

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2011-2012

Philosophy 3170F
Topics in the History of Ethics: *Nicomachean Ethics*

Fall term 2011
Tu 11:30-1:30; Th 11:30-12:30
TC 304

Instructor: Prof. Karen M. Nielsen
Office: StH 4145
Office Hours: Tu 2:30-3:30; Th 3:30-4:30
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We will read Aristotle's most influential ethical treatise, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in its entirety. Aristotle develops his account of human virtue and happiness by examining the "reputable opinions" of his predecessors, rejecting some and accepting others. What candidates for happiness (*eudaimonia*) does Aristotle consider, and how does he adjudicate between them? Is the best life a life of action (*praxis*), or a life of contemplation (*theoria*), or perhaps a life that incorporates many types of ends rather than just one? Does Aristotle argue fallaciously from "is" to "ought" when he suggests that we will find out what happiness is once we grasp the function of a human being? We will attempt to gauge the extent to which Aristotle's ethics reflects his overall metaphysical commitments, in particular the extent to which his ethics presupposes a distinctive model of the human psyche. Topics include the nature and development of virtue of character and intellect; voluntary action and decision; weakness of will (*akrasia*); pleasure and friendship (*philia*).

TEXTS:

- T. H. Irwin (translation, introduction, notes and glossary), *Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999).
- Richard Kraut (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).
- Amelie O. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

In addition to these texts, we may rely on additional readings available through JSTOR and other sources. The three required books are available through the campus store. If you prefer to purchase the books elsewhere, please ensure that you purchase exactly the same editions as those available from the campus store.

REQUIREMENTS:

* Class participation and preparation. The readings for this course are difficult. For the sake of your own comprehension and that of your peers, it is crucial that you come to every class prepared to discuss the readings. Where a student's final grade is borderline, class participation will determine whether she is given the benefit of the doubt.

* One mid-term exam, held in class on Tuesday November 1 (30%). The assignment will consist of four questions; you should answer three of them. You will have an hour and fifty minutes to complete your answers. Answers will be graded according to their relevance, accuracy, breadth and depth. Although the exam is essay format, I don't expect your answers to conform to the formal style of an essay. There is no need to write an introduction or a summary at the end – just cut to the chase and answer the questions. The exam will cover all the material we have discussed in lectures up to the day of the mid-term.

* Two papers, each totaling 5-7 pages (Times New Roman, 12 point, double spaced, standard margins) (35% each). The first paper will be due at the beginning of class on Tuesday October 25. The second paper will be due at the beginning of class on Thursday December 1. All papers should be submitted in paper copy (no e-mail submissions except with the prior permission of the instructor).

The Department of Philosophy requires that all papers be submitted to Turnitin.com. This secures your copyright to the paper, and helps prevent plagiarism. No paper will be returned until it has been submitted to Turnitin.com. The class name for turnitin is "3170F Topics in the History of Ethics", our class number is 4083130, our password "eudaimonia".

Don't forget to include a complete bibliography listing *all sources* you consulted while writing your paper, whether electronic or non-electronic.

All references to specific passages in Aristotle's works should be made using the "Bekker numbers" you will find in the margins of Irwin's translation. These numbers (e.g. "*Nicomachean Ethics* 1113b17- 27") uniquely identify a passage in Aristotle's corpus even without any mention of the name of the work in which it appears. Bekker numbers are based on the page numbers used in Immanuel Bekker's 19th-century edition of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* for the Prussian Academy of Sciences ("a" refers to text that appeared in the left-hand column of that edition, "b" to text that appeared in the right-hand column). Add such references in parentheses in the main body of the text rather than in footnotes.

You are invited to meet with the instructor to discuss your paper during office hours – feel free to bring in a draft. The instructor will not provide written comments on drafts, but she is happy to comment on individual passages during office hours. All questions regarding papers should reach the instructor no later than two workdays before the deadline. Paper assignments will be distributed in class at least two weeks in advance of the deadline. If you hand in your paper late, you will be penalized 3 points per day, including weekends (maximum 20pts). If you cannot submit the paper directly to the instructor, please use the drop box on the first floor of the entrance to the Philosophy Department (Stevenson Hall). If you do not hand in all your papers by the last day of classes (December 7th) you will, unfortunately, fail the course.

Accommodation

Be aware that senate regulations prohibit individual instructors from granting extensions on written assignments or arranging special accommodations on tests. All such requests, with the appropriate documentation, should be directed to your academic counselor and the Undergraduate Counselor in the Department of Philosophy, Prof. Christopher Viger.

Contacting the Instructor

Students who are absent from class are responsible for obtaining notes from one of their peers. The instructor does not distribute lecture notes. While you are encouraged to make use of the instructor's office hours to discuss the course material and raise any questions that arise in connection with the course, the instructor is also prepared to respond to reasonable requests and inquiries submitted by email. The instructor does not respond to questions that can be answered by reading the course outline. Under normal circumstances, you should expect to receive an answer within 48 hours (weekends and public holidays excepted).

Audit

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

Provisional course calendar:

1. Thurs. September 8 Introduction; Aristotle and the *Nicomachean Ethics*
2. Tues. September 13 EN I, 1-6; Chris Bobonich, "Aristotle's Ethical Treatises" in Kraut (ed); Richard Kraut, "How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle's Method" in Kraut (ed).
3. Thurs. September 15 EN 1, 7; T.H. Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics" in Rorty (ed.).
4. Tues. September 20 EN I, 7 (continued); Jennifer Whiting, "Aristotle's Function Argument: A Defense" *Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1988), 33-48; [see also Gavin Lawrence, "Human Good and Human Function" in Kraut (ed.)]
5. Thurs. September 22 EN 1, 8-13; Thomas Nagel, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*" in Rorty (ed); J. L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*", in Rorty (ed).
6. Tues. September 27 EN II, 1-7. Myles F. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good" in Rorty (ed).
7. Thurs. September 29 EN II, 8-9; Rosalind Hursthouse, "The Central Doctrine of the Mean", in Kraut (ed).
8. Tues. October 4 EN III, 1-5; Susan Sauvé Meyer, "Aristotle on the Voluntary" in Kraut (ed.) [See also T. H. Irwin, "Reason and Responsibility in Aristotle" in Rorty (ed).]
9. Thurs. October 6 EN III, 6-12; David Pears, "Courage as a Mean", in Rorty (ed).
10. Tues. October 11 EN IV; Roger Crisp, "Aristotle on Greatness of Soul" in Kraut (ed).
11. Thurs. October 13 EN V, 1-11; Bernard Williams, "Justice as a Virtue"; Charles M. Young, "Aristotle's Justice" in Kraut (ed)
12. Tues. October 18 EN VI, 1-6; David Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason" in Rorty (ed),
13. Thurs. October 20 EN VI, 7-11; C. D. C. Reeve, "Aristotle on the Virtues of Thought", in Kraut (ed.)
14. Tues. October 25 EN VI, 12-13; Richard Sorabji, "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue".
First paper due.
15. Thurs. October 27 EN VII, 1-5; A. W. Price, "Acrasia and Self-control" in Kraut (ed).
16. Tues. November 1 **Midterm examination**
17. Thurs. November 3 EN VII, 6-10; Amelie O. Rorty, "Akrasia and Pleasure: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 7", in Rorty (ed).
18. Tues. November 8 EN VII, 11-14; Dorothea Frede, "Pleasure and Pain in Aristotle's Ethics" in Kraut (ed).
19. Thurs. November 10 EN VIII, 1-6; John M. Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship" in Rorty (ed.).

20. Tues. November 15 EN IX, 7-14; Jennifer Whiting, "The *Nicomachean* Account of *Philia*" in Kraut (ed).
21. Thurs. November 17 EN IX, 1-12; Whiting and Cooper continued.
22. Tues. November 22 EN X 1-5; Julia Annas, "Aristotle on Pleasure and Goodness" in Rorty (ed).
23. Thurs. November 24 EN X 6-8; Amelie O. Rorty, "The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*" in Rorty (ed).
24. Tues. November 29 EN X, 9; Malcolm Schofield, "Aristotle's Political Ethics".
25. Thurs. December 1 Open; **Second paper due.**
26. Tues. December 6 Open