

PHIL 6230 Ethics, Fall 2014
M 2:30-5:20, MACK 311

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OVERVIEW

This course will examine the foundations of the Aristotelian approach to ethics through readings from Aristotle, Aquinas, a few contemporary commentators on them, and moral philosophers carrying on the Aristotelian tradition in practical philosophy today. Aristotelian ethics grounds itself on what it is to be a good human, and so it is necessarily connected to views on human nature, which are in turn based on views of nature taken more broadly. Being human, for an Aristotelian, means being a sort of thing that is the originator of a distinctive sort change in nature: actions. A human is essentially a rational agent. Being a good human means acting well. So, we will be looking at texts that help us to understand this claim and how it informs an Aristotelian approach to ethics. Our trajectory will take us from broad concerns with nature and causality to a focus on the virtue of practical wisdom, which is the central concern of ethics as a practical science for Aristotelians. Hence, our course of study will cover these topics:

1. An overview of Aristotle on nature, causality, and substance.
2. An overview of Aristotle on the soul.
3. Ethics as a practical science.
4. Human nature as a foundation for ethics.
5. Aristotle on moral virtue.
6. Aristotle on practical wisdom as a virtue.
7. Aquinas on conscience and synderesis
8. Aquinas on practical wisdom.
9. Contemporary discussion of practical wisdom

TEXTS

The following texts are available at the bookstore:

Aristotle on Practical Wisdom, Reeve, Harvard
Nicomachean Ethics, trans. Irwin. Hackett.
Summa Theologiae, vol. 36, ed. and trans. Gilby, Cambridge

If you have a different edition of the NE, it should be fine, provided there are Bekker numbers in the margins. In addition to some copy of the NE, you should have access to the rest of the Aristotelian corpus, for instance:

The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation, 2 Vols., Ed. Barnes

Though not comprehensive – this volume has everything needed, and it is an excellent translation with helpful notes and glossary:

Aristotle: Selections, Trans. and Ed. Irwin and Fine, Hackett

Generally speaking, it is helpful to consult multiple translations. What doesn't make sense in one translation can become clear in another translation.

Other Recommended Books (on reserve at library):

- Annas, Julia. *Intelligent Virtue*. Oxford: 2009.
- Anscombe, G.E.M., and Geach, Peter. *Three Philosophers: Aristotle, Aquinas, Frege*. Blackwell: 1967
- Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. C. I. Litzinger. Dumb Ox Books, 1993.
- . *Selected Writings*. Ed. McNerny. Penguin, 1998.
- Broadie, Sarah. *Ethics with Aristotle*. Oxford, 1995.
- Hardie, W.F.R., *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*. Oxford, 1980.
- Hoffman, Müller, and Perkams, ed. *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge, 2013.
- Kretzman, et. al. *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*. Cambridge, 1988.
- Korsgaard, Christine. *The Constitution of Agency*. Oxford, 2009
- Kraut, Richard, ed. *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Ethics*. Blackwell, 2006.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*. Princeton, 1978.
- Nussbaum, Martha and Amélie Rorty, ed. *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*. Oxford, 1992.
- Rorty, Amélie, ed.. *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*. University of California, 1981.

EVALUATION

Critical Reading Responses (25%)

Each week, you will submit a one-two page response to the reading to the Courselink dropbox. These are due no later than two hours prior to class (2:00PM), so that I can review them and address them in class. 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, a statement of methodology .

*Note that you cannot submit a paper on a reading for a previous class meeting. If you are submitting a paper for a Monday reading, it is due two hours before Monday's class.

I will drop **one** of these grades to account for circumstances that arise (illnesses, etc), but I will not ordinarily receive them late or waive additional grades. I will grade these 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 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 25-30 minutes (no longer).

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

Rubric for Grading Oral Presentations				
	Below Expectation	Satisfactory	Exemplary	Weight
Organization	No apparent organization. Evidence is not used to support assertions.	The presentation has a focus and provides some evidence which supports conclusions.	The presentation is carefully organized and provides convincing evidence to support conclusions	30%
Content	The content is inaccurate or overly general. Listeners are unlikely to learn anything or may be misled.	The content is generally accurate, but incomplete. Listeners may learn some isolated facts, but they are unlikely to gain new insights about the topic.	The content is accurate and complete. Listeners are likely to gain new insights about the 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 2 pages

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	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	No evident structure or organization. No transitions between major points.	Unclear, unfocused, disorganized, lacking in unity, transitions abrupt or confusing, context unclear.	Generally unclear, unfocused, often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions. Does not provide sufficient information, explanation, and context for readers.	Generally clear and appropriate, though may wander occasionally. May have some unclear transitions or lack of coherence. Does not fully appreciate reader's need for information, explanation, and context.	Evident, understandable, appropriate for thesis. Essay is focused and unified. Words chosen effectively. Excellent transitions between points. Anticipates reader's need for information, explanation, and context.
Use of sources (when applicable)	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	Draws upon sources to support most points. Some evidence may not support thesis or may appear where	Draws upon primary and secondary source information in useful and illuminating ways to support

			sources. Quotations may be poorly integrated into paragraphs. Some possible problems with source citations.	inappropriate. Quotations integrated well into paragraphs. Sources cited correctly.	key points. Excellent integration of quoted material into paragraphs. Sources cited correctly.
Logic and argumentation	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 alternative views.	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.
Mechanics	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 via email. Please submit a file in Word or Rich Text Format (no .pdf files please).

Except for the weekly critical reading responses (see above), all late assignments will be assessed a 10% penalty for every 24 hours late, except in cases of serious illness or family emergency. For weekly critical reading responses, the three dropped grades are meant to

cover all circumstances. If illness or other dire circumstance will cause you to miss more than three of these assignments, please consult with me.

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: [Click](#)

Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is October 31. Refer to the Graduate Calendar for the schedule of dates: [Click](#)

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 Graduate Calendar: [Click](#)

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 Graduate Calendar is the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to graduate programs:

[Click](#)

READING SCHEDULE

Week 0. Course Introduction

Week 1 (Sept 15). An overview of Aristotle on nature, causality, and substance

Assigned Reading:

Physics II.1-3, 7-9

Metaphysics VII, VIII, IX, XII

Commentary:

Nussbaum "Aristotle on Teleological Explanation" in *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*

Aquinas, "On the Principles of Nature," in *Selected Writings*

Aquinas "On Being and Essence," in *Selected Writings*

Week 2 (Sept 22). An overview of Aristotle on the soul

Assigned Reading:

De Anima I.1, II & III

Commentary:

Matthews "*De Anima* 2.2-4 and the Meaning of Life" in *Essays on De Anima*

Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics" in *Essays on*

Aristotle's Ethics

Week 3 (Sept 29). Ethics as a practical science and human nature as a foundation for ethics

Assigned Reading:

Nicomachean Ethics I

Commentary:

Korsgaard, "Aristotle's Function Argument" in *The Constitution of Agency*

Lawrence, "Aristotle on the Human Good and Human Function" in *Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Ethics*.

Week 4 (Oct 6). Aristotle on moral virtue

Research Prospectus Due

Assigned Reading:

Nicomachean Ethics II

Commentary:

Korsgaard, "Aristotle on Function and Virtue" in *The Constitution of Agency*

Hursthouse, "The Central Doctrine of the Mean" in the *Blackwell Guide*

Week 5 (Oct 20). Aristotle on practical wisdom as a virtue I

Assigned Reading:

Nicomachean Ethics III 1-5; VI 1-3

Commentary:

Reeve from *Aristotle on Practical Wisdom*

Korsgaard, "Acting for a Reason" in *The Constitution of Agency*

Week 6 (Oct 27). Aristotle on practical wisdom as a virtue II

Assigned Reading:

Nicomachean Ethics VI 4-13

Commentary:

Reeve from *Aristotle on Practical Wisdom*

Week 7 (Nov 3). Aquinas on conscience and synderesis

Assigned Reading:

Aquinas, *De Veritate* 15-16

Commentary

Timothy Potts, "Conscience" in *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*

Week 8 (Nov 10). Aquinas on practical wisdom

Assigned Reading

Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Q47-49

Commentary

Tobias Hoffmann "Prudence and practical principles" in *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics*

Week 9 (Nov 17). Aquinas on practical wisdom

Assigned Reading

Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Q50-56

Week 9 (Nov 24) Contemporary discussion of practical wisdom

Assigned Reading

John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason" on Courselink

Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, 7

Week 10 (Nov 28) Contemporary discussion of practical wisdom

Assigned Reading

Jason Swartwood "Wisdom as an Expert Skill" on Courselink

John Hacker-Wright, "Skill, Practical Wisdom, and Ethical Naturalism" on CourseLink

Final Research Paper Due: TBA