

**Instructor:** John Hacker-Wright, Ph.D.

**Office:** Mackinnon 330

**Office Hrs:** M 1:00-2:00 Wed. and by appointment

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## **OVERVIEW**

This course will cover the recent revival of Aristotle in ethics, also known as neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. On this approach, conduct is assessed in terms of virtues, which are traits of character that it is good to have because it makes one properly human to have them. This approach has been advocated in recent times because it seems that if ethical value is to be something objective and non-mysterious, it must have some relation to human nature. Yet it remains quite controversial whether Aristotle's views are compatible with contemporary biology and psychology. The course will be broken up into the following units: first we will look at how Aristotle intended to ground ethics in human nature and how neo-Aristotelians propose to do this. Then we will look at what virtues are in general and how they are employed in assessing conduct accord to Aristotle and neo-Aristotelians. Then we will look at some specific virtues such as courage and justice, again in both Aristotle and contemporary Aristotelians. We will look at intellectual virtues, specifically, practical wisdom, as discussed by Aristotle and contemporary Aristotelians. Finally, we look at how neo-Aristotelians propose to construct a moral theory out of Aristotle's ethics. We will read parts of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and readings from leading contemporary Aristotelians including Philippa Foot, John McDowell, and Martha Nussbaum, as well as critics of the Aristotelian approach such as Bernard Williams and John Doris.

## **TEXTS**

Many readings will be available through our Counselink website in .pdf format. Please ask me if you need any assistance acquiring Adobe Reader (which is free) or accessing and using these files.

Our main text will be the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There are many editions of this text, but we will be using the Irwin translation, which is a very good translation and has helpful features such as a glossary. It is also very affordable, and it is therefore **required**.

**Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin, Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 0872204642**

## **PREREQUISITES**

You must have studied ethics at the 2000-level. More specifically:

PHIL 2120, 1.00 credits in Philosophy at the 3000 level.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

As this is a fourth year course, I aim to help you to attain a level of proficiency in research and oral and written communication that would be sufficient to progress into Master's-level study in philosophy. I realize that this may not be your personal aim, but you ought to have that option after finishing a degree in philosophy. Such competencies are at any rate the skills you are supposed to have when you finish a degree in philosophy.

More specifically, the course aims at:

1. Bringing about a greater understanding of Aristotle's ethics
2. Bringing about an appreciation of the value of studying the history of philosophy to the understanding of current philosophical issues.
3. Enhancing the student's ability to read historical philosophical texts.
4. Enhancing the student's ability to write exegetically and about philosophical issues.
5. Enhancing the student's understanding of and ability to write about and speak about philosophical issues concerning virtue ethics.

**EVALUATION****Critical Reading Responses (25%)**

Each week, you will submit a one page response to the reading to Courselink, under "Discussions." These are due no later than two hours prior to class (9:30AM), 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 consequential for how we view the subject under consideration.

**\*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 three of these grades (out of thirteen), 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 pick out something of genuine importance, cogently justify that importance, and correctly explain the meaning.

**Presentations (35%)**

You will each give two presentations, working with another student. The point of these presentations is to give you experience with presenting complex material to a group, as will be required if you go on in philosophy (especially if you end up teaching!).

At least 24 hours before your presentation, you must submit to me your visual aid materials and an outline of your talk; you may receive an email from me with advice for revisions. By the class meeting following the presentation, each student who presented must submit a two-page “process” paper, discussing how you prepared, how you divided the work up, what worked, and what did not in the actual presentation. For the second presentation, your process paper should address how you attempted to improve your second presentation based on your experience with your first presentation.

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 in fact 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) and direct a 20-25 minute discussion.

Your grade on each presentation will be broken down as follows:

**Style (30%)**

1. Evidence of preparation: minimal use of notes; reading from a prepared text will result in a zero on this mark (10 points)
2. Effective pace and volume (10 points)
3. Clear and effective visual aid (10 points): can be either a PowerPoint presentation, or a handout.

**Content (45%)**

1. Content selection: pinpoints important material from the reading (15 points)
2. Organization: the material is broken down in a comprehensible and reasonable way (15 points)
3. Accuracy: the material is a correct presentation of the text (15 points)

**Discussion management (15%)**

Here I am looking for good questions. Good questions don’t have obvious answers, yet they are also not SO open-ended or general that we don’t know what to say. You should think through how you would answer your own questions, and be prepared to give guidance or rephrase your questions.

**Process paper (10%)**

I am looking for critical self-reflection. Tell me what worked and what did not work. Also, discuss division of labour; how did you divide up your work with your partner.

On most parts of your presentation, you and your partner will be graded together, except on pace and volume and on your process paper.

**Research Papers (40%)**

This course has a research paper with two components. It is really one project with two stages, each weighted equally in your grade.

The first stage is a secondary literature assessment. This will be a five to eight page paper in which your task is to find two scholarly articles written in the last twenty years that take different interpretations of a passage of Aristotle or a definite, focused disagreement on an issue related to neo-Aristotelian ethics. You are to critically evaluate their positions to determine which (if either) is correct, comparing both to the text as you read it (if they are on Aristotle) or simply who has the strongest argument (if either). You will be graded for your ability to present the conflicting views and the issue that divides them concisely and sensitively, and then on your ability to assess their positions, and finally on your ability to suggest a convincing resolution to the issue.

The final research paper is an expanded 10-15 page treatment of the same issue. You will read at least four more articles that relate to the debate, for example by reading material cited in the original articles. You will use these to extend your understanding of the original issue and to develop your argument in the original paper.

**ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION & LATE POLICY**

Except for the weekly critical reading responses (see above), all assignments should be submitted via email (to [jhackerw@uoguelph.ca](mailto:jhackerw@uoguelph.ca)). Please submit an attachment in Word or Rich Text Format (no .pdf files please) with a subject line of “PHIL 4340.” As mentioned above, weekly critical reading responses are to be submitted through Courselink.

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 COMPORTMENT**

Please note that this is a seminar style course, and so your participation in discussion is expected every class. I will not hesitate to call on you by name. Thorough preparation is therefore essential.

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> 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 e-mail contact. See the undergraduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-ac.shtml>

**Drop Date**

The last date to drop one-semester **Winter '11** courses, without academic penalty, is **Friday March 11<sup>th</sup>**. For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-drop.shtml>

**Copies of out-of-class assignments**

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

**Academic Misconduct**

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and enjoins 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. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amsconduct.shtml>

### **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. It can be found at:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/>

### **READING SCHEDULE**

Date	Topic	Readings/Assignments
Jan. 10	Course Introduction	
Jan. 12	Ethical Naturalism in Aristotle	NE Book I
Jan. 17	Ethical Naturalism in Aristotle	NE Book II
Jan. 19	Ethical Naturalism in Aristotle	NE Book X
Jan. 24	Ethical Naturalism in Aristotle	McDowell “The Role of <i>Eudaimonia</i> in Aristotle’s Ethics”
Jan. 26	Ethical Naturalism in Aristotle	Korsgaard “Aristotle on Function and Virtue”
Jan. 31	Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism	Williams “Foundations: Well-Being”
Feb. 2	Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism	McDowell “Two Sorts of Naturalism”
Feb. 7	Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism	Foot “Natural Norms” and “Transition to Human Beings”
Feb. 9	Neo-Aristotelian Naturalism	Andreou “Getting on in a Varied World” Hacker-Wright “What is Natural about Foot’s Ethical Naturalism?”
Feb. 14	Aristotle’s Moral Psychology	Burnyeat “Aristotle on Learning to Be Good”
Feb. 16	Aristotle’s Moral Psychology	Hursthouse “Aristotle’s Central Doctrine of the Mean”
Feb.	Virtue and	Doris “Persons, Situations, and Virtue”

28	Contemporary Psychology	Ethics”
Mar. 2	Virtue and Contemporary Psychology	Sreenivasan “Errors about Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution”
Mar. 7	Aristotle on Virtues	NE iii.6-iv
Mar. 9	Aristotle on Courage	Pears “Courage as a Mean”
Mar. 14	Aristotle on Justice	NE v
Mar. 16	Aristotle on Justice	Young “Aristotle’s Justice”
Mar. 21	Aristotle on Practical Rationality	NE vi & vii
Mar. 23	Aristotle on Practical Rationality	Sorabji, “Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue” <b>Secondary Literature Assessment Due</b>
Mar. 28	Neo-Aristotelian Views on Practical Rationality	Nussbaum “The Discernment of Perception”
Mar. 30	Neo-Aristotelian Views on Practical Rationality	Foot “Utilitarianism and the Virtues”, Scheffler “Agent-Centered Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues”
Apr. 4	Neo-Aristotelian Moral Theory	LeBar “Virtue Ethics and Deontic Constraints”
Apr. 6	Neo-Aristotelian Moral Theory	Hursthouse “Normative Virtue Ethics”

**Final Research Paper Due: TBA**