**PHIL 97: Questions of Character**

**Syllabus: Fall 2016**

**Instructor:** Olivia Bailey

**Email:** obailey@fas.harvard.edu

**Time/Location:** Tuesdays, 4-6, location B012

**Office Hours:** Emerson 306, 4-6 Wednesdays

**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 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.  Our investigations will draw upon a variety of virtue ethical traditions, most centrally Aristotelian and Confucian approaches to questions about the good life. Readings will range from ancient texts to brand-new essays from contemporary scholars.

**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. Your written assignments will include: **8** short reflection pieces of roughly one page, including the mandatory 1st piece for our first meeting (see handout “guidelines for reflection pieces”), **2 4-page papers**, one of which will involve a **mandatory rewrite** (you may choose to rewrite the second short paper) and **1 longer term paper of 10–12 pages**. Each student will also be responsible for **one presentation with a partner.** Your 15-20 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. It goes without saying that reading the texts and attending section is mandatory.

**Grading:** Each of the 4 page papers is worth 20% of your grade in total. The first paper will involve a *mandatory* re-write. The first draft will be worth 10% of your final grade, and the final draft will be worth 10%. For the other 4-page paper, you may choose to rewrite. If you choose to re-write, the first draft will also be worth 10% of your grade, the second draft 10%. The term paper is worth 30% of your grade. The reflection pieces are collectively worth 10% of your grade. That means a full 20% of your grade is participation. Participation includes: the quality of your presentations, involvement in discussion, and/or participation in office hours.

The **late policy** is as follows: you have **5** 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 5 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 send me the correct, uncorrupted files. Your assignments are to be emailed to me by 5pm on the due date. They should be either in docx or pdf format, 12pt font, double-spaced.

**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.

**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 term paper) within five days. 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**

**9/6/16: First Meeting/Introduction to our cast of characters**

Benjamin Franklin’s “Plan for attaining moral perfection”

“Lists of Virtues”

*Reflection piece 1 due.*

**9/13/16: Why Character?**

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

Edmund Pincoffs, “Quandary Ethics,” *Mind* 80 (1971): 552-571

**9/20/16 What is involved in having a virtue, and why should we want to be virtuous? Aristotle’s perspective**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* Books I-II

**9/27/16: The nature of the virtuous will: spotlight on self-control.**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics,* excerpt from Book III, Book VII

Philippa Foot, “Virtues and Vices,” in *Virtues and Vices.*

**10/4/16: What makes for a good friendship, and why is friendship good?**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* Book XIII and IX

*10/6/16: Draft 1 of Paper #1 due*

**10/11/16: Mengzi on learning to be good**

Excerpts from the *Mengzi:* **All of 6a**, 4b26, 4a10, **2A6**, 2A7, **7a33**, **2A2, 3B8, 3A5,** 7a26, **7a17, 4a27**, 4A4, 4B20, 4B28, **4B14**, **1A7**

Emily McRae, “The Cultivation of Moral Feelings and Mengzi's Method of Extension,” *Philosophy East and West,* [Volume 61, Number 4, October 2011](https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/24219) pp. 587-608

**10/18/16: Confucians vs. Mohists: should our care be universal?**

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

Mengzi, *The Mengzi,* Mencius3A5, 5A2, 5A3, 7A35 (and 1A7 again).

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

*10/19/16: Draft 2 of Paper #1 due*

**10/25/16: Relativism? Eudaimonist Naturalism?**

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

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

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

**11/1/16 Can virtue theory tell us what is right to do? Does it need to?**

Mark Johnson, “Virtue and Right,” [*Ethics*](http://philpapers.org/asearch.pl?pub=325) 113 (4):810-834 (2003).

**11/8/16 Anger: What (if anything) is it good for?**

Owen Flanagan, “Moral Geographies of Anger” and “For Love and Justice’s Sake”

[Kongzi and Mengzi], “Confucian perspectives on anger"

[Aristotle], "Aristotle on anger"

*11/11/16: Draft 1 of Paper #2 due*

**11/15/16 Virtues’ ties to Community**

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

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

**11/22/16 Integrity**

Cheshire Calhoun, “Standing for Something,” *The Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 92, No. 5. (May, 1995), pp. 235-260.

*11/24/16: Draft 2 of Paper #2 due*

**11/29/16 No such thing as character?**

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

John Sabini and Maury Silver. "Lack of character? Situationism critiqued." *Ethics* 115.3 (2005): 535-562.

*12/10/16 Term Paper Due*