombe, Foot, Hursthouse, and Annas), where the concepts of virtue, eudaimonia, and phronesis are central; secondly, to show some of the variety of contemporary virtue ethical traditions by considering Humean, Nietzschean, Platonist, and Exemplarist virtue ethics; thirdly, to show how virtue ethics can be applied to a variety of contemporary issues; finally, to highlight how particular debates that have arisen within the virtue ethical tradition make contributions to normative ethics more generally, for example, regarding debates about the nature of normativity, moral perception, rule-following, supererogation, heroism, ethical naturalism, and consequentialism.

Assessment

50% Class presentations and participation

50% Final paper (5000–8000 words)

Format

Each week, students will present a part of the material and other students will be assigned with taking notes for the class.

Here is the link to the schedule for this (sign up equitably!):

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sPNoEVRUxmTBRCFTrq9FCXheT2hDTS4RH5K4qfWFPOQ/edit?usp=sharing>

Here is the link for the notes: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YPxrdt_RbV36o-Tk9iPej5Y4BW1o7ZbYGBYY1HUO9tM/edit?usp=sharing

Course Schedule and Required Readings

Aug 25: Normativity

Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy"

Annas, "Why Virtue Ethics Does Not Have A Problem With Right Action"

Sep 1: Right Action

Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Part I (chapters 1–3)

Sep 8: Motivation

Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Part II (chapters 4-7)

Sep 15: Applying the theory

Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion"

Hursthouse, "The Good and Bad Family", in L. Thomas (ed.) *Contemporary Debates in Social Philosophy*

Hursthouse, "Environmental Virtue Ethics"

Sep 22: Virtue as Skill

Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, chapters 1–5

Sep 29: Phronesis

Hursthouse, "Practical Wisdom, A Mundane Account"

Hursthouse, "What does the Aristotelian Phronimos Know?"

Oct 6: Virtue and Rules

McDowell, "Virtue and Reason"

Anscombe, "Mr Truman's Degree"

Reid, "Virtue, Rule-Following, and Absolute Prohibitions"

Oct 13: Eudaimonism

Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, chapters 6–10

Annas, "Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism"

Oct 20: Naturalism

Foot, *Natural Goodness*

Optional: Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Part III (chapters 8–11)

Oct 27: Heroism, Supererogation, and the Demands of Virtue

Wolf, "Moral Saints"

Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality"

Annas, "Virtue and Heroism"

Nov 3: Exemplarism

Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, chapters 1–4

Nov 10: Platonism

Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, chapters 1–3

Murdoch, “The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts”

Nov 17: Humean and Sentimentalist Virtue Ethics

Greco, “Toward a Humean Virtue Ethics”

Slote, “Virtue Ethics and Moral Sentimentalism”, in van Hooft (ed.) *The Handbook to Virtue Ethics*

Pettigrove, “Re-conceiving Character: The Social Ontology of Humean Virtue”

Dec 1: Virtue and Consequentialism

Foot, “Utilitarianism and the Virtues”

Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, chapters 4–5

Dec 8: Nietzschean Virtue Ethics

Swanton, “Nietzschean Virtue Ethics”

Swanton, “Weakness of Will as a Species of Executive Cowardice”

Hard copies:

It is not required to buy hard copies of any of the assigned books, as pdfs will be supplied. That being said, these three books we will be reading cover-to-cover, and you may wish to buy hard copies. Amazon links are for reference—you are free to use other suppliers.

https://www.amazon.com/Virtue-Ethics-Rosalind-Hursthouse/dp/0199247994/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=hursthouse+on+virtue+ethics&qid=1589665283&sr=8-1

https://www.amazon.com/Intelligent-Virtue-Julia-Annas/dp/0199228779/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=annas+intelligent+virtue&qid=1589665318&sr=8-1

https://www.amazon.com/Natural-Goodness-Philippa-Foot/dp/019926547X/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=foot+natural+goodness&qid=1589665342&sr=8-1

We will also read substantial excerpts from the following books:

https://www.amazon.com/Exemplarist-Moral-Theory-Linda-Zagzebski/dp/0190072253/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1589665665&sr=8-1

https://www.amazon.com/Robert-Merrihew-Adams/dp/0195153715/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1589665732&sr=8-1

https://www.amazon.com/Uneasy-Virtue-Cambridge-Studies-Philosophy/dp/052103406X/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=driver+uneasy+virtue&qid=1589665748&sr=8-1

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 vpsaem@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>