

PHI6667: SEMINAR IN ETHICS

Spring 2025

Prof. David McPherson

Thursdays, Periods 8-10 (3pm – 6pm) / Room 200 in Griffin-Floyd Hall

Office Hours: Thursday, 12:45 pm – 2:45 pm and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this seminar we will focus on the revival of the ancient tradition of virtue ethics (especially Aristotelian virtue ethics), starting in the latter half of the 20th century and continuing up to the present. We will explore how this revival was motivated by (1) dissatisfactions with dominant modern moral theories (especially Kantianism and utilitarianism) as well as by (2) meta-ethical concerns about the modern problem of disenchantment (the perceived loss of meaning/value) as expressed in the supposed fact-value divide that informs subjectivist views of value. Regarding (1), we will assess criticisms that modern virtue ethicists have made of Kantian and utilitarian moral theories, and we will also examine Kantian and utilitarian criticisms of modern virtue ethics. Furthermore, we will consider whether modern virtue ethics should be understood as offering a rival *theory* of right action on a par with Kantianism and utilitarianism or as an *anti-theory* approach that instead seeks to derive an understanding of the virtues from concrete experiences, practices, and ethical traditions. We will examine specific accounts of the virtues, and we will also consider “the situationist challenge” to virtue ethics. Regarding (2), we will explore how modern virtue ethicists seek “re-enchantment” through defending “natural normativity.” We will examine several different views of Aristotelian ethical naturalism along with criticisms. Specific philosophers whose works we will study include Elizabeth Anscombe, Alasdair MacIntyre, Philippa Foot, John McDowell, Bernard Williams, Rosalind Hursthouse, and others.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- (1) Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007 [1981]).
- (2) Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).
- (3) Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
- (4) Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- (5) Additional readings will be posted on Canvas under “Files.”

DESCRIPTION OF GRADED WORK

(1) *Reading Reflection (RR) Assignments*: For each class session you are expected to write up a single-spaced (12-point font, Times New Roman, 1-inch margins) reflection of around one page (two-page max) on the required reading (or readings), identifying what you take to be the key issues raised (providing page numbers when particular passages are appealed to) and offering an assessment and/or a question (or questions) for reflection. These need to be turned in on the “Assignments” section of Canvas the evening before class (no later than midnight). There will be fourteen reading reflections over the course of the semester, but I will take the top 10 for your total grade for the RR

component of your grade. Each reflection is worth 3 points, and it will be graded on quality of reflection and evidence of engagement with the readings. These reading reflections will also serve to demonstrate your preparation for class participation, and so will also contribute to that component.

(2) *Class Participation*: In order for this course to be successful and discussion to be fruitful it is important that you attend class prepared to discuss the material. You are expected to have read and thought about the reading (or readings) for each class meeting prior to class and to be willing to engage each other respectfully in discussion. You are also expected to bring to each class the texts to be discussed that day. You are expected to attend each class, and if you have more than two unexcused absences you can be failed from the course. *See Participation Rubric Below.*

(3) *Final Paper*: You will write a final thesis-driven research paper that is connected to the course material. The aim here is to develop a paper that could be a conference presentation and submitted for publication eventually. The expected length is around 20 pages (no less than 15 pages, no more than 25 pages) with 12-point font (Times New Roman), 1-inch margins. You will need to meet with me at least once (in person or over Zoom) before the last class before Spring Break to discuss ideas for your final paper. You will also need to write an abstract for your paper and discuss it with me (in person or over Zoom) before class on Thursday, April 10th. Additionally, you will present an outline of your final paper and get feedback in class on Thursday, April 17th. All of these components will be factored into your grade for your final paper (failure to do them adequately will result in point deductions). The final paper is due on Tuesday, April 29th (before midnight), and it should be submitted in the “Assignments” section of Canvas. The final paper will be graded largely on the clarity, originality, and importance of the thesis, the strength of the argument in support of it (including considering objections), the coherence and logical flow of the paper, and also the evidence of engagement with the course material. You are also expected to show some engagement with sources beyond the required readings. *See Final Paper Rubric Below.*

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

(1) *Reading Reflection (RR) Assignments* (14 total; each worth 3%): 30%

(2) *Class Participation*: 20%

(3) *Final Paper*: 50%

GRADING SCALE

A	93 – 100%		C	73 – 76%
A-	90 – 92%		C-	70 – 72%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	83 – 86%		D	63 – 66%
B-	80 – 82%		D-	60 – 62%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

GRADING RUBRICS

Final Paper Rubric

	A (90-100%)	B (80-89%)	C (70-79%)	D (60-69%)	E (below 60%)
Thesis and Argumentation	Thesis is clear, specific, and presents a thoughtful, critical, engaging, and original perspective. Argument fully supports the thesis both logically and thoroughly and effectively uses sources.	Thesis is clear and specific, but not as critical or original. Shows insight and attention to the texts under consideration. May have gaps in argument.	Thesis is present but not clear or specific, demonstrating a lack of critical engagement to the texts. Argument is weak or ill-thought out, missing important details or making logical leaps with little support.	Thesis is vague and/or confused, demonstrates a failure to understand the texts. Argument lacks any logical flow and does not utilize any source material.	There is no thesis or argumentation
Use of Sources	Course readings and other sources are well incorporated, utilized, and contextualized throughout.	Course readings and other sources are incorporated and utilized but not contextualized as neatly or as significantly.	Course readings and other sources are mostly incorporated and utilized but are not properly contextualized.	Engagement with course readings and other sources is almost wholly absent.	Engagement with course readings and other sources is wholly absent.
Organization	Clear organization. Introduction provides adequate background information and ends with a thesis. Details are in logical order. Conclusion is strong and states the point of the essay.	Clear organization. Introduction clearly states thesis, but does not provide as much background information. Details are in logical order, but may be more difficult to follow. Conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all loose ends.	Significant lapses in organization. Introduction states thesis but does not adequately provide background information. Some details not in logical or expected order that results in a distracting read. Conclusion is recognizable but does not tie up all loose ends.	Poor, hard-to-follow organization. There is no clear introduction of the main topic or thesis. There is no clear conclusion, and the essay just ends. Little or no employment of logical body paragraphs.	The essay is wholly disorganized, lacking an introduction, conclusion or any logical coherence.

Grammar, mechanics	No errors.	A few errors.	Some errors.	Many errors.	Filled with errors.
--------------------	------------	---------------	--------------	--------------	---------------------

Participation Rubric

	Excellent (90-100%)	Good (80-89%)	Average (70-79%)	Insufficient (60-69%)	Unsatisfactory (below 60%)
Knowledgeable: Shows evidence of having done the assigned work.					
Thoughtful: Evaluates carefully issues raised in assigned work.					
Considerate: Takes the perspective of others into account and listens attentively.					

STUDENTS REQUIRING ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

COUNSELING AND WELLNESS CENTER

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

UF EVALUATION PROCESS

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

UNIVERSITY HONESTY POLICY

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

All writing assignments will be checked for AI and other forms of plagiarism. Plagiarism on an assignment will result in an automatic zero and possibly failure from the course.

POLICY ON LATE WORK

All late work will be penalized with point deductions unless there are extenuating, excusable circumstances, which requires approval from the professor. In such case, you will have to meet a new deadline for completing the work (set by the professor).

SCHEDULE (subject to revision)

Week 1, Thurs, Jan 16

Required Readings:

1. Anscombe, “Mr. Truman’s Degree” (1957), in *Ethics, Politics and Religion: Collected Philosophical Papers, Vol. III* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press), pp. 62-71.
2. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1-19.
3. Anscombe, “Contraception and Chastity” (1975), in *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics by G. E. M. Anscombe*, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally. Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic), pp. 170-91.
4. Anscombe, “Euthanasia and the Morality of Murder” (1982), in *Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic), pp. 261-77.

(Recommendations for further reading will also be provided on Canvas)

Week 2, Thurs, Jan 23

Required Readings:

1. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chs 1-6 (pp. 1-78).

Week 3, Thurs, Jan 30

Required Readings:

1. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chs 9, 12, 14-15, 17-18 (pp. 109-20, 146-64, 181-225, 244-63).

Week 4, Thurs, Feb 6

Required Readings:

1. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, preface and chs 1-3, 6 (pp. vii-ix, 1-53, 93-119).

Week 5, Thurs, Feb 13

Required Readings:

1. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chs 7-10 & postscript (pp. 120-202).
2. Cottingham, "The Good Life and 'the Radical Contingency of the Ethical,'" in *Reading Bernard Williams*, ed. Daniel Callcut (New York: Routledge), 24-42.

Week 6, Thurs, Feb 20

Required Readings:

1. Foot, *Natural Goodness*, intro and chs 1-8 (pp. 1-98)

Week 7, Thurs, Feb 27

Required Readings:

1. McDowell, "The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Mind, Value, Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3-22.
2. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62:3 (1979): 331-50.
3. McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism," in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, 167-97.
4. McPherson, "Virtue, Happiness, and Meaning," in *Virtue and Meaning: A Neo-Aristotelian Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 44-75.

Week 8, Thurs, Mar 6

Required Readings:

1. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), chapters 8-11, (pp. 163-265).
2. McPherson, "Cosmic Outlooks," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55:2 (2015): 197-215.

Week 9, Thurs, Mar 13

Required Readings:

1. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, intro and ch 1, pp. 1-42.
2. Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), intro and chs 1-2, pp. 1-67.

Deadline for First Meeting to Discuss Final Paper Ideas

Week 10, Thurs, Mar 20

Spring Break

Week 11, Thurs, Mar 27

Required Readings:

1. Murdoch, "Against Dryness," in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi (New York: Penguin), 287-95
2. Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good'" and "The Sovereignty of the Good Over Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 337-84.
3. McPherson, "Human Beings as *Homo Religiosus*" and "The Contemplative Life," selection from ch 5 of *Virtue and Meaning*, pp. 159-80.

Week 12, Thurs, April 3

Required Readings:

1. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), chs 9-10, pp. 99-128.
2. Gaita, "Goodness Beyond Virtue" and "Evil Beyond Vice," in *A Common Humanity*: 17-55.
3. McPherson, "Other-Regarding Concern," in *Virtue and Meaning*, pp. 76-114.

Week 13, Thurs, April 10

Required Readings:

1. Hooker, "The Collapses of Virtue Ethics," *Utilitas* 14:1 (2002): 22-40.
2. Schneewind, "The Misfortunes of Virtue," *Ethics* 101:1 (1990): 42-63.
3. Coker, "Virtue Ethics and the Social Demands of Morality," *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, Vol. IV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 237-60.

Deadline for Discussing Abstract for Final Paper

Week 14, Thurs, April 17

Required Readings:

1. Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," *Noûs* 32:4 (1998): 504-30.
2. Adams, "Moral Inconsistency" and "Moral Frailty and Moral Luck," in *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 115-20, 144-70.

10-15 Minute Class Presentations of Final Paper Outlines

Week 15, Thurs, April 24 (Reading Day)

Final Papers Due on Tuesday, April 29th (before midnight)