

THE TURN TO VIRTUE

Professor: Alice Crary (she/her)

Spring 2025, GPHI 6670-A, CRN: 15555

Seminar: T 4-5:50pm

Room D1009 (6 East 16th Street, 10th floor)



The Thames at Binsey, Oxford, 2018. Photo credit to Nathaniel Hupert.

PROFESSOR—ALICE CRARY

EMAIL: CraryA@newschool.edu

OFFICE HOURS: Tues 6-7pm and Thurs 12-1pm, at D1115, with Zoom option available upon request at [this link](#). Sign up on [Google Calendar](#).

Course Description

The second half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first were marked by a striking increase of interest in neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics and, more generally, in the question of the significance of virtue. What is at stake in this turn toward virtue? Is it at bottom nothing more than the articulation of a new approach in ethics to be set alongside utilitarian and Kantian approaches? Or does it call for a radical re-evaluation of deeply entrenched assumptions about moral thought and action? In this course, we will consider the writings of moral philosophers who present their stress on virtue as a call for a revolution in ethics. We will also pay close attention to the political and historical context for this revolutionary event. Our emphasis will be on works by Iris Murdoch, Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot, three of the twentieth century's great moral philosophers (and also: three of its great women philosophers). We will also read work by Julia Annas, Annette Baier, Cora Diamond, Alasdair MacIntyre, John McDowell, Mary Midgley, Michael Thompson, David Wiggins, and Bernard Williams.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this seminar, you should be able to (1) give an overview of major trends in mid to late 20th and early 21st century moral philosophy, (2) discuss the significance of the upsurge of interest in virtue ethics during this period and (3) describe in detail the guiding themes and preoccupations of the three main moral philosophers we will discuss (e.g., Murdoch, Anscombe and Foot). Further, you should be able to (4) do all these things in less formal, conversational settings as well as (5) write about them in a more structured or formal manner.

Required texts and other materials

You are required to have copies of the following texts:

Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*
 Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*
 Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*

All other texts and materials for this seminar that aren't already in the public domain will be made available in class or on our Canvas site.

Course requirements

All students in the seminar are expected to:

1. Proactively engage in class participation,
2. Read/watch/listen to the assigned weekly materials before each seminar meeting, and
3. Complete the following written assignments:
 - i. Weekly commentaries. On the first day of class, you will be broken into three groups (A, B, C, and D). Each week students from one group will write brief (c. 500-word) reflections. All reflections will be posted to our Canvas site under "Discussions" by 8am Tuesday. The reflections will be integrated into in-class discussions, so all students should try to read their peers' reflections before class. If you don't feel comfortable sharing your reflections in Canvas, you can submit your reflections to me via email. However, you are encouraged to share your reflections to communicate your thoughts and critiques. Over the course of the semester, each of you will submit three reflections.
 - ii. Final paper. Each student will write a paper of roughly 15-18 pages (double-spaced, 12-point, and with reasonable margins) based on their proposal. Final papers are due by noon on, two days after our last seminar meeting.

Weighting of assignments:

1. Weekly commentaries: 15%
2. Final paper 85%

Reaching me

My contact information is at the top of the first page of this syllabus. There you will find information about my office hours. Please make sure to sign up for the appointment slot that you want. (The links for my Google Calendar page are listed above.) All appointments are in person, with Zoom options available. If your schedule does not allow you to attend my regular office hours, email me to make an alternative arrangement. You should feel free to contact me about any course-related issue, no matter how small. I will try to respond to emails as promptly as I can.

Fairness, grading methods, and disputes

Implicit or unconscious bias is a serious issue in academic settings, putting members of underrepresented groups at a substantial disadvantage. One recommended strategy for combating implicit bias is anonymous assessment. But this doesn't work well in small seminars in which I will be familiar with your research interests and projects. A second strategy for combating implicit bias is to attend carefully to interactions in the classroom (e.g., what form of address is used, how often speaking time is granted and to whom, and how much time individual students spend speaking). Throughout the semester, I will monitor my practice with an eye to fairness. A third strategy is to get anonymous feedback on pedagogy and methods well before the end of the course. I will administer an anonymous survey before the middle of the term to make improvements in the running of the course.

If you believe that there is something amiss with the evaluation of your work, I urge you to let me know. I am open to discussion and to arranging for papers to be re-read.

University-wide course-policies and resources

Academic integrity

Compromising your academic integrity may lead to serious consequences, including (but not limited to) one or more of the following: failure of the assignment, failure of the course, academic warning, disciplinary probation, suspension from the university, or dismissal from the university. Students are responsible for understanding the New School's policy on academic honesty and integrity and must make use of proper citations of sources for writing papers, creating, presenting, and performing their work, taking examinations, and doing research. It is the responsibility of students to learn the procedures specific to their discipline for correctly and appropriately differentiating their own work from that of others. The full text of the policy, including adjudication procedures, is found [here](#).

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work as one's own, in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc.), intentional or unintentional. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, Internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc. This includes the purchase or "outsourcing" of written assignments for a course. It also includes material produced partly or wholly by generative artificial intelligence (AI). Essays or responses that are partly or wholly generated by software such as ChatGPT count as plagiarized. (For a further comment on uses of generative AI systems, see below.) Submission of the same work or substantially overlapping material for different assignments without prior instructor approval is plagiarism. A detailed definition of plagiarism in research and writing can be found in the 8th edition of the MLA Handbook, pages 6-10. The University Learning Center provides resources and workshops to help students understand and avoid plagiarism. Resources regarding what plagiarism is, how to avoid it, and additional information about the services provided by the Learning Center can be found on [their website](#).

Student conduct in the online learning environment

Students should familiarize themselves with the [Student Code of Conduct](#) and [other policies](#) that govern continued enrollment. Contact your [Student Advisor](#) for division-specific policies relevant to your degree. This class is a collective learning environment and will entail sharing and discussing beliefs, opinions, and thoughts on a spectrum of issues, including sensitive topics. Indeed, a productive and flourishing class-dynamic depends on such exchanges. And while we might not always agree, we should nevertheless remain respectful and courteous to one another in any format of exchanging ideas—online discussions, commenting on posts, and in giving feedback and asking questions. It is important to emphasize that the critical exchange of ideas doesn't have to be contentious or combative. We should refrain from impolite, offensive, and rude behavior.

Attendance

Please note that **lecture attendance AND discussion section attendance are mandatory**. According to the [University Attendance Policy](#), habitual absences may justify some grade reduction. For this class, four or more unexcused absences while actively registered will begin to affect your final grade for the course. Please keep your **discussion section leaders** updated should any difficulties arise and make sure to understand their policy regarding the difference between "excused" and "unexcused" absences.

Further university-wide policies

All students should be aware of the following further university policies: the policy on [intellectual property rights](#), the [Title IX policy](#), and [TNS grading policy](#). You should also be aware of and act in the spirit of the university pledge or [Narwhal pledge](#).

Other Relevant Resources

The university provides many resources to help students achieve academic and artistic excellence. These resources include:

- [University Libraries and Archives](#), including [Reserves](#)
- [The University Learning Center](#) is a good resource for all
- [Student Disability Services](#)

If you are a student with a disability/disabled student or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact the Student Disability Services (SDS) at

studentdisability@newschool.edu, or 212-229-5626, to coordinate all reasonable accommodation requests.

- [The New School Food Assistance](#)
- [Health and Wellness](#)
- [The Student Ombuds Office](#): This office provides assistance to students in resolving conflicts, disputes, or complaints on an informal basis. This office is independent, neutral, and confidential.
- [Office of Financial Aid](#): Visit this webpage to set up a meeting with a FA counselor. Eligible students may be considered for different types of financial aid such as scholarships, federal grants, federal work study and federal student loans. To be considered for federal student aid, you will need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) available online at fafsa.gov. The New School's priority deadline to submit the FAFSA is February 15. The FAFSA needs to be submitted annually.
- [Student Bill of Rights](#)

Course Evaluations

During the last two weeks of the semester, students are asked to provide feedback for each of their courses through an online survey. They cannot view grades until providing feedback or officially declining to do so. Course evaluations are a vital space where students can speak about the learning experience. It is an important process which provides valuable data about the successful delivery and support of a course or topic to both the faculty and administrators. Instructors rely on course rating surveys for feedback on the course and teaching methods, so they can understand what aspects of the class are most successful in teaching students, and what aspects might be improved or changed in future. Without this information, it can be difficult for an instructor to reflect upon and improve teaching methods and course design. In addition, program/department chairs and other administrators review course surveys. Instructions are available online [here](#).

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools

This course aims to provoke you to think for yourself and to make independent critical judgments. It is for this reason that you are not permitted to use generative AI tools to produce, partly or wholly, any of your required assignments (see the comment on [plagiarism](#), above). *Using these tools to produce your assignments, partly or wholly, would defeat the very purpose of the course.* It is, however, possible to find ways of interacting with these tools as a strategy for stimulating your own thinking, for instance, by attempting to assess and improve on the answers such tools give to course-related questions. Please bear in mind that the use of these tools is not carbon neutral.

A final comment on course readings

The readings for this course may change, so you should pay attention to changes announced in class. The readings may be changed to reflect interests of seminar participants. They may also be adjusted to be more manageable. A fair bit is listed on the schedule (see below) for many of our class meeting. As we proceed, I will make suggestions about where to focus attention. I will identify an easily readable required reading or set of readings before every class meeting. Sometimes this will involve treating portions of what is listed as “required” on the schedule as merely recommended. (Any readings listed as “other resources” for specific classes represent, as the label suggests, further resources for anyone interested in exploring a particular topic more deeply.)

Tentative schedule of readings and assignments

Week One—Introduction of the seminar's themes

T, January 21st

No required reading

Some useful reference points

A.J. Ayer, Chapters 1 (“The Elimination of Metaphysics”) and 6 (“Critique of Ethics and Theology”) of *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936)

Stephen Darwall, Alan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, “Toward *Fin de Siècle* Ethics: Some Trends” (1992)

RM Hare, “Universalizability,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1954-1955)

Students will be assigned to groups for response papers.

Week Two—Selections from Iris Murdoch’s early ethical writings

T, January 28th

Required materials

Iris Murdoch, “Vision and Choice in Morality” (1956)

Cora Diamond, “‘We are Perpetually Moralists’: Iris Murdoch, Fact, and Value” (1996)

Also—read roughly the first fifth of Iris Murdoch, The Black Prince

GROUP A Reflection 1

Other resources

Peter Conradi, Chapter 1 (“Innocence: Fairy-Tale Princess”) of *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (1986)

RM Hare, Chapters 1-2 (“Introduction” and “Descriptive Meaning”) and Section 10.1 (pp.186-189) of *Freedom and Reason* (1962)

Iris Murdoch, “Against Dryness” (1961)

Week Three— Iris Murdoch—From Ethics to Politics

T, February 4th

Required materials

Iris Murdoch, “Metaphysics and Ethics” (1957)

Iris Murdoch, “House of Theory” (1959)

Also—read up through roughly two fifths of Iris Murdoch, The Black Prince

GROUP B Reflection 1

Other resources

Annette Baier, “What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?” (1985)

Alice Crary, “Metaphysics and Morals: How four women defended ethical thought against the legacy of positivism,” *Boston Review*, <https://bostonreview.net/articles/metaphysics-and-morals/> (2022)

Sabina Lovibond, Chapter 1 (“A Woman Philosopher, Why Not?”) of *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy* (2011)

Week Four—Iris Murdoch's *Sovereignty of Good*

T, February 11th

Required reading

Iris Murdoch, Chapters 1 and 2 (“The Idea of Perfection” and “On Good and ‘Good’”) of *Sovereignty of Good*

Also read roughly up through three fifths of Iris Murdoch, The Black Prince

Group C Reflection 1

Other resources

Stuart Hampshire, “Disposition and Memory” (1962)

Stuart Hampshire, “The Pleasure of Iris Murdoch,” *New York Review of Books* (2001)

Donald MacKinnon, “The Function of Philosophy in Education” (1941)

Week Five— Iris Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, ethics, and theology

T, February 18th

Required materials

Iris Murdoch, Chapter 3 (“The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts”) of *Sovereignty of Good*

Stanley Hauerwas, “Murdochian Muddles: Can We Get Through Them if God Does Not Exist?” (1997)

Also—read up through roughly four fifths of Iris Murdoch’s The Black Prince

GROUP D Reflection 1

Other resources

Maria Antonaccio, “The Virtues of Metaphysics: Iris Murdoch’s Philosophical Writings”

Carla Bagnoli, “The Exploration of Moral life”

Paul Fiddes, Chapter 2 (“Iris Murdoch on ‘God’ and ‘Good’: A Dialogue with Modern Theology”) and Coda (“With and Beyond Simone Weil: The Dialogue between Murdoch and Theology”) of *Iris Murdoch and the Others: A Writer in Dialogue with Theology*

Week Six—Iris Murdoch on Philosophy and Literature

T, February 25th

Required materials

Finish reading Irish Murdoch, The Black Prince

Niklas Forsberg, Chapters 1 and 4 of *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse*

Martha Nussbaum, “Faint with Secret Knowledge’: Love and Vision in Murdoch’s *The Black Prince*” in Broackes (ed), *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*

GROUP A Reflection 2

Other resources

Iris Murdoch, “Philosophy and Literature, a Conversation with Bryan McGee” (1977). You can also watch the interview here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBG10XnxQaI>.

Iris Murdoch, pp.1-40 of *The Fire and the Sun* (1977)

Week Seven—A selection of early writings of GEM Anscombe

T, March 4th

Required materials

G.E.M. Anscombe, “Reality of the Past” (1950)

G.E.M. Anscombe, “Mr. Truman’s Degree” (1958)

GROUP B Reflection 2

Other resources

G.E.M. Anscombe, “Introduction” to *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus* (1959)

“Introduction” to Cora Diamond and Jenny Teichman, *Intention and Intentionality: Essays in Honor of G.E.M. Anscombe* (1979)

Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachel Wiseman, Prologue (pp.1-11) of *Metaphysical Animals: How Four Women Brought Philosophy Back to Life* (2022)

MARCH 10TH-16TH TNS SPRING BREAK

Week Eight—G.E.M. Anscombe on Action and Intention

T, March 18th

Required materials

G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, §§1-18 (1957)

GROUP C Reflection 2

Other resources

G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* §§19-31 (1957)

John Schwenkler, Chapters 1 and 2 (“Beginnings of An Account” and “The Unity of Action”) of *Anscombe’s Intention: A Guide* (2019)

Roger Teichman, Introduction and Chapter 1 (“Intentional Action”) of *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* (2011)

Week Nine—G.E.M. Anscombe and Ethics

T, March 25th

Required materials

G.E.M. Anscombe, “Does Oxford Moral Philosophy Corrupt the Youth?” (1957)

G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy” (1958)

GROUP D Reflection 2

Other resources

G.E.M. Anscombe, “Authority in Morals” (1962)

G.E.M. Anscombe, “On Promising and Its Justice, and Whether it Need be Respected in *Foro Interno*” (1969)

Candace Vogler, “Aristotelian Necessity” (2020)

Week Ten—Selection from Foot’s Early Ethical Writings
--

T, April 1st

Required materials

Philippa Foot, “When is a Principle a Moral Principle?” (1954)

Philippa Foot, “Moral Arguments” (1958)

GROUP A Reflection 3

Other resources

Philippa Foot, “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives” (1972)

Nikhil Krishnan, “Is Goodness Natural?” *Aeon*, <https://aeon.co/essays/how-philippa-foot-set-her-mind-against-prevailing-moral-philosophy> (2017)

John McDowell, “Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?” (1978)

Week Eleven—Foot and the Critique of Utilitarianism
--

T, April 8th

Required materials

Philippa Foot, “Utilitarianism and the Virtues” (1983)

Bernard Williams, “Critique of Utilitarianism” (1973)

GROUP B Reflection 3

Other resources

Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (1972)

Amia Srinivasan, “Stop the Robot Apocalypse” (2015)

Leif Wenar, “Poverty is no Pond: Challenges for the Affluent” (2011)

(Related but wholly optional—Alice Crary, “Against ‘Effective Altruism’” (2021) available at <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/against-effective-altruism>)

Week Twelve—Foot’s Later Ethical Naturalism I
--

T, April 15th

Required materials

Philippa Foot, Chapters 1 and 2 (“A Fresh Start?”, “Natural Norms”) of *Natural Goodness* (2001)

John McDowell, “Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following” (1981)

GROUP C Reflection 3

Other resources

Julia Annas, Chapter 2 (“Virtue, Character, and Disposition”) of *Intelligent Virtue* (2011)

Alice Crary, Chapter 5 (“A Couple of Competing Views: Foot’s Ethical Naturalism and Wolfe’s Posthumanism”) of *Inside Ethics* (2016)

Week Thirteen—Foot's Later Ethical Naturalism II

T, November 19

Required materials

Philippa Foot, Chapters 3 to 7 (“Transition to Human Beings,” “Practical Rationality,” “Human Goodness,” “Happiness and Human Good,” and “Immoralism”), and also the postscript of *Natural Goodness* (2001)

GROUP D Reflection 3

Other resources

Rosalind Hursthouse, Chapters 9 and 10 (“Naturalism” and “Naturalism for Rational Animals”) of *On Virtue Ethics*

John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason” (1980)

Michael Thompson, “The Representation of Life” (1995)

Week Fourteen —The Case of Animals, from Foot to Midgley and Diamond

T, April 29th

Required materials

Cora Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People” (1978)

Mary Midgley, extract from *Animals and Why They Matter* (1983)

Other resources

Please refer to the articles list as “other resources” for week 3

Week Fifteen —Reflections and Seminar Reception
--

T, May 6th

No required readings—Reflections and reception

Final papers are due by 4pm, Thursday, May 8th.