**PHIL 162: Virtues and Vices**

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| *Instructor*: Seth Robertson | *Time*: Tu 3:00-5:00 PM |
| *Instructor Email*: srobertson@fas.harvard.edu | *Location*: Emerson Hall 107 |
| *Course Page:* <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/67835> | *Office:* Emerson Hall 320 |
| *Office Hours*: Wednesdays 3-4 PM and by appointment |  |

**Course Description**

What is the difference between courage and cowardice? Why is being open-minded better than being narrow-minded? Is it good to be independent? What does it mean to be a “good person” and is it desirable or even possible to become one? Are there personality traits that are especially dangerous and damaging to people suffering from and resisting oppression and marginalization? What kind of personality could you cultivate that would give you and those around you the best chances of not only being happy, but of flourishing? In both historical and contemporary ethical thought, an appreciation for the richness, subtlety, and complexity of our moral and intellectual lives has attracted philosophers to approaches we now think of virtue ethical and virtue epistemological, respectively. These approaches broadly seek to answer the question of how we can develop ourselves to be at our moral and intellectual best. In this course, we will start by examining both historical and contemporary approaches to virtue ethics. Then, we will turn to examining recent developments in the burgeoning field of virtue epistemology. Finally, we will examine specific moral, intellectual, civic, social, and executive virtues and vices in more detail. Students will be tasked with identifying and examining in detail the specific virtues they find most important or valuable and the specific vices they find most dangerous in their own lives.

*Learning Objectives*

1. Develop knowledge of historical and contemporary work in virtue ethics and epistemology
2. Develop skills in producing advanced work in academic philosophy

**Required Texts**

There is no required text for this course. All readings are posted on the course website.

**Course Requirements / Grading**

1. *Conference Paper Project (60% total)*: The main project of this course is writing a “conference paper” on an unexplored / underexplored virtue or vice. The format will follow the rules for an American Philosophical Association Conference paper and will have several components. Students will read their own paper and comment on one other paper at our class mini-conference (date TBD).
   1. Paper Abstract (5%)
   2. Rough Draft (10%)
   3. Referee Report (5%)
   4. Mini-Conference Presentation (10%)
   5. Conference Comments (10%)
   6. Final Draft (20%)
2. *Tests* (30%; 15% each): There will be two tests (a midterm and final). These are take-home tests but take the format of textbook chapters for virtue ethics (midterm) and virtue epistemology (final).
3. Participation (10%): Scored by completing in-class group activities and small out-of-class assignments.

**Late/Missed Work Policies**

Exams may be rescheduled if the student provides an acceptable excuse but must be taken as soon as possible. In-class activities cannot be made-up, but every student is allowed to miss 2 without penalty.

**Electronic Devices**

Laptops are not permitted for use in class. Exceptions will be made only where there is some documented need for the device.

**Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to do their own work. If you violate standards of academic integrity, I will seek to impose the severest penalty the university permits.

**Statement on Student Success and Reasonable Accommodation**

My hope is that you are able to do your best work in this course to achieve success. There are many resources available here that you should not hesitate to utilize if needed: <https://advising.college.harvard.edu/academic-support-resources-0>.

Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should contact me personally as soon as possible so that we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation. For more information, please see <https://accessibility.harvard.edu/student-accommodations>.

**Syllabus Policy**

This syllabus is subject to change. The most updated version of this syllabus will be posted on the course page.

**Schedule**

**R**: *Required reading*. Will be focus of lecture)  
**O:** *Optional.*Might come up in lecture; will be useful for take-home tests and for essays  
**F:** *Further****.*** Further reading if you become interested in particular topic. Might be useful for your essays.

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| **Date** | **Topic** | **Reading** |
| 1/28 | Introduction / Overview |  |
| 2/4 | Rumblings of Discontent | R: Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”; Wolf “Moral Saints” O: Williams, “Morality, the Peculiar Institution”  F: Solomon, “Early Virtue Ethics” |
| 2/11 | Virtuous and Vicious Roles | R: Riggle, *On Being Awesome* Chapters 1-2*;* Schwitzgebel “A Theory of Jerks” |
| 2/18 | Virtuous and Vicious Roles Continued | R: Mann, “Creepers, Flirts, Heroes, and Allies”; Stevens, “The Virtuous Arguer” O: Cohen, The Virtuous Troll |
| 2/25 | Virtues Around the World | R: Olberding, *The Wrong of Rudeness* Chapters 1 & 4  O: Jeffers, Embodying Justice in Ancient Egypt; Maffie, “Reciprocity, Balance, and Nepantla in Aztec Ethics”; Purcell, “What the Aztecs can teach us about happiness and the good life”; Len Miller, “Etemeyaske Pokat”; Bewaji, “Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture”; Gyeke, “Ethics and Character”; Sim, “Why Confucius’ Ethics is a Virtue Ethics”; McRae “Equanimity and the Moral Virtue of Open-mindedness” |
| 3/3 | Aristotelian Virtue Ethics | R: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Books 1-3 O: Snow, Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics  F: Urmson, *Aristotle’s Ethics;* Polansky *Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*  ***3/6 Abstract Due*** |
| 3/10 | Classics in Contemporary Virtue Ethics | R: Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics,* Introduction & Chapter 1  O: Battaly, *Virtue* Chapter 1; Annas, *Intelligent Virtue,* Introduction, Chapters 1-3 F: MacIntyre *After Virtue;* Foot *Natural Goodness*  ***3/12 Rough Draft Due*** |
| 3/24 | Situationism | R: Merritt, “Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology”; Sreenivasan, “The Situationist Critique” O: Slingerland, “The Situationist Critique and Early Virtue Ethics”  F: Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character”; Doris, “Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics,” *Lack of Character*  **3/27 Referee Report Due** |
| 3/31 | Virtue, Vice and Social Injustice | R: Tessman, *Burdened Virtues* Introduction, Chapters 1-2O: Kidd “Epistemic Oppression and Social Corruption” F: Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance* Chapter 1  **4/01 Midterm Due** |
| 4/7 | Virtue Epistemology | R: Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind,* Chapters 1-2  F: Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind* |
| 4/14 | Intellectual Vice | R: Cassam *Vices of the Mind*, Chapters 1-3  **4/17 Conference Presentation Due** |
| 4/21 | Ignorance | R: Mills, “White Ignorance”; Pohlhaus, “Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice”  O: Arpaly, “Open-mindedness as a Moral Virtue”  **4/23 Conference Commentary Due** |
| 4/28 | Intellectual Arrogance and Timidity | R: Tanesini, “Calm Down, Dear”; “Intellectual Servility and Timidity”  O: Cassam, “Epistemic Insouciance”; Tanesini “Arrogance, Anger, and Debate”  **4/30 Final Due**  **5/10 Paper Final Draft Due** |