

PHIL 491A 002

Virtue Ethics

Seminar for Majors in Philosophy

Thursdays, 2:00-4:45 p.m. SWNG 410

Instructor: Edward Slingerland (edward.slingerland@ubc.ca)

OH: Buchanan E163 W 9-10
TH 10-11

Also virtual, by appointment:

<https://ubc.zoom.us/j/4422938752?pwd=aGxFRVU5bkZvUS9kUWxSMmFsWktCdz09>

Meeting ID: 442 293 8752

Passcode: 520254

This seminar will introduce students to the revival of so-called “virtue ethics” as an alternative to the two dominate approaches to ethics in modern Western philosophy, deontology and utilitarianism. In the first half of the course, we will read some of the seminar theorists in this movement, exploring themes including moral perception, the role of literature in ethics, feminism and virtue ethics, and the problem of cultural relativism. In the second half, we will explore in detail the thought of two early Chinese virtue ethicists, Confucius and Mencius, and also discuss the debate over Confucianism as a virtue ethic and virtue ethics from a cognitive scientific perspective.

Required Texts

Crisp, Roger and Michael Slote (eds.), *Virtue Ethics*. Oxford University Press.

Murdoch, Iris. *The Sovereignty of Good*. Routledge.

Slingerland, Edward. *Confucius: Analects*. Hackett Publishing Company.

Van Norden, Bryan. *Mengzi*. Hackett Publishing Company.

Class Structure

Class meetings will typically be broken into two sessions, structured as follows, with the first session generally focusing on primary texts and the second on secondary literature.

Session	Component	Duration	Time (Pacific)
Session 1	Introduction	5 minutes	2-2:05 pm
	Talk or presentation	20 minutes	2:05-2:25 pm
	Discussion	50 minutes	2:25-3:15 pm
Break	Rest & break time	15 minutes	3:15-3:30 pm

Session 2	Introduction	5 minutes	3:30-3:35 pm
	Talk or presentation	20 minutes	3:35am-3:55 pm
	Discussion	50 minutes	3:55pm-4:45pm

Course Assessment

Course participation and engagement 10%

This component of your grade will reflect class attendance, your engagement with class discussion and level of preparation, taking into account individual differences in comfortableness speaking out in class, etc.

Course presentations (10% each) 20%

At the beginning of term students will pick two different weeks when they would like to present. These presentations should be aimed at raising central points in the readings that are interesting or problematic, confusing, etc., with the aim of stimulating discussion.

Midterm assessment 25%

Final term paper 45%

The primary assessment tools for the course will be an in-class midterm assessment and a 4,000-5,000 word final term paper. The midterm assessment will involve a response to one of a choice of prompts concerning the class readings to date. The final paper should engage with course materials in a critical and creative fashion, ideally relating it to the student's own philosophical interests, and also exploring further relevant secondary scholarship on the topic. Students will schedule an individual 15-minute meeting with the instructor in Week 13 to discuss their final paper proposal, and papers will be due **May 4, 2023**.

Schedule of Class Meetings, Topics and Readings

Week 1 (Jan 12)

Introduction to virtue ethics

Readings

G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern moral philosophy," in Crisp and Slote, pp. 26-44
Murdoch, Iris, "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts," in Murdoch, pp. 75-101.

Week 2 (Jan 19)

Learning to see: Iris Murdoch and the Critique of “existentialism”

Readings

Murdoch, Iris, “The Idea of Perfection,” “Of ‘God’ and ‘Good’”, in Murdoch, pp. 1-74.

Week 3 (Jan 26)

Virtue and Practice, Virtue and Reason

Readings:

MacIntyre, Alastair. “The nature of the virtues,” in Crisp and Slote, pp. 118-140.

McDowell, John. “Virtue and reason,” in Crisp and Slote, pp. 141-162.

Foot, Philippa. “Virtues and vices,” in Crisp and Slote, pp. 163-177.

Week 4 (Feb 2)

Literature and Virtue Ethics, Feminism and Virtue Ethics

Readings:

Nussbaum, Martha. “‘Finely aware and richly responsible’: Literature and the moral imagination,” in Nussbaum, Martha, *Love’s Knowledge*, pp. 148-167 (Canvas)

Annette Baier, “[TBA]” (Canvas)

Friedman, Marilyn, 2009, “Feminist Virtue Ethics, Happiness and Moral Luck”, *Hypatia*, 24: 29–40.

Week 5 (Feb 9)

Virtue ethics and cultural relativism

Readings:

Nussbaum, Martha. 1993. “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach”, in *The Quality of Life*, Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 242–70

Gowans, Christopher W., 2011, "Virtue Ethics and Moral Relativism", in Stephen D. Hales (ed.), *A Companion to Relativism*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 391–410

Week 6 (Feb 16)

Critiques of virtue ethics

Readings

J.B. Schneewind, "The misfortunes of virtue," in Crisp and Slote, pp. 178-200
Robert Louden, "On some vices of virtue ethics," in Crisp and Slote, pp. 201-216
Nussbaum, Martha. 1999. "Virtue ethics: A misleading category?" *The Journal of Ethics* 3: 163-201.

Second half of class: Midterm assessment

Midterm Break

Week 7 (March 2)

Confucius of the *Analects* I

Readings:

Analects Books I-IX (Slingerland pp. 1-97)

Week 8 (March 9)

Confucius of the *Analects* II

Readings:

Analects Books X-XVIII (Slingerland pp. 98-212)

Week 9 (March 16)

Confucius: Virtue Ethicist or Role Ethicist or Exemplarist?

Readings:

Ramsey, John. 2016. "Confucian Role Ethics: A Critical Survey." *Philosophy Compass* 11: 235-245

Sim, May, 2015, "Why Confucius' Ethics is a Virtue Ethics", in Besser-Jones and Slote (2015), pp. 63–76.

Angle, Stephen and Michael Slote. 2013. "Introduction" (pp. 1-11) in *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism* (Routledge)

Zagzebski, Linda. 2010, "Exemplarist Virtue Theory", *Metaphilosophy*, 41(1/2): 41–57

Olberding, Amy. "Dreaming of the Duke of Zhou: Exemplarism and the *Analects*." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35:4 (2008):625-639

Week 10 (March 23)

Mencius I

Readings

Mengzi Books I-IVA (Van Norden, pp. 1-102)

Week 11 (March 30)

Mencius II

Readings:

Mengzi Books IVB-VIIB (Van Norden, pp. 103-197)

Week 12 (April 6)

Mencius and Moral Psychology

Readings:

Slingerland, Edward. 2011. "'Of What Use Are the Odes?'" *Cognitive Science, Virtue Ethics, and Early Confucian Ethics*, *Philosophy East & West* 61.1 (January 2011): 80-109

Flanagan, Owen, and Robert Anthony Williams. 2010. "What does the modularity of morals have to do with ethics? Four moral sprouts plus or minus a few." *Topics in Cognitive Science* 2, no. 3 (July 2010): 430–53.

Cline, Erin. "Putting Confucian Ethics to the Test: The Role of Empirical Inquiry in Comparative Ethics'." *Journal of Religious Ethics* (2017)

Week 13 (April 13)

Final paper consultations with professor
Final Paper due noon Pacific Time May 4 2023