

**Intellectual Virtue and Civil Discourse**  
**Philosophy 150**  
**Professor Jim Taylor**

Course Description

Both the classic liberal arts tradition and the Judeo-Christian tradition prize and promote human excellence. Though the former tradition tends to use the language of intellectual and moral virtue and the latter tradition tends to use the language of wisdom, righteousness, and love, both traditions provide similar and to a large extent harmonious models of human formation and maturation.

But neither of these traditions is dominant in contemporary society and culture. And neither the contemporary academy nor the contemporary Christian church shows adequate evidence of a significant influence of these traditions on the intellectual, moral, and spiritual development of students or parishioners.

As a result of this current inadequate attention to growth in virtue, our societies, our universities, and our churches are insufficiently characterized by wisdom and good will and are rather arenas that all too frequently manifest irrationality and incivility. In sum, our age of information, individualism, and ideology tends to be devoid of discernment, diplomacy, and dialogue.

This course is designed to address these deficiencies by providing students with a theoretical context that will enable them to acquire a general understanding of the topics of intellectual virtue and civil discourse. The course also offers students concrete illustrations of people who have succeeded and people who have failed to practice intellectual virtue and civil discourse. These illustrations are intended both to further students' understanding of these topics but also to acquaint them with examples to inspire and motivate them to become intellectually virtuous and to engage in civil discourse themselves. Finally, the course will give students opportunities to practice attempting to be intellectually virtuous and civil in conversations with each other about important issues that are currently being debated in the public square.

As the professor of this course, my desire is for students to become both more intellectually virtuous and more able to manifest their virtues in civil discourse about crucial and controversial contemporary issues.

Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate, in written essay form, their understanding of fundamental philosophical and theological principles about the concepts of intellectual virtue and civil discourse.
2. Students will articulate, through oral presentation, their acquaintance with and appreciation of prominent models of intellectual virtue (and vice) and civil (and uncivil) discourse that they encounter in both (auto)biography and fiction.
3. Students will display, through dialogue and debate about controversial contemporary issues, evidence of their attempts to grow in intellectual virtue and civil discourse.

### Required Course Texts

The Bible (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)

The *Analects* of Confucius

Course reader with miscellaneous essays

Franklin, Benjamin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

Miles, Sian, ed. *Simone Weil: Anthology*

Mouw, Richard, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*

Plato, *The Apology*

Roberts, Robert and Wood, Jay, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*

Sophocles, *Antigone*

### Recommended Reading

Boyle, Fr. Gregory, *Tattoos on the Heart*

Hammarskjöld, Dag, *Markings*

Schami, Rafiq, *A Handful of Stars*

Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*

### Course Assignments and Grading

There will be three assignments, each corresponding to a major section of the course:

1. A philosophical essay on a topic concerning the concepts of intellectual virtue and civil discourse;
2. An autobiographical speech that draws on classical and contemporary models of intellectual virtue and civil discourse;
3. Participation in a dialogue about a controversial issue of contemporary concern.

### Course Outline

1. Principles: Philosophical & Theological Foundations (14 class sessions)
  - a. Roberts & Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*
  - b. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*
  - c. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes
2. People: Illustrations from Literature & Life (14 class sessions)
  - a. Antigone
  - b. Socrates
  - c. Confucius
  - d. Job
  - e. Jesus
  - f. Benjamin Franklin
  - g. Simone Weil
3. Practice: Contemporary Issues (14 class sessions)
  - a. Abortion
  - b. Gay marriage
  - c. Global warming
  - d. Universal health care
  - e. Gun control
  - f. Immigration
  - g. Creation & evolution