

PHIL 4340 Ethics, Fall 2015
TTH 11:30-12:50, GRHM 2302

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OVERVIEW

This course will examine the foundations of the Aristotelian approach to ethics through readings from Aristotle and contemporary Aristotelian ethicists. This approach to ethics is distinctive in its methodology and in its substance. The goal of this course is to thoroughly familiarize the student with this approach to ethical theory. The course will advance as follows:

1. An overview of the idea of virtue ethics
2. Aristotle on human nature and its role in ethics
3. Moral virtue in general according to Aristotle
4. Two moral virtues: courage and temperance.
5. Practical wisdom in Aristotle
6. Neo-Aristotelians on human nature and its role in ethics
7. Neo-Aristotelians on virtue theory
8. Neo-Aristotelians on virtue ethics
9. Neo-Aristotelians on animals and the environment

TEXTS

The following text is available at the bookstore:

Nicomachean Ethics, trans. Irwin. Hackett.

If you have a different edition of the NE, it should be fine, provided there are Bekker numbers in the margins.

In addition to this text, there will be a number of readings available through our Courselink website, and in addition, some works on reserve listed below.

Other Recommended Books (on reserve at library):

Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. C. I. Litzinger. Dumb Ox Books, 1993.

Broadie, Sarah. *Ethics with Aristotle*. Oxford, 1995.

Hardie, W.F.R., *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*. Oxford, 1980.

Kraut, Richard, ed. *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Ethics*. Blackwell, 2006.

Rorty, Amélie, ed. *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*. University of California, 1981.

EVALUATION

Critical Reading Responses (25%)

Each week, you will submit a one or two page response to the reading to the Courselink dropbox. These are due no later than class time on Tuesday or Thursday. The paper must do the following:

1. Pick a sentence or two of particular philosophical importance in the reading for that class meeting.^{*} Quote the material at the beginning of your paper. Be sure to note the page number.
2. Explain what it says.
3. Explain why it is of particular importance. In this context, “important” means that it makes a claim that is philosophically important – e.g., an argument, a philosophical distinction, or a statement of methodology.

^{*}Note that you cannot submit a paper on a reading for a previous class meeting. If you are submitting on Thursday, it should concern the reading for that day’s class.

I will automatically drop two of these grades. I will grade them out of ten points, based on the extent to which they (a) pick out something of genuine philosophical importance, (b) cogently defend that importance, and (c) demonstrate a good faith effort to explain the meaning of the passage.

Presentations (35%)

You will each give two **brief** presentations. The presentation should consist of an explanation of some important point from the reading for that day. For instance, it might focus on a paragraph or (at most) a couple of pages, or a significant argument or claim, from one of the readings assigned for that day (at the time of signing up for the presentation, you should select both the date and the text you will be presenting on, if there is more than one text). The aim is **not** to be comprehensive (this would significantly detract from the quality of the presentation, in my view), but rather to clearly expound and to stimulate a good general discussion of a philosophically important section of the reading. The presenters should speak for 10-15 minutes (no longer, please).

Your grade on each presentation will be broken down as follows (rubric adapted from Humboldt State University):

Rubric for Grading Oral Presentations				
	Below Expectation	Satisfactory	Exemplary	Weight
Organization	No apparent organization. Textual evidence is not used to support assertions.	The presentation has a focus and provides some textual evidence which supports conclusions.	The presentation is carefully organized and provides convincing textual evidence to support assertions.	30%

Content	The presentation lacks focus. Listeners are left unengaged	The content is somewhat focused but still trying to cover too much. Listeners have something to hold onto but must work to pick it out.	The content is focused. Listeners are likely to be engaged in a discussion of a particular topic.	50%
Delivery	The speaker appears anxious and uncomfortable, and reads notes, rather than speaks. Listeners are largely ignored.	The speaker is generally relaxed and comfortable, but too often relies on notes. Listeners are sometimes ignored or misunderstood.	The speaker is relaxed and comfortable, speaks without undue reliance on notes, and interacts effectively with listeners.	20%

Research Papers (40%)

By the fourth week of classes, each student must submit a prospectus of around 1 page outlining a proposed area of research. Failure to do so will result in a 5% reduction in your final paper grade per week that it is late.

You should aim for a topic that can be treated well in 15-20 pages. I expect that your paper will reflect that you have taken into account anything relevant from course readings and, in addition, that you will investigate relevant peer-reviewed literature on your topic.

Here are the criteria that I will employ in assessing your paper (rubric from SUNY-Buffalo Department of Philosophy):

	Fails Completely	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Competent	Exemplary
Thesis 15%	No identifiable thesis or thesis shows lack of effort or comprehension of assignment.	Difficult to identify, inconsistently maintained, or provides little around which to structure paper.	Unclear, buried, poorly articulated, lacking in insight and originality.	Promising, but may be unclear or lacking insight or originality.	Easily identifiable, interesting, plausible, novel, sophisticated, insightful, clear.
Structure and style- 20%	No evident structure or organization. No transitions	Unclear, unfocused, disorganized, lacking in	Generally unclear, unfocused, often	Generally clear and appropriate, though may	Evident, understandable, appropriate for thesis. Essay is

	between major points.	unity, transitions abrupt or confusing, context unclear.	wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions. Does not provide sufficient information, explanation, and context for readers.	wander occasionally. May have some unclear transitions or lack of coherence. Does not fully appreciate reader's need for information, explanation, and context.	focused and unified. Words chosen effectively. Excellent transitions between points. Anticipates reader's need for information, explanation, and context.
Use of sources (when applicable)-20%	No attempt made to incorporate information from primary and secondary sources.	Very little information from sources. Poor handling of sources.	Moderate amount of source information incorporated. Some key points supported by sources. Quotations may be poorly integrated into paragraphs. Some possible problems with source citations.	Draws upon sources to support most points. Some evidence may not support thesis or may appear where inappropriate. Quotations integrated well into paragraphs. Sources cited correctly.	Draws upon primary and secondary source information in useful and illuminating ways to support key points. Excellent integration of quoted material into paragraphs. Sources cited correctly.
Logic and argumentation -35%	No effort made to construct a logical argument. Failure to support thesis.	Little attempt to offer support for key claims or to relate evidence to thesis. Reasons offered may be irrelevant. Little to no effort to address	Arguments of poor quality. Weak, undeveloped reasons offered in support of key claims. Counter-arguments mentioned without rebuttal.	Argument is clear and usually flows logically and makes sense. Some counter-arguments acknowledged, though perhaps not addressed fully.	Arguments are identifiable, reasonable, and sound. Clear reasons are offered in support of key claims. Author anticipates and successfully grapples with counter-arguments.

		alternative views.			
Mechanics - 10%	Difficult to understand because of significant problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	Several problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	Some problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	Sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling strong despite occasional lapses.	Correct sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION & LATE POLICY

All assignments should be submitted to me through the Courselink dropbox. Please submit a file in Word or Rich Text Format (no .pdf files please).

All late assignments will be assessed a 10% penalty for every 24 hours late, except in cases of illness or family emergency.

PARTICIPATION & CLASSROOM COMPORIMENT

Please note that this is a seminar style course, and so your participation in discussion is expected every class.

Out of consideration for your fellow students, please observe the following rules:

1. No cell phone use, including text messaging.
2. No personal conversations.
3. No laptop use, except for presentations.

I reserve the right to remove you from the classroom if your behaviour is distracting to me or other students.

E-mail Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. See the graduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration see [here](#).

Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is November 6. Refer to the Undergraduate Calendar for the schedule of dates: [here](#)

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar [here](#)

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

Resources

The Undergraduate Calendar is the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate programs [here](#).

READING SCHEDULE**Week 1.**

9/10. Course Introduction

Week 2

9/15. Virtue Ethics

Topic: What is virtue ethics? How is it distinctive as an approach to ethical theory? What are its advantages and what challenges does it face?

Assigned Reading: Julia Annas “Virtue Ethics” [[Courselink](#)]

9/17. Aristotle's on ethics and human nature

Topic: How does Aristotle approach ethics? What is its focus?

Assigned Reading: Nicomachean Ethics, Book I

Week 3

9/22. Aristotle on ethics and human nature

Topic: How are we to interpret Aristotle's claim that we all aim at happiness?

Assigned Reading: McDowell, “The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics”
[[Courselink](#)]

9/24. Aristotle's Ethics II

Topic: How does Aristotle's Function Argument go? What is he attempting to show with it?

Assigned Reading Korsgaard, "Aristotle's Function Argument" [[Courselink](#)]

Week 4

9/29. Topic: What is a virtue, according to Aristotle?

Assigned Reading: Nicomachean Ethics II

10/1. Aristotle Ethics II

Topic: How do we become virtuous, according to Aristotle?

Assigned Reading: Burnyeat, "Learning to be Good" [[Courselink](#)]

Week 5

10/6. Aristotle Ethics II

Topic: What are we to make of Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean?

Assigned Reading: Hursthouse, "The Central Doctrine of the Mean" [[Courselink](#)]

10/8. Aristotle on Courage and Temperance

Topic: We examine the above named moral virtues in Aristotle's NE.

Assigned Reading: Nicomachean Ethics, III, 6-12

Week 6

10/15. Aristotle on Courage and Temperance

Topic: Deepening our appreciation of these virtues through reading an important recent treatment of them.

Assigned Reading: Curzer, "Courage and Continenence" [[Courselink](#)]

Week 7

10/20 Aristotle on Courage and Temperance

Assigned Reading: Curzer, "Temperance and Incontinence" [[Courselink](#)]

10/22. Aristotle on practical wisdom

Topic: Practical wisdom is a crucial virtue for Aristotle, but it is distinct in that it belongs to the intellect.

Assigned Reading: Nicomachean Ethics, Book VI

Week 8

10/27. Aristotle on practical wisdom

Topic: We will discuss an important and interesting recent treatment of Aristotle on practical wisdom.

Assigned Reading: Hursthouse, "Practical wisdom: a mundane account" [\[Course link\]](#)

10/29. Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics

Topic: What were the motivations that lead moral philosophers back to Aristotle in the 20th century?

Assigned Reading: Anscombe "Modern Moral Philosophy" [\[Course link\]](#)

Week 9

11/3. Neo-Aristotelian views on human nature and its role in ethics

Topic: Can we still adopt an Aristotelian approach given the vast gulf between our biological sciences and his?

Assigned Reading: Foot, "Natural Norms" and "Transition to Human Beings" [\[Course link\]](#)

11/5. Neo-Aristotelian views on human nature and its role in ethics

Assigned Reading: Hacker-Wright, "What is Natural about Foot's Ethical Naturalism?" [\[Course link\]](#)

Week 10

11/10. Neo-Aristotelian virtue theory

Topic: A contemporary approach to understanding moral virtue is to draw on the analogy with skill, which we will discuss here.

Assigned Reading: Annas, "Skilled and Virtuous Action" [\[Course link\]](#)

11/12. Neo-Aristotelian virtue theory

Assigned Reading: Annas, "Virtue and Goodness" [\[Course link\]](#)

Week 11

11/17. Neo-Aristotelian virtue theory

Topic: What should we make today of the notion that virtue plays some important role in our happiness?

Assigned Reading: Russell, "Happiness and Virtuous Activity"

11/19. Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics

Assigned Reading: Russell, "New Directions from Old Debates"

Week 12

11/24. *Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics*

Topic: Now we will discuss the substantial moral commitments of contemporary Aristotelians.

Assigned Reading: MacIntyre, "Social relationships, practical reasoning, common goods and individual goods" [[Course link](#)]

11/26. *Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics*

Assigned Reading: MacIntyre, "The virtues of acknowledged dependence" [[Course link](#)]

Week 13

12/1. *Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics*

Topic: What might Aristotelian virtue ethics have to say about the important contemporary issue of our treatment of non-human animals?

Assigned Reading: Hursthouse, "The virtue ethics defence of animals" [[Course link](#)]
Also, for background to this, Scruton, "The moral status of animals"

12/3. *Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics*

Topic: What might Aristotelian virtue ethics have to say about the important contemporary issue of our relation to the natural world?

Assigned Reading: Hursthouse, "Environmental virtue ethics" [[Course link](#)]

Final Research Paper Due: TBA (approximately one week after the end of classes)