



PHIL*4340 Current Debates in Ethics

Fall 2019

Section(s): C01

Department of Philosophy

Credit Weight: 0.50

Version 1.00 - August 27, 2019

1 Course Details

1.1 Calendar Description

This course offers an advanced study of problems in ethical theory. This course will examine contemporary and perennial issues in ethics through recent or historical texts. Texts and topics will vary with the instructor; students are advised to consult the Philosophy department's website.

Pre-Requisites: 1.00 credits in Philosophy at the 3000 level or 12.50 credits

1.2 Course Description

PHIL*4340xPHIL*6230 Current Debates in Ethics

Are there modes of social (i.e., economic and political) organization that are incompatible with human flourishing? Are there modes that are distinctively amenable to human flourishing? If there are, how should these be specified (democracy, kingship, socialism, anarchism, or are perhaps all of these categories misguided ways of designating the relevant human social organizations)? What is human flourishing anyway and how do we figure that out? These are questions at the intersection of ethics and political philosophy; these questions were pursued acutely by Aristotle and Marx, and it is a major reason both philosophers are worth reading today. Although not often thought of together, Marx was deeply Aristotelian: indeed, he produced the first translation of Aristotle's *On the Soul* into German. Just as Aristotle criticized his atomist predecessors, Marx thought the atomistic metaphysics of the natural world assumed by the empirical sciences in the modern period was deeply flawed and blinkered, and he attempted to apply an Aristotelian approach to understanding the social world and processes of economic production.

In this course we will read Aristotle with a view to understanding his distinctive conception of

nature, including the role that he accords formal and final causation in understanding living things. This will allow us to understand his views on human nature, and why ethics and politics as practical thinking are necessary for living things such as we are. For Aristotle, we are essentially both political animals and rational animals – and these are importantly connected. Every animal lives with a view to its own flourishing; it employs senses and locomotion to do so to maintain and reproduce its form. We human beings, in addition, think about how to live and think about how to live together with a view to maintaining and reproducing our form. The city-state or polis is something natural, not merely a contrivance that allows us to live better. Still, it is something that is shaped by our choices. Hence, there are various ways in which we can live together, with different results. Our rational powers are brought to fruition in a well-functioning city-state. So, figuring out how to live well (ethics) necessarily requires us to think about how to live well together (politics).

Marx, on rather Aristotelian grounds, thinks that capitalism is incompatible with human flourishing. As he argues in his 1844 Economic and Political Manuscripts, capitalism alienates us from our activity, and in doing so, alienates us from our ‘species-being’ – we are naturally active, productive animals, applying our thinking to transform the natural world around us. Although we will notice some disagreement with Aristotle over the exact nature of fullest human realization, there is still an agreement between them that there is a task to find a way of living that allows us to achieve full human actuality, and that this will involve the realization of distinctively rational powers as well as our appetitive powers.

Methodologically, both Aristotle and Marx agree that a reductive materialism (broadly, atomism) is insufficient for comprehending nature properly, and that we need to undertake to understand ethics and politics in a way that appreciates their distinctive place within nature through mapping the high order unities and teleological organization of living things, including rational animals and the societies that they are inevitably a part of, at least when things go well for them.

1.3 Timetable

Timetable is subject to change. Please see WebAdvisor for the latest information.

1.4 Final Exam

There will be no final exam, but rather a final paper - see "Assessments."

2 Instructional Support

2.1 Instructional Support Team

Instructor: John Hacker-Wright

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Telephone: +1-519-824-4120 x56765
Office: MCKN 330
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-2:00

3 Learning Resources

We will be reading a variety of content this semester. I will make everything available on Courselink/ARES reserve, but also recommend a couple of editions of Aristotle and one of Marx for purchase. If you have different editions, feel free to use those. I will always use Book and Chapter numbers, and, when greater specificity is required, Bekker numbers which are found in most editions of Aristotle.

3.1 Recommended Resources

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Translated by C.D.C. Reeve, Hackett, 2014 (Textbook)

Aristotle, Politics, translated by C.D.C. Reeve. Hackett, 1998. (Textbook)

Karl Marx, Early Writings, Trans. Livingstone and Benton, Penguin. (Textbook)

4 Learning Outcomes

Learning Objectives: We will aim to achieve the following goals in this course, which fit within a framework for the Bachelor of Arts approved by the University of Guelph Senate. By the end of this course you will be able to:

4.1 Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Orally Articulate and Defend a position on a philosophical topic, either in class discussion or in a formal presentation, that is clear, accurate, and well-reasoned.
2. Develop research methods for gathering a wide range of primary and secondary source materials, and synthesize these materials and evaluate their credibility.
3. Demonstrate Independence in articulating an original approach to a significant philosophical topic.

4. Write clearly and cogently on complex problems in philosophy.
 5. Read extensively and systematically in a specialized area of philosophical research.
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5 Teaching and Learning Activities

This section outlines the semester reading and assignment schedule class by class. It would be good to print it separately can keep handy for reference.

5.1 Seminar

Wed, Sep 11

Topics: Course Introduction: Review Syllabus, Introduce Topic.

In class work on ethics and political philosophy.
Aristotle's Physics Book II, Chapter 1

Wed, Sep 18

Topics: The Fundamentals of Aristotelian Naturalism:

Read: Ed Feser "Two philosophies of nature" from Aristotle's Revenge, pp. 3-64

In these first few classes, we will explore the Aristotle metaphysics of nature. What does it mean to say something has a nature? This will be important for understanding what Aristotelians mean when they discuss human nature, and it informs the views of Karl Marx as well. This component will also introduce some central ideas in the Aristotelian understanding of nature, especially the four causes, which are the underlying principles of change.

Wed, Sep 25

Topics:

The Fundamentals of Aristotelian Naturalism:

Read: Physics, Book II, Chapters 1-3 and 7-9; De Anima I, 1, II 2-4

This meeting we will discuss how the teleology addressed in our previous meeting applies to the Aristotelian science of the soul. This science is often treated under the heading 'psychology,' since the topic is psûche. But since even plants have souls, it is misleading to call it that. Part of what is exciting about this science is that it understands the lives of animals with intellects as having very much in common with plants and non-human animals - we are special, but having some fundamentals (growth, nutrition, reproduction) that are quite alike. Hence, it combines what we separate as botany, zoology, and psychology into one overarching science.

Why must a proper natural scientific understanding of living things include considerations of form? Does it play a distinctive role in understanding things with a soul versus things without a soul?

Supplemental Reading

G. Matthews "De Anima 2.2-4 and the Meaning of Life"

Wed, Oct 2

Topics:

Aristotelian ethics

Read Nicomachean Ethics, Book I; Book X 6-8

Book I of the Nicomachean Ethics investigates the structure of human action; it is oriented toward apparent and, sometimes, real goods. Why should we think of human action as oriented toward an

overarching goal? What is the nature of the end of human action?

Supplemental Reading:

Frede: "The Political Character of Aristotle's Ethics"; John McDowell "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics"; Gavin Lawrence "Human Good and the Human Function"

Wed, Oct 9

Topics:

Aristotle on the Nature of Virtue:

Read Nicomachean Ethics, Book II (complete)

Book II covers a lot of ground. Aristotle discusses the nature of moral virtue and how we acquire it. He also introduces the famous Doctrine of the Mean. What is a moral virtue? Notice the careful definition in terms of genus and species. What sort of thing is a virtue? What differentiates virtue from other things of that sort?

Supplemental readings:

Myles Burnyeat: "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good"; Rosalind Hursthouse: "Aristotle's Central Doctrine of the Mean"

Wed, Oct 16

Topics:

Aristotle on Courage, Temperance, and Justice

Read Nicomachean Ethics, Book III 6-12; Book V

In this session we will discuss three examples of moral virtues that are arguably virtues on a contemporary understanding as well. How does Aristotle understand them?

Supplemental Reading:

Curzer: "Courage and Continnence," Aristotle and the Virtues; Polansky: "Giving Justice its Due," Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics

Wed, Oct 23

Topics:

Aristotle on Friendship

Read Nicomachean Ethics Book VIII; Book IX

Why is friendship something important for human happiness? What is friendship? How is it related to politics?

Supplemental Readings:

Cooper, "Friendship and the Good in Aristotle"; Whiting, "Impersonal Friends"

Wed, Oct 30

Topics:

Aristotle on the City-State

Read Politics, Book I

What is the city-state? In what sense are human beings political animals? Why do we engage in exchange and what forms of exchange are good? When can exchange deform human beings?

Supplemental Readings:

Fred Miller, "Naturalism," Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought ; S. Meikle "Aristotle on Money"

Wed, Nov 6

Topics:

Aristotle on the City-State

Reading Aristotle, Politics, Book III

How do the virtues of a citizen and the virtue of a human being relate? What sorts of city-states are good, which deformed?

Supplemental Reading:

Annas "Aristotle on Human Nature and Political Virtue"

Wed, Nov 13

Topics:

Aristotle on the City-State

Read: Politics Book, VII, Ch 1-3, 13-17, VIII

Here we return to some of the themes of the

Nicomachean Ethics. What is it to live well? How should the city-state be organized to bring that about? What is the purpose of education?

Supplemental Reading: Destrée "Education, leisure, and politics" Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics

Wed, Nov 20

Topics:

Marx on Alienated Labor

Read Economic and Political Manuscripts, First Manuscript

Marx explores labor under capitalism and argues that it is at odds with human nature. What does this mean? How does Marx arrive at this conclusion? Are these ideas still applicable to life in contemporary capitalism?

Supplemental Reading:

A. Wood "The Human Essence" and "Alienation and Capitalism" from Karl Marx; C. Byron, "The Normative Force Behind Marx's Theory of Alienation"

Wed, Nov 27

Topics:

Marx on Value, Commodities, and Exploitation

Read Capital 1, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 26, 32

Marx offers a theory of value as arising from productive processes but argues that value takes in a

life of its own. As Scott Meikle argues, this analysis is grounded in Aristotle's Politics. Money and commodities exert a force on human life that must be understood to be mastered and overcome.

Supplemental Reading

D. Harvey, "The Visualization of Capital as Value in Motion" from Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason; S. Meikle "Quality and Quantity in Economics: The Metaphysical Construction of the Economic Realm"

6 Assessments

6.1 Assessment Details

Critical Reading Responses (25%)

Date: Weekly

Each week, you will submit a one to two page response to the reading to the Courselink dropbox. These are due no later than class time on Wednesday. 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 Friday, it should concern the reading for that day’s class, not the preceding Wednesday.

I will automatically drop the lowest of these grades. I will grade them out of ten points, based on the extent to which they (a) reflect that you read the entirety of the reading, (b) cogently defend the importance you attribute to the passage, and (c) demonstrate a good faith effort to explain the meaning of the passage.

NOTE: you need not submit on weeks for which you are presenting, though you may if you want to make up for a low mark.

Seminar Presentations (30%)

You will each give two presentations of a reading. The presentations 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 15-20 minutes (no longer).

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

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|----------------------------------------------|
| 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% |

Paper Proposal (15%)

No later than November 1, 5:00pm, you should submit a proposal for your research for the final research paper (see below). It should consist of about 3-5 pages, with around two pages explaining your project and a proposal research bibliography. You need not have read all the works that you mention, but write a few sentences about each source describing its importance to your proposed project.

You will be assessed on whether:

- 1) you proposed a manageable project that relates to philosophically important issues related to the topics in the seminar.
- 2) you were able to find credible, peer-reviewed sources that will help you complete the project that you outline.

I will speak about research techniques and distribute some material about potential topics in the first few weeks of classes.

Final Research Paper (30%)

At the end of the course you will submit a final research paper.

You should aim for a topic that can be treated well in 10-15 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 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)- 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 | 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 -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 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 - 10% | Difficult to understand because of significant problems with sentence structure, grammar, | Several problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. | Some problems with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. | Sentence structure, grammar, and spelling strong despite occasional lapses. | Correct sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. |

punctuation,
and spelling.

7 Course Statements

7.1 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

8 University Statements

8.1 Email Communication

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

8.2 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. The grounds for Academic Consideration are detailed in the Undergraduate and Graduate Calendars.

Undergraduate Calendar - Academic Consideration and Appeals

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

Graduate Calendar - Grounds for Academic Consideration

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/index.shtml>

Associate Diploma Calendar - Academic Consideration, Appeals and Petitions

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/diploma/current/index.shtml>

8.3 Drop Date

Students will have until the last day of classes to drop courses without academic penalty. The deadline to drop two-semester courses will be the last day of classes in the second semester. This applies to all students (undergraduate, graduate and diploma) except for Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and Associate Diploma in Veterinary Technology (conventional and alternative delivery) students. The regulations and procedures for course registration are available in their respective Academic Calendars.

Undergraduate Calendar - Dropping Courses

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

Graduate Calendar - Registration Changes

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/genreg-reg-regchg.shtml>

Associate Diploma Calendar - Dropping Courses

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/diploma/current/c08/c08-drop.shtml>

8.4 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.

8.5 Accessibility

The University promotes the full participation of students who experience disabilities in their academic programs. To that end, the provision of academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the University and the student.

When accommodations are needed, the student is required to first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Documentation to substantiate the existence of a disability is required; however, interim accommodations may be possible while that process is underway.

Accommodations are available for both permanent and temporary disabilities. It should be noted that common illnesses such as a cold or the flu do not constitute a disability.

Use of the SAS Exam Centre requires students to book their exams at least 7 days in advance and not later than the 40th Class Day.

For Guelph students, information can be found on the SAS website

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/sas>

For Ridgetown students, information can be found on the Ridgetown SAS website

<https://www.ridgetownc.com/services/accessibilityservices.cfm>

8.6 Academic Integrity

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 encourages academic integrity. 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.

Undergraduate Calendar - Academic Misconduct

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml>

Graduate Calendar - Academic Misconduct

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/index.shtml>

8.7 Recording of Materials

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

8.8 Resources

The Academic Calendars are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies, and regulations that apply to undergraduate, graduate, and diploma programs.

Academic Calendars

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/academics/calendars>
