

## Philosophy 4900: Virtue Ethics

326 Old Main      TR 3:00 - 4:15

*Instructor:* Dr. Justin Clark | *Office:* Old Main 202H | *Email:* justin.clark@usu.edu

*Office Hours:* Wednesday 9:30-11:00, or by appointment

*Course Website:* [phil4900.posthaven.com](http://phil4900.posthaven.com)

**I. Course Description:** This course will examine the history of virtue ethics, one of the major traditions in ethical theory. Virtue ethics is a theory that emphasizes the goodness or badness of those who act, rather than the rightness or wrongness of particular actions. For many virtue ethicists, good moral character (which is constituted by the virtues) bears an especially close relation to human happiness, or the ability to construct a meaningful human life. We will survey some ancient “eudaimonistic” versions of virtue ethics. We will also explore some recent developments, investigate some key objections and criticisms, and examine some applied issues.

**II. Required Texts:** some additional readings will be posted on the website as well.

- (1) Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (2001) Oxford University Press
- (2) Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (2011) Oxford University Press
- (3) *Course Packet* (USU Bookstore)

**III. Course Requirements:** note that graduate students will have a different set of requirements.

- (1) Attendance and Participation—10% of course grade.
- (2) First Exam—15% of course grade.
- (3) Three Response Papers (short 1-2 page reflection papers discussing an assigned reading, must be turned in the day of that particular reading)—30% of course grade.
- (4) Second Exam—15% of course grade
- (5) Final Term Paper (8-10 pages)— 30% of course grade.

Evaluation of papers and written exams will be based on three criteria: (a) the clarity and organization of your written work, (b) the degree of understanding demonstrated, and (c) the depth of personal engagement and argumentation.

Late work will not be accepted. Do not use the work of another student, and do not use anything from the web when writing your papers. If you must use the web (although I urge you not to), quote and cite everything you have used. If you do not quote and cite material that you have used, it is plagiarism. Any student caught plagiarizing will certainly fail the class, and will potentially be expelled from the university.

Handouts will be made available on all topics; they will not be posted on the website or emailed to you. Handouts can be acquired by attending class, section, or office hours.

**IV. Tentative Schedule:****Topic 1: Virtue Ethics and Eudaimonia**

Readings: Julia Annas, 'Virtue Ethics;' Terence Irwin, 'The Virtues: Theory and Common Sense in Greek Philosophy'

**Topic 2: Ancient Versions, Part 1 [Socrates and Plato]**

Readings: Rachana Kamtekar, 'Ancient Virtue Ethics;' Plato, *Apology*, *Protagoras* (selections on website), *Republic* (selections on website)

**Topic 3: Ancient Versions, Part 2 [Aristotle and the Stoics]**

Readings: Daniel Russell, 'Virtue Ethics, Happiness, and the Good Life;' Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Julia Annas, 'Virtue, Character, and Disposition' (*IV*, Ch. 2)

[*First Exam*]

**Topic 4: Contemporary Versions, Natural Goodness**

Readings: Philippa Foot, 'Natural Norms' (*NG*, Ch. 2), 'Transition to Human Beings' (*NG*, Ch. 3), 'Practical Rationality' (*NG*, Ch. 4), 'Happiness and the Human Good' (*NG*, Ch. 6)

**Topic 5: Contemporary Versions, Intelligent Virtue**

Readings: Julia Annas, 'Skilled and Virtuous Action' (*IV*, Ch.3), 'Virtue and Enjoyment' (*IV*, Ch. 5), Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, 'Enjoyment and the Quality of Life,' Julia Annas, 'Virtue and Goodness' (*IV*, Ch.7), 'Living Happily' (*IV*, Ch.8)

[*Second Exam*]

**Topic 6: Recent Objections**

Readings: Robert Solomon, 'Internal Objections to Virtue Ethics,' Michael Stocker, 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories,' Simon Keller 'Virtue Ethics is Self-Effacing,' Julia Annas, 'Virtue Ethics and the Charge of Egoism,' Christopher Toner, 'The Self-Centeredness Objection to Virtue Ethics'

**Topic 7: Virtue Ethics and Action Guidance**

Readings: Bernard Williams, 'Acting as Virtuous Persons Act,' Robert Louden, 'On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics,' Julia Annas, 'Skilled and Virtuous Action' (*IV*, Ch. 3), Liezl Van Zyl, 'Virtue Ethics and Right Action'

**Topic 8: Recent Applications**

Readings: Rosalind Hursthouse, 'Virtue Theory and Abortion,' and 'Environmental Virtue Ethics,' and 'Applying Virtue Ethics to Our Treatment of Non-Human Animals'; Rebecca Walker, 'The Good Life for Non-Human Animals,' Lawrence Blum, 'Racial Virtues';