

PHIL 408Q: Topics in Contemporary Philosophy: VIRTUE Syllabus, Spring 2018 - ONLINE

Instructor: Kelsey Gipe
Email: gipe.kelsey@gmail.com
Online Office Hours: Wed. 4:30-5:30pm
Online Classroom: <https://umd.instructure.com/courses/1240562>
Discord Server “Office”: <https://discord.gg/huapVqx>

What sort of person should I be? What sort of life should I live? How should I treat others? This course will address these questions by engaging with the work of virtue ethicists from ancient Greece to the current day. We will focus particularly on what Aristotle and contemporary virtue ethicists have to say about personal character and its relation to human flourishing.

By the end of this course students can expect to:

- Gain an understanding of concepts such as virtue, practical wisdom, and eudaimonia.
- Become acquainted with controversies in contemporary virtue ethics and the issues at stake, as well as the placement of such controversies within a historical ethical narrative.
- Produce and revise a conference-length philosophy paper.
- Learn how to build and refine sophisticated philosophical arguments, critique arguments presented in readings, and respond to arguments put forward by their peers.
- Apply to their own lives concepts such as virtue, vice, character, and flourishing.

The ultimate aim of this course is to help students to be better thinkers and philosophers and to give them a greater understanding of the normative and metaethical issues surrounding virtue ethics.

Texts:

Virtue Ethics – Crisp and Slote (2007)
Natural Goodness – Philippa Foot (2001)
Nicomachean Ethics – Aristotle

I will provide an electronic copy of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1999; translated by W.D. Ross) for you under the “Files” tab on ELMS. If you prefer a paper copy (I usually do!) there are plenty of options for buying cheap used copies online or in used bookstores.

Class Format:

One or more video lectures will be posted under the “Panopto Recordings” tab on ELMS every *Tuesday* and *Thursday*. These may be supplemented by notes, worksheets, podcasts, or YouTube videos as appropriate. Any supplementary materials will be sent out in an ELMS announcement.

Scheduled readings may change as the course progresses. Changes will be announced. Please consult ELMS regularly ***and make sure your Canvas settings enable you to receive announcements.***

Requirements:

One term paper (+ outline & rough draft), three exams, 10 discussion posts, and 10 discussion responses.

exam 1	Multiple choice & T/F questions	10% of grade	Due March 1
term paper outline	Outline of entire term paper	5% of grade	Due March 15
term paper rough draft	Rough draft of entire term paper	10% of grade	Due April 5
exam 2	Multiple choice & T/F questions	10% of grade	Due April 19
term paper final draft	Final draft of 2500-3500 word term paper	25% of grade	Due May 10
discussion posts (10)	400 - 600 word discussion post on topic for the week	20% of grade	Due on Wednesdays
discussion post responses (10)	Thoughtful response to the discussion post of a fellow student	10% of grade	Due on the Following Wednesdays
exam 3	Multiple choice & T/F questions	10% of grade	Due May 12-18 (specific day TBA)

Regarding exams:

Approximately a week before each exam, I will post a study guide on ELMS. Exams will consist of multiple choice, true-false, and/or term matching questions. Exams will be timed. You will take each exam on ELMS.

Discussion Posts:

You are required to submit ten total discussion posts on ELMS (400-600 words) on the topic for the week. You cannot post more than one discussion post per week. ***Note that this means that if you don't do your first post until Feb. 28th, you will then be committed to doing a post every single week thereafter. So I suggest you start before then.*** In each discussion post, you must summarize and criticize an ethical position or argument manifest in our readings for that specific week of the course. I have provided a sample discussion post at the end of this syllabus to help make expectations clear.

Discussion Post Responses:

Students will also be required to respond thoughtfully to at least 10 discussion posts (written by one of their fellow students). ***You should not respond to more than one post per week.*** Deadlines for responding will be the *Wednesday following the original post*. This needn't be a long

response, but it does need to consist of more than saying “good job!” or “well put!” or “I agree!” Try to think of an interesting question to ask, a thoughtful point to add, and/or a (polite) objection to raise to your classmates’ posts. Original posters should feel free (and encouraged!) to respond back to classmates’ feedback on their posts.

Term Paper:

This will be a conference-length philosophy paper of 2500-3500 words. You are required to turn in a paper outline on Thursday March 15th. I will provide you with prompts for the paper at least a week in advance of the due date for outlines. *Proposals for paper topics which differ from those provided in the prompts will be subject to approval on a case-by-case basis. Unique proposals must be emailed to your instructor by March 8th at the very latest.* Rough drafts will be due on Thursday April 5th by 11:59pm. Final drafts will be due by 11:59pm on Tuesday, May 15th.

Info Regarding Instructor Office Hours & E-mail Availability:

Your instructor will be available for online “office” hours on Wednesdays from 4:30-5:30pm EST. These will take place on the PHIL408Q Discord server. Here is the permanent invite code: <https://discord.gg/huapVqx> Please use your actual name (or something close enough that we can easily identify which student you are) as your username. You don’t need to download the Discord app in order to participate. It will work fine in a browser. Also, feel free to log on and listen to the questions your classmates ask. You don’t need to talk if you don’t want to!

Your instructor will also be available to answer emails from 12pm-8pm EST Monday-Friday. Students may typically expect a response within a few hours, unless a question is complex and needs some time to resolve.

Academic integrity:

The University of Maryland Honor Pledge reads: “I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination.” The Pledge statement should be handwritten and signed on the front of your papers and exams. Students who fail to write and sign the Pledge will be asked to confer with the instructor. The Code of Academic Integrity identifies four types of academic dishonesty: cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes dishonesty of these four types. Please consult the Code of Academic Integrity

<http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii100a.html> or speak with the instructor if you would like any further clarification (e.g., on what constitutes plagiarism). Incidents of academic dishonesty will be taken very seriously. Any cases of it will be forwarded to the Student Honor Council.

Grading:

Your final grade will depend on the percentage you earn of the total points possible in the class: A+: 99-100; A: 94-98; A-: 90-93; B+: 87-89; B: 84-86; B-: 80-83; C+: 77-79; C: 74-76; C-: 70-73; D+: 67-69; D: 64-66; D-: 60-63. *Numbers in these ranges guarantee the grade in question, but your instructor reserves the right to curve up when appropriate.* Late assignments will be docked a full letter grade per day they are late. Failure to complete an assignment will result in your receiving no points (a zero) for that assignment.

Policy on Medically Necessitated Absence from the Course:

- A student who experiences a prolonged absence or an injury/illness preventing participation in a Major Scheduled Grading Event is required to provide written documentation of the illness from the Health Center or an outside health care provider, verifying the dates of treatment and the time period during which the student was unable to meet academic responsibilities.
- Major Scheduled Grading Events will be: exams, discussion posts, and paper (+ outline & rough draft) submissions.

Copyright notice:

Class lectures and other materials are copyrighted and they may not be reproduced for anything other than personal use without written permission from the instructor.

This syllabus is subject to change:

Students will be notified in advance of important changes that could affect grading, assignments, etc.

Religious Observances:

You will not be penalized for any absence that results from religious observance. However, it is your responsibility to notify the instructor within the first week of class regarding any religious observance absence(s) for the duration of the course.

Students with Disabilities:

The University of Maryland is committed to providing appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. Students with a documented disability should inform the instructors within the add-drop period if academic accommodations are needed. To obtain an Accommodation Letter prepared by Disability Support Service (DSS), a division of the University Counseling Center, please call 301-314-7682, e-mail dissup@umd.edu, or visit the Shoemaker Building for more information.

Schedule:

(Readings may be altered as the course progresses. If there are any changes, they will be announced.)

Th Jan 25	Introduction to Virtue Ethics; Syllabus & Philosophy Paper Writing Instructions
Tu Jan 30	Anscombe: <i>Modern Moral Philosophy</i> (from Crisp and Slote)
Th Feb 1	Aristotle: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book I
Tu Feb 6 & Thurs Feb 8	Aristotle: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Books II & III
Tu Feb 13 & Thurs Feb 15	Aristotle: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Books V & VI
Tu Feb 20 & Thurs Feb 22	Aristotle: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Books VII & X
Tu Feb 27 & Thurs March 1	Williams: <i>Morality, the Peculiar Institution</i> (from Crisp and Slote) (3/1) Exam 1: Posted under “Quizzes” tab on ELMS; Complete by 11:59pm
Tu March 6 & Thurs March 8	Wolf: <i>Moral Saints</i> (from Crisp and Slote)
Tu March 13 & Thurs March 15	Foot: <i>Virtues and Vices</i> (from Crisp and Slote) (3/15) Term Paper Outline: Upload to the relevant assignment on ELMS by 11:59pm
Tu March 20 & Thurs March 22	***SPRING BREAK***
Tu March 27 & Thurs March 29	Slote: <i>Agent-Based Virtue Ethics</i> (from Crisp and Slote)
Tu April 3 & Thurs April 5	Foot: <i>Natural Goodness</i> Intro & Ch. 1 (4/5) Term Paper Rough Draft: Upload to the relevant assignment on ELMS by 11:59pm
Tu April 10 & Thurs April 12	Foot: <i>Natural Goodness</i> Ch. 2 & 3
Tu April 17 & Thurs April 19	Foot: <i>Natural Goodness</i> Ch. 4 (4/19) Exam 2: Posted under “Quizzes” tab on ELMS; Complete by 11:59pm
Tu April 24 & Thurs April 26	Foot: <i>Natural Goodness</i> Ch. 5
Tu May 1 & Thurs May 3	Foot: <i>Natural Goodness</i> Ch. 6
Tu May 8 & Thurs May 10	Foot: <i>Natural Goodness</i> Ch.7 (5/10) Final Paper Drafts due! Upload to the relevant assignment on ELMS by 11:59pm
TBA: Week of 5/12 – 5/18	Final Exam: Posted under “Quizzes” tab on ELMS; Complete by 11:59pm (specific day to be announced ASAP)

Sample Ideal (your instructor wrote this for a grad-level course) Discussion Post:

In *Republic X*, Socrates draws Glaucon's attention to a discontinuity between what we value as consumers of fiction and what we value in actual life:

When even the best of us hear Homer, or some other tragic poet, imitating one of the heroes in a state of grief and making a long speech of lamentation, or even chanting and beating his breast, you know we enjoy it and give ourselves over to it. We suffer along with the hero and take his sufferings seriously. [...] But when one of us suffers a personal loss, you also realize we do the opposite: we pride ourselves if we are able to keep quiet and endure it, in the belief that that is what a man does, whereas what we praised before is what a woman does. (605d-e)

The portrayal of suffering by the poet draws us in and leads us to indulge our soul's appetite to wallow in self-pity and grief. What the example above is meant to underscore is the fact that poets encourage us to indulge our non-rational / appetitive part when we engage with their fictions. This wallowing in grief is directly counter to what we take to be correct action in our actual lives, but the poet's performance basically seduces us into ignoring our rational part and indulging our appetitive one. In this way our better rational part will eventually be overwhelmed by our worse non-rational part and our souls will grow vicious and unjust.

I'm not sure that this example does the work that Socrates wants it to. This is because all it seems to me to show is that there is a disconnect between the emotions we feel and what is socially appropriate for us to express. The poet gives full affective reign to these emotions as a pragmatic measure, since it would be difficult for the audience to really understand what his character is feeling were he to merely "man up" and swallow his grief. In identifying with the character we are just identifying with the same emotions that we would feel in his place. We all feel sadness and grief. The poet is just externally expressing what we feel internally. Being the sort of person who maintains one's composure and keeps quiet in the face of inner turmoil doesn't seem incompatible with also being the sort of person who can empathize wholeheartedly with a dramatic display of raw emotion.

Now, I understand that it may be the case that what Socrates takes to be so praiseworthy is the ability to actually suppress one's emotions in the face of a rational goal. Perhaps what we actually pride ourselves in being able to do is crush down / compartmentalize potentially debilitating emotions in order to be able to actually deal with the traumatic situation in front of us in a reasonable manner. It does seem that in cases like this, our rational part does dominate our appetitive part (which presumably really wants to just curl up and cry). After all, we praise people (and rightly so) for keeping a cool head in the face of terrible situations. This makes sense to me. It may be the case that it is bad for us to keep such emotions suppressed forever, but it is clearly good to be able to keep one's composure and a level head in trying situations.

A good comic representation of *akrasia*:



<http://nedroid.com/2008/01/beartato-116/>