Theory of Virtue Honours: Spring Semester 2020

Course organiser: Dr Andrew Mason
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Office Hour: Monday, 2.00-3.30 (6.10, DSB).

Course Secretary: Ms Ann-Marie Cowe
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Course Description

The course will introduce students to central ideas in the theory of virtue from the ancient, mediaeval, early modern and contemporary periods, illustrating the development of this area of moral philosophy, the various ways in which the concept of virtue has been interpreted, and the different views which have been held about its significance for ethics.

Teaching will consist of a weekly seminar (10.00-10.50 a.m. Tuesday: S37, 7 George Square), and a tutorial, for which there will be two groups (10.00-10.50 Wednesday, 9.01 David Hume Tower, and 11.10-12.00 Wednesday, 1.01 Dugald Stewart Building). A list of readings for tutorials will be published at the start of term.

Assessment

Assessment consists of a tutorial presentation (20%), and an final exam in the May exam period (80%). Each student will be asked to make a presentation in the course of the term, introducing a passage from the reading and raising questions for discussion. A written submission may be substituted for the presentation with the course organiser’s approval. Students who have chosen to submit a coursework dissertation (5000 word essay) in this course should follow the usual procedure for coursework dissertations. They should consult the course organiser about their plans for the dissertation before the decision deadline (Monday 24th February).

Readings: Major Works

Plato, Protagoras, Meno, Republic Books II-IV.
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Books I-IV.
A. Long and D. Sedley, The Hellenistic Philosophers (selections)
Aquinas, Treatise on the Virtues.
I. Kant, The Doctrine of Virtue.
A. Macintyre, After Virtue.
R. Hursthouse, On Virtue Ethics
N. Athanassoulis: Virtue Ethics

(Other suggestions for reading may be made during the semester.)

Seminar Content

1. Virtue in Socrates.
   Plato, Protagoras 351b-361c: Meno, 77b-78c and 87b-89c.

   Background reading:

2. Virtue in Plato
   Plato, Republic book II, 357a-367b: book IV, 427e-445d. (See also 484a-502d: 519c-512b; 577c-592b.)

   Background reading:
   A.S. Mason, Plato, chapter 7.

3. Virtue in Aristotle
   Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, book I, chapters 1-5, 7, 13: book II, chapters 2, 4-6. (See also the rest of book II, and book VI, 1 and 5.)

   Background reading:
   D. Hutchinson, 'Ethics', in J. Barnes, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle.
   G. Santas, 'Does Aristotle have a Virtue Ethics?', in Statman.

4. Virtue in the Stoics
   Long and Sedley, The Hellenistic Philosophers, vol I, sec 61. (See also sections 58, 60, 63.)

   Background reading:
   A. Long, Hellenistic Philosophy, pp. 179-209.

5. Virtue in Aquinas
   Aquinas, Treatise on the Virtues (in Summa Theologica), Questions 55-66: especially Q55, Q56 A 1, 4, 6, Q57 A 1, 4, 5, Q58, Q60, Q61 A 1-4, Q62, Q63, Q65.

   Background Reading:
   F. C. Copleston, Aquinas, chapter 5.

6. Virtue in Hume

Background Reading:
D. Wiggins, 'Natural and Artificial Virtues: a Vindication of Hume’s Scheme', in Crisp, ed., How Should One Live?

7. Virtue in Kant

Background reading:
N. Sherman, Making a Necessity of Virtue, chapter 4.

8. Modern virtue ethics (1): The revival of naturalism
P. Geach, The Virtues, chapter 1.

9. Modern virtue ethics (2): Virtue, tradition and culture
A. MacIntyre, After Virtue, chapter 14 (reprinted in Crisp and Slote: see also chapters 13 and 15).

Background reading:
A. Mason (no relation!), ‘MacIntyre on Modernity and how it has Marginalised the Virtues’, in Crisp, ed. How Should One Live?

10. Modern virtue ethics (3): Varieties of virtue ethics

11. The place of virtue in a moral theory
followed by a question period for revision. (No set reading.)