

## PHIL 3350\*01 W15: Selected Topics--Aristotelian Practical Philosophy.

Instructor: John Russon

Office Hours: Thursdays 12:00-1:00, or by appointment; Mackinnon 338

Course meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-2:20; MacNaughton 118.

Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics has long been recognized as one of the most profound and enduring studies of human nature ever written. Central to Aristotle's study is the idea that human beings have natural capacities, but that their healthy development does not happen "by nature," but requires, instead, cultivation. Human fulfillment is thus fundamentally dependent upon developing good character and for this we are dependent upon education. For the first half of the semester, we will study this marvellous book, reflecting in some detail on what it takes to live a happy and healthy life—courage, self-possession, friendship, etc. We will then turn, in the second half of the course, to John Dewey, a 20<sup>th</sup> Century philosophy whose writings strongly develop these central Aristotelian themes. Through study of his books Democracy and Education and Art as Experience, we will especially study matters of education, politics and art, and what role these play in human fulfillment.

**Tentative Schedule of Readings:** Read the specified reading *in advance* of the class, and come to class prepared to discuss it. *Always* bring your text with you to class.

Jan 6, 8	Aristotle, <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u> , Book I (Human Nature—Logos)
Jan 13, 15	Book II (Virtue, Mean)
Jan 20, 22	Book III (Choice, Courage, Moderation).
Jan 27, 29	Books VII/X (Incontinence, Pleasure, Incorrigibility)
Feb 3, 5	Books VIII, IX, (Friendship), Book V (Justice)
Feb 10, 12	Book VI (Intellectual Virtue) X.6-8 (Contemplative Life)

Week of Feb 16--break

Feb 24, 26	John Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u> , Chapters 1-4
Mar 3, 5	<u>Democracy and Education</u> , Chapters 10-12.
Mar 10, 12	<u>Democracy and Education</u> , Chapters 13-15, 17.
Mar 17, 19	John Dewey, <u>Art as Experience</u> , Chapters 3-4
Mar 24, 26	<u>Art as Experience</u> , Chapters 5-6
Mar 31, Apr 2	<u>Art as Experience</u> , Chapters 8, 14.

### Texts:

Required:

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, trans. Bartlett and Collins (U of Chicago)

John Dewey, Democracy and Education, (The Free Press)

John Dewey, Art as Experience, (Perigree)

Recommended:

John Dewey, Individualism Old and New, (Prometheus)

Frederick Crews, The Random House Handbook (Out of print)

**Assignments:**

1. The primary reason for taking this course is to read these texts. I will do my best to make the few hours we spend together interesting, but **the books themselves are the teachers**. If you study the books you will learn. If you do not study the books, you will not learn much.
2. Come to class prepared, and willing to participate in collaborative discussion of various ideas that come up. The less you contribute, the less successful and effective the class will be.
3. I will give you some writing assignments. Forcing yourself to articulate your thoughts and then subjecting this articulation to the judgment of others is one of the most powerful ways to develop your thinking.

Your grade will be based on two components.

1. Participation: 20%

2. 2 essays @40% each: 80%

    Essay 1 on Aristotle: due February 12, in class.

    Essay 2 on Dewey: due April 2, in class.

    NB: OPTION—I am open to the possibility of substituting a classroom presentation for a paper. Discuss this with me if you are interested.

As I said above, the point of the class is for you to read these works. Doing this is what will count as success in the class. Your grade, however, will primarily be based on two essays that you will write. It may well be that you can get away with writing the essays and getting a good grade without committing yourself to serious reading over the semester. You should consider that an educational failure, though.

I will give you details about the essays as we proceed. Basically, you will write one essay each on Aristotle and Dewey. As well as defending a critical thesis, your essay will involve careful exegesis of selected textual passages in the relevant text, and an engagement with some other empirical material (such as an artwork or a historical figure).

DO NOT read commentaries on Aristotle or Dewey unless I specifically direct you to do so.

Finally, pay attention to the issue of academic integrity, i.e., DO NOT PLAGIARIZE. Any work you submit must be your own. See the undergraduate calendar for a fuller discussion.

## Objectives.

--In your undergraduate courses in philosophy, it is typically the case that you only get to read short selections from thinkers. My objective here is to give you the opportunity to spend more time with two great thinkers and to have an experience of reading a more substantial selection of their work. In the case of Aristotle, I want you to read all (or close to all) of his Nicomachean Ethics, surely one of the half-dozen greatest works of philosophy ever written. From Dewey, I want you to read enough of two of his great works that you develop a real feel for his thinking.

--Closely related to this substantial quantitative engagement with these texts will be, I hope, a substantial qualitative engagement: the biggest objective of the course is to have you spend a sustained period of time *dwelling* with the ideas of these thinkers, and, through this sustained engagement, to develop a deep and rich engagement with their ideas.

--My hope is that this sustained engagement with these thinkers will be a real experience of learning for you, and that from these works you will take away lessons that will be of life-long value to you as you try to navigate your way through the complexities of adult life. This will, of course, only happen if you are yourself open to allowing these works to speak to you, and that means that your study of these texts must go hand-in-hand with a serious, critical reflection on your own life.

--Finally, this course should satisfy a wide range of standard academic objectives:

- It should help you to gain familiarity with the history of philosophy, and to establish a greater level of literacy with respect to your own culture.

- It should push you to think both analytically and synthetically, as you grapple with the rigorous, technical arguments made by these philosophers, and as you work to put together their insights, both with each other's insights and with issues in your own life.

- It should deepen your understanding of such matters as upbringing, habituation, the body, the relationship between theoretical and practical experience, moral virtue, the nature of art, the goals of education, the nature of democracy, happiness, duty and more.

- The assignments, finally, should go a good distance towards helping improve your skills of reading, writing and thinking.

--In my view, the text we are reading are amazingly rewarding. They offer up their rewards, though, only to one who seeks insight in reading them. What you get out of them will vary directly with what you put into them.

## College of Arts Standard Statements.

### EMAIL COMMUNICATION

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their uoguelph.ca email account regularly: email 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 instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and email contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar's [information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration](#).

### DROP DATE

The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is Friday March 6, 2015. See the Undergraduate Calendar's [regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses](#).

### COPIES OF OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Keep paper and/or other reliable backup copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

### ACCESSIBILITY

The University of Guelph is committed to creating a barrier-free environment. Providing services for students is a shared responsibility among students, faculty and administrators. This relationship is based on respect of individual rights, the dignity of the individual and the University community's shared commitment to an open and supportive learning environment. Students requiring service or accommodation, whether due to an identified, ongoing disability or a short-term disability should contact Student Accessibility Services as soon as possible. For more information, contact CSD at 519-824-4120 ext. 56208 or email [sas@uoguelph.ca](mailto:sas@uoguelph.ca) or refer to the [SAS website](#).

### 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.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

The Academic Misconduct Policy is [detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar](#).

### RECORDING OF MATERIALS

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

### RESOURCES

The Academic Calendars are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars>