**Questions of Character: Virtue Ethics East and West**

**Syllabus: Spring 2019**

**Instructor:** Prof.Olivia Bailey

**Email:** obailey@tulane.edu

**Time/Location:** T 11-12.15, Th 11-12.15

**Office Hours:** W 2-4, or by appointment

**Topic:** As we make our way through the world, we are constantly confronted with questions about how we ought to relate to others, pursue our projects, and adjudicate between different ends. It is quite natural to think of many of these questions as having to do with *character:* how can I be a courageous ally, or a kind friend? If I take the bribe, what kind of person would that make me? Who, if anyone, should I model myself after? And why should I try to be generous, or compassionate, or fair in the first place? A focus on problems concerning the nature of good character, and how to get it, distinguishes an approach to ethical theorizing known as *virtue ethics.*Virtue ethics is perhaps the most ancient of ethical traditions, and in the last few decades it has experienced a tremendous renaissance. This course will explore several of the most central and interesting debates surrounding character-centered ethics. We will focus on two ancient virtue ethical traditions, the Aristotelian and the Confucian, whose rich and surprising insights about friendship, integrity, heroism, and vice continue to be strikingly relevant to our lives today. Readings will range from original historical texts to new essays from contemporary scholars.

**Course Objectives:** Students will acquire a rich understanding of virtue ethics, an approach to moral theorizing that is still flourishing today, through careful reflection on the philosophical masterpieces that represent its most sophisticated historical form. Students will develop skill in the close textual analysis of historical work and build their abilities in philosophical writing through regular short writing exercises, revisions, and outlining. Students will also think critically about what kind of person they want to be, and about what values and skills they want to cultivate in their own lives. This course aims to change your life for the better, at least a little bit!

**Required Student Resources**

You are required to purchase or borrow three books for this course. These are:

1. The Nicomachean Ethics | Edition: 2  
   Aristotle, Terence Irwin (Trans.)  
   ISBN:9780872204645, Hackett.
2. The Essential Mengzi: Selected Passages with Traditional Commentary  
   Author: Mengzi, Bryan W. Van Norden (Trans.)  
   ISBN:9780872209855, Hackett.
3. The Essential Analects: Selected Passages with Traditional Commentary | Edition: 1  
   Author: Confucius, Edward Slingerland (Trans.)  
   ISBN:9780872207721, Hackett.

Please be sure to get physical, rather than ebook, copies of these texts. Note that it is important that we all use the same editions/translations (otherwise, we’ll spend a lot of time just trying to coordinate references). *Additional readings* will be posted on this course’s Canvas site. You must print these readings out and bring them to class (Exception: students using flat e-readers such as Nooks, Kindles, or iPads. See the Electronics Policy below).

**Electronics Policy**

*Neither phones nor laptops* will be permitted in class except as a matter of special accommodation (in accordance with the recommendations of the Goldman Center for Student Accessibility). You *must* bring the relevant texts with you to class. Flat reading devices such as Kindles or iPads will be allowed for in-class text access, but I highly recommend printing out any secondary readings instead, and hard copies of the books really are necessary.

Why the electronics policy? Research shows that while students prefer to read on screens, student laptop use is correlated with poorer retention of lecture content, poorer retention of information from readings, worse performance on conceptual questions, worse course performance generally, and weaker self-reported understanding of course material. These results are likely linked to the fact that students engage in substantial multitasking behavior with their laptops and have non course-related software open and active about 42% of the time, on average. I have uploaded a summary of these findings, with references to the relevant studies, to the Canvas site.

**Evaluation Procedures and Grading Criteria**

**Assignments:** The assignments for this course are designed with three principle objectives in mind. First, they will give you the chance to clarify your understanding of other moral philosophers’ work on character, and to develop your own ideas about the nature and significance of facts about virtue and vice. Second, they will provide the opportunity to work on key skills for philosophical writing. And third, they will help you to hone your oral presentation abilities. Some of the writing for this course will take the form of short reflection pieces of around a page. You must write a minimum of **seven reflection pieces** **of one (or maximum two) pages** over the course of the term (including the set reflection for the first day of class) and only one reflection piece may be submitted per class. You are welcome to submit more than seven; only the best seven will be factored into your final overall reflection piece grade. These pieces will pertain to the reading material for the coming class session, and are due at **5pm** **on Monday,** the day before the Tuesday class meets, or **5pm on Wednesday,** the day before the Thursday class meets. Instructions for writing reflections are available on the Canvas site, under “Files > Guidelines.” **You will also write three 4-5 page papers**, two of which you *may* rewrite (in which case your grade will be updated; NB you cannot receive a worse grade on a re-write, though no grade improvement is guaranteed). Each student will also be responsible for **one presentation** (with a partner, or solo, depending upon enrollment). Your 10-minute presentation will involve presenting one or two arguments from one of the assigned readings, and raising questions about it for the class as a whole to discuss. A guideline for presentations is available on the Canvas site, under “Files > Guidelines.” You should prepare a short**handout** to accompany your presentation: send it to be by 5pm the day before your presentation if you’d like me to print out copies for you. It goes without saying that reading the texts and attending class is mandatory.

**Additional Requirements, writing intensive:** One mandatory 4-page paper rewrite.

**Course Grade Breakdown**

*Reflection pieces – 25% Longer papers- 40%*

*Participation – 20% Class Presentation– 15%*

Note that a full 20% of your grade is participation. Participation includes involvement in classroom discussion and/or office hours. **Philosophy is not a spectator sport**. You should come ready to raise questions, challenge assumptions, and contribute constructively to our evolving collective understanding of the material. A participation guideline is available on Canvas in “Files>Guidelines.” It contains helpful tips; do check it out!

**Late Policy:** you have **three free late days.** You can use a late day, or multiple late days, *whenever you like*. You do not need to provide a reason, but you mustlet me know that this is what you intend to do. Once you’ve used up your three days, though, alllateness not excused by a dean’s or doctor’s note will be penalized (1/3 of letter grade per day), no exceptions. In turning in your assignments, it is your responsibility to ensure that you’ve uploaded correct, uncorrupted files. Your assignments are to be uploaded to Canvas by 5pm on the due date.

**Collaboration and Academic Integrity:**

Collaboration is an essential part of philosophy. I encourage you to discuss your ideas and your papers with your classmates, your roommates, your professors, your friends, your enemies… That said, it is important that you cite all your sources responsibly, and that the work in your papers be your own. This course has a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. If you have questions about these matters, please do ask.

**ADA/Accessibility Statement**

Any students with disabilities or other needs, who need special accommodations in this course, are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructor and should contact Goldman Center for Student Accessibility: [http://accessibility.tulane.edu](http://accessibility.tulane.edu/) or 504.862.8433.

**Code of Academic Conduct**

The Code of Academic Conduct applies to all undergraduate students, full-time and part-time, in Tulane University. Tulane University expects and requires behavior compatible with its high standards of scholarship. By accepting admission to the university, a student accepts its regulations (i.e., [Code of Academic Conduct](https://college.tulane.edu/academic-honesty) and [Code of Student Conduct](https://conduct.tulane.edu/resources/code-student-conduct)) and acknowledges the right of the university to take disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion, for conduct judged unsatisfactory or disruptive.

**What you can expect from me:** I will be available at least 2 hours per week for office hours, and I will return all assignments (with the possible exception of the final paper) within five days I will endeavor to offer short reading guides for each week, provided that you all find them useful. I will not be able to read whole drafts in advance of your turning them in, but I’m very happy to read outlines and discuss ideas with you.

**Schedule and list of readings**

**What is virtue ethics? An introduction**

**1/15/19: First Meeting/Introduction to our texts and cast of characters**

Benjamin Franklin’s “Plan for attaining moral perfection”

“Lists of Virtues from diverse ethical traditions”

**1/17/19: Why focus on character?**

Wolf, Susan. “Moral Saints” in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Crisp and Slote (OUP) 1997. Available on Canvas.

**The good life**

**1/22/19: What is the good life? Aristotle’s function argument**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* Book I

**1/24/19: Good life and bad fortune: Aristotle’s perspective**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* Book X, Chs 1-8 (focus especially on 6-8).

*Strictly optional secondary reading:* Charles, David. "Aristotle On Well‐Being And Intellectual Contemplation" *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*. Vol. 73. No. 1. University College London: The Aristotelian Society, 1999. Available on Canvas.

**1/29/19: Confucian conceptions of the good life and happiness. Was Kongzi himself happy?**

Slingerland, Edward. “Introduction” and “Appendix 4: Glossary,” in *The Essential Analects.*

Selections from the *Analects.* Detailed assignment available on Canvas under “Files> 1/29/19 Readings.”

*Strictly optional secondary reading:* Amy Olberding, Amy (2013). “Confucius' Complaints and the Analects' Account of the Good Life.” Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy 12 (4). Available on Canvas

**1/31/19:** **Mengzi’s eudaimonism**

Van Norden, Bryan. “Introduction,” in *The Essential Mengzi.*

Selections from *Mengzi.* Detailed assignment available on Canvas under “Files> 1/31/19 Readings.”

*Strictly optional secondary reading:* Huff, Benjamin I. (2015). “Eudaimonism in the Mencius: Fulfilling the Heart.” Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy 14 (3). Available on Canvas.

**Developing and Manifesting the Virtues**

**2/5/19: What is a virtue? Aristotle’s perspective.**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* Book II

**2/7/19: Wisdom, Prudence, and Intellectual Virtue**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* Book VI

*2/10/19: Paper #1 due 5pm*

**2/12/19: The nature of the virtuous will: spotlight on self-control.**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* Book VII

**2/14/19: Aristotle’s catalogue of virtues**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* Book III, Sections 6-12, Book IV.

Recommended: *Nichomachean Ethics,* Book III, Sections 1-5.

**2/19/19: Learning to be good Part I**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* Book II, Chs 1-3 (review), Book X Ch 9.

*Mengzi* 1A7, 2A2.1-2A2.17, 2A7, 3A8, 4A27, 4B14, 4B20, 4B28, 6A (review), 7A17, 7A26, 7A33.

McRae, Emily (2011). “The cultivation of moral feelings and Mengzi's method of extension.” Philosophy East and West 61 (4):587-608. NB this secondary reading is required rather than optional. Available on Canvas.

**2/21/19:** **Learning to be good Part II**

Readings same as above.

**2/26/19: Etiquette I: Aristotelian and Confucian perspectives**

Stohr, Karen. “Manners, Morals, and Practical Wisdom.” In *Values and Virtues: Aristotelianism in Contemporary Ethics.* Ed. Chappell. OUP: 2006. Available on Canvas.

Selections from the *Analects.* Detailed assignment available on Canvas under “Files> 2/26/19 Readings.”

**2/28/19: Etiquette II:** **Xunzi on *li* (ritual propriety) and human nature**

Xunzi, “Human Nature Is Bad.” Available on Canvas.

Xunzi, “Discourse on Ritual.” Available on Canvas.

**3/12/19:** **Special Topic: what to do with anger**

Owen Flanagan, “Moral Geographies of Anger.” Available on Canvas.

Kongzi and Mengzi, “Confucian perspectives on anger.” Available on Canvas.

Aristotle: “Aristotle on anger.” Available on Canvas.

**Virtue and relationships**

**3/19/19: Confucians vs. Mohists: should our care be universal?**

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Kongzi, *Analects,* 1.5–1.8, 2.5.–2.8, 4.15, 4.18–4.21, 5.12, 6.30, 12.1-12.2, 13.8 (pay special attention to this one), 13.20

Mozi, *The Mozi,* Universalism 1–3. Available on Canvas.

Mengzi, *The Mengzi,* 1A7, 3A5, 5A2, 5A3, 7A35.

Wong, David. “Universalism vs. Love with Distinctions: an Ancient Debate Revived,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy,* Volume 16, Issue 3-4, September 1989, pp. 251–272

**3/21/19: Confucians vs. Mohists II**

Readings same as above.

*3/24/19: Paper #2 due at 5pm.*

**3/26/19: Friendship I**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* Book XIII

**3/28/19: Friendship II**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* Book IX.

**4/2/19: Integrity**

McFall, Lynne. “Integrity.” *Ethics* 98 (1) 1987.

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# 4/9/19: Virtue and Community I: Virtuous Villages, Cities, States?

Excerpts from the *Mengzi:* Detailed assignment available under “Files> 4/9/19 Readings.”

Blum, Lawrence. “Community and Virtue,” in Roger Crisp (ed.), [*How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues*](http://philpapers.org/rec/CRIHSO). Clarendon Press (1998). Available on Canvas.

**4/11/19: Virtue and Community II: Virtue and Patriotism**

MacIntyre, Alasdair. “Is Patriotism a Virtue?” *The Lindley Lecture*, University of Kansas 1984.

# Contemporary Challenges for Virtue Ethics

**4/15/16: Virtue Ethics in a Multicultural World**

MacIntyre, Alasdair. “The Nature of the Virtues,” *The Hastings Center Report,* Vol 11, No 2 (April 1981) pp 27-34.

Nussbaum, Martha. “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach.”

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* IV.9 (on the *megalopsuchos* (or “proud man”))

(All available on Canvas)

**4/18/19: Virtue Ethics in a Multicultural World, Part II.**

Readings same as above.

**4/22/19: No such thing as character? A challenge from empirical psychology.**

Gilbert Harman, "Moral philosophy meets social psychology: Virtue ethics and the fundamental attribution error." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. Aristotelian Society, 1999. Available on Canvas.

**4/25/19: No such thing as character? A response**

Sosa, Ernest. (2009). “Situations against Virtues: The Situationist Attack on Virtue Theory,” in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Philosophical Theory and Scientific Practice*. Ed. C. Mantzavinos. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 274-290. Available on Canvas.

**4/29/19: Virtue ethics without (fully realized) virtue**

Miller, Christian (2016). Virtue Cultivation in Light of Situationism. In Julia Annas, Nancy Snow & Darcia Narvaez (eds.), Developing the Virtues: Integrating Perspectives. Oxford University Press. pp. 157-183.

Available on Canvas.

***5/5/19: Final Papers due in at 5pm.***