# Philosophy 390: Special Topics: Aristotle's Ethics

Aristotle, who is by all accounts one of the most influential thinkers in history, can also be one of the most intimidating. His writings are often dense and occasionally cryptic, there is a great historical distance between him and us, and his views on different topics are so intertwined that it can be difficult to know where to begin in studying him. In this course we will approach Aristotle by focusing on one of his most accessible works, the Nicomachean Ethics, in which he develops a theory of the human good and details the role in it of virtue, intellectual achievement, pleasure, friendship, and other values. Over the course of the semester, we will read this treatise in its entirety, interspersed with related passages from other Aristotelian texts on a wide range of topics including: logic, science, causality, god, the soul, biology, and politics. In this way, students will become orientated to Aristotle's philosophy as a whole and learn see the place of ethics within it. (We may also look briefly at some works by Plato to which Aristotle is reacting.)

The primary aim of the course is to help students develop an understanding and appreciation of Aristotle generally and of the Nicomachean Ethics in particular and to further their own thinking about the human good through critical engagement with Aristotle. A secondary aim is to help students develop the skills required for the detailed study of a philosophical text, with an emphasis on the special problems posed by a text from a different historical period and in a foreign language.

There are no formal prerequisites for the course, but it is will be geared primarily to the needs and interests of students who have had at least one prior course in philosophy. Prior exposure to the ideas of Plato and Aristotle (e.g. in Phil 210) would be helpful, but will not be presupposed.

## Required Texts (available at bookstore)

Broadie, S. and Rowe, C. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, *Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford, 2002).
Irwin, T. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, Second Edition (Indianapolis, 1999).
Kraut, R. *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 2006)

## Recommended Texts (available at bookstore)

Barnes, J. (ed.) *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (2 volumes) (Princeton, 1984).
McKeon, R. (ed.) *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York, 2001).
Cooper, J. (ed.) *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, 1997).

## Supplemental Texts (* available at bookstore, †on reserve, ‡ available electronically through library)

Annas, J. *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford, 1993).
Anton, J. P. and Preus, A. *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy IV: Aristotle's Ethics* (Albany, 1991). †
Barnes, J. (ed.) *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (two volumes) (Princeton, 1984). *†
Barnes, J., Schofield, M., and Sorabji, R. (eds.) *Articles on Aristotle*, Vol. 2 *Ethics & Politics* (London: 1975). †
Broadie, S. *Ethics With Aristotle* (Oxford, 1991). ‡
Cooper, J. M. (ed.) *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, 1997). *†
Cooper, J. M. *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Indianapolis, 1986). †
Dover, K. J. *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Indianapolis, 1994). †
Irwin, T. and Fine, G. (eds. & trs.) *Aristotle: Selections* (Indianapolis, 1995). †
McKeon, R. (ed.) *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York, 2001). *
Pakaluk, M. *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge, 2005). †
Reeve, C. D. C. *Practices of Reason: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 1992). ‡
Rorty A. O. (ed.). *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1980). †
Ross, W. D. *Aristotle*, Sixth Edition. (London, 1995). ‡

## Class Schedule

The following schedule is tentative and will almost certainly be altered as the course progresses. This may include the introduction or elimination of readings. The readings listed below fall into four categories: (1) material from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) itself, (2) other material by Aristotle or other ancient authors which provides a context for our readings in the *NE*, (3) commentary on the *NE* that is included in the two required course texts, and (4) other secondary material. Required readings are listed in bold, and all are either in the required texts for the course or will be provided online via Blackboard. Other readings are optional, but are recommended for students writing stimulus papers for the class relevant session.

| | Topic | Readings | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *NE* | Other Ancient | Commentary | Other |
| 1 | • Introduction | | | • Rowe, "Historical Introduction"<br>• Irwin, Preface, Introduction §1-4, 13<br>• Bobonich, "Aristotle's Ethical Treatises" | • Sedley, "Transmission of a Text" from the introduction to *the Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*. |
| 2 | • The Good as the ultimate end of action<br>• Popular conceptions of the Good | • I.1-5 | • *Eudemian Ethics* I.2 | | • Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Chapter 1, pp. 27-34<br>• Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, Chapter 21 |
| 3 | • Popular views of the good<br>• Criteria for an account of the good<br>• Plato's theory of Forms & of the Good<br>• Aristotle's critique | • I.5-7 | • Plato, *Republic* VI (from 504a4)<br>• **Plato, *Philebus* 11b-d, 20b-22b** | | • Kenney, "Aristotle on Happiness" (in Barnes et al.)<br>• Annas, *The Morality of Happiness,* Chapter 1, pp. 34-46<br>• Ross, *Aristotle*, Ch. 7, pp.198-200. |
| 4 | • Aristotle's theory of forms and soul<br>• Aristotle's outline theory of the good<br>• The structure of the *NE* | | • *Eudemian Ethics* I.3-5<br>• *De Anima* **II.1-3** | • **Irwin, Introduction §5.**<br>• Lawrence, "Human Good and the Human Function" | • Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle,* II.1, pp. 91-115.<br>• Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics" (in Rorty) |
| 5 | • Aristotle's outline account of the Good (continued) | • I.7, 13 | • *De Anima* **II.1-3**<br>• **Plato, *Phaedrus* 246a-b, 253d-e**<br>• Plato, *Republic* IV, 436b-442c | | • Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, Chapter 22-5 |
| 6 | • Controversies concerning the good | • I.8-12 | • **Herodotus, *Histories* I.29-33** | | |
| 7 | • Virtue of character | • II | | • Broadie, Introduction, §2<br>• Irwin, Introduction, §6<br>• **Hursthouse, "The Central Doctrine of the Mean"** | • Kosman, "Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle's Ethics" (in Rorty)<br>• Ross, *Aristotle*, Ch. VII, pp. 200-205.<br>• Dover. *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato* |

| | | | | | *and Aristotle*, II, from p. 46-50, 66-73. |
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| 8 | • Decision and whether our characters are up to us | • **III.1-5** | | • Broadie, Introduction, §5-6<br>• Irwin, Introduction, §7<br>• Suavé Meyer, "Aristotle on the Voluntary" | • Ross, *Aristotle*, Chapter VII, pp. 205-209<br>• Irwin, "Reason and Responsibility in Aristotle" (in Rorty)<br>• Anscombe "Thought and Action in Aristotle" (in Barnes et al.) |
| 9 | • Courage | • **III.6-9** | • Plato, *Laches* | • **Broadie, Introduction, §3 pp. 24-5** | • **Lear, "Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine"**<br>• Ross, *Aristotle*, Chapter VII, pp. 209-214<br>• Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of Τὸ Καλόν." |
| 10 | • Temperance | • **III.10-12** | • Plato, *Charmides* | • **Broadie, Introduction, §3 pp. 25-7** | |
| 11 | • Virtues concerned with wealth | • **IV.1-2** | | • **Broadie, Introduction, §3 pp. 27-9** | |
| 12 | • Pride and a virtue concerned with trivial honors | • **IV.3-4** | | • **Broadie, Introduction, §3 pp. 29-32**<br>• **Crisp, "Aristotle on Greatness of Soul"** | • **Ross, *Aristotle*, Chapter VII, pp. 214-5.** |
| 13 | • Mildness, the social virtues, and the pseudo-virtue of shame | • **IV.5-9** | | • Broadie, Introduction, §3 pp. 33-4 | • Ross, *Aristotle*, Chapter VIII, pp. 249-252 |
| 14 | • Justice | • **V** | • Plato, *Republic* I | • **Broadie, Introduction, §4**<br>• Young, "Aristotle's Justice" | • Ross, *Aristotle*, Chapter VII, pp. 215-221 |
| 15 | • Review and wrap-up of issues concerned of virtue of character | | | | |
| 16 | • Virtue of intellect | • **VI.1-2** | | • **Broadie, Introduction, §6-8**<br>• **Irwin, Introduction, §8**<br>• **Reeve, "Aristotle on the Virtues of Thought"** | • Ross, *Aristotle*, Chapter VII, pp. 221-226 |
| 17 | • Science and related virtues. | • **VI.3-7** | • *Posterior Analytics* I.2, II.19.<br>• *Metaphysics* A.1 | | • Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge) |
| 18 | • Practical reasoning | **VI.8-13** | • *De Anima* III.3, 10-11<br>• *De Motu Animalium* 7 | • Gottlieb, "The Practical Syllogism" | • Reeve, *Practices of Reason*, Chapters 11-18<br>• Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, Chapters 1.-6 |
| 19 | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | |

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| 21 | • Productive reasoning | | • *Politics* **I.4-12** | | • Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, IV.B, pp. 170-180 |
| 22 | • Aristotle's methodology | • **VII.1-2** | • VII.1-2<br>• *Eudemian Ethics* I.6<br>• *Topics* I.1-5, 10<br>• *Metaphysics* B.1<br>• *Politics* I.1 | • **Irwin, Glossary, "ethics"**<br>• **Broadie, Introduction, §1**<br>• Kraut, "How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle's Method" | • Bolton, "Aristotle on the Objectivity of Ethics" (in Preus & Anton)<br>• Nussbaum, "Saving Aristotle's Appearances"<br>• Owen, "Tithenai ta Phainomena"<br>• Cooper, "Aristotle on the Authority of 'Appearances'"<br>• Salmieri, "Aristotle's Non-'Dialectical' Methodology in the *Nicomachean Ethics*" |
| 23 | • Incontinence and related states | • **VII.2-10** | | • Broadie, Introduction, §9<br>• Irwin, Introduction, §9<br>• Price, "Acrasia and Self-control" | • Ross, *Aristotle*, Chapter VII, pp. 227-231 |
| 24 | • Pleasure | • **VII.11-14**<br>• **X. 1-5** | | • Broadie, Introduction, §11<br>• Irwin, Introduction, §10<br>• Frede, "Pleasure and Pain in Aristotle's Ethics" | • Annas, "Aristotle on Pleasure and Goodness" (in Rorty)<br>• Ross, *Aristotle*, Chapter VII, pp. 231-235 |
| 25 | • Friendship | • **VII**<br>• **IX** | • *Magna Moralia* II.13 | • Broadie, Introduction, §10 | • Gotthelf , "Love and Philosophy: Aristotelian vs. Platonic"<br>• Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship" (in Rorty) |
| 26 | • Self and others | • **IX.9** | | • Irwin, Introduction, §11<br>• **Whiting, "The Nicomachean account of *Philia*"** | • **Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, Chapter 12, pp. 249-262**<br>• Madigan "Eth.. Nic. 9.8: Beyond Egoism and Altruism" (in Preus & Anton)<br>• McDowell, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics" (in Rorty)<br>• Rogers,"Aristotle on loving another for his own sake." |
| 27 | • The best life | • **X.6-8** | • *Metaphysics* Λ.6-10 | • **Broadie, Introduction, §12**<br>• **Irwin,** | • Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*, III, pp. 144-180. |

| | | | | **Introduction, §12** | • Cooper, "Contemplation and Happiness: a Reconsideration"<br>• Ross, *Aristotle*, Chapter VII, pp. 237-239<br>• Rorty, "The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle's Ethics" (in Rorty)<br>• Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good*, Chapter 8. |
| 28 | • The relation of ethics to statesmanship | • **X.9**<br>• **I.2** | • *Politics* **I.1-3** | • Schofield, "Aristotle's Political Ethics" | |
| 29 | • Concluding Thoughts | | | | |
| **FINAL EXAM** | | | | | |

## Assignments and Grading

Students will be expected to write four papers over the course of the term. Two of these will be brief "stimulus" papers (each of 300-400 words and counting for 5% of the semester average), one a "follow-up" paper (of 900-1200 words and counting for 20% of the semester average), and one a final paper (of 1500-1800 words and counting for 40% of the semester average). In addition to the papers there will be a final exam (counting for 15% of the semester average), and students will be expected to participate regularly in online discussion via the Blackboard discussion forum (with their participation grade comprising the remaining 15% of the semester average. Extra credit points, which will be added to the semester average, can be earned for exceptional contributions to in-class discussion.

A student's **online participation** will be judged by the degree to which it reflects engagement with the course materials and contributes to the intellectual environment of the class. Since there are different axes along which student's posts can vary (quality, frequency, length, relevance, etc.) I cannot specify a formula by which this portion of the grade will be determined. However, no student who submits at least ten posts will receive less than an 80% for this component of the grade, provided that each post meets the following conditions: (1) it is at least 150 words, (2) it makes a point of relevance of the course that has not already been made in a post or classroom discussion, (3) it is consistent with a familiarity on the student's part of the content of the course readings and discussions. (In saying that the post must be consistent with a familiarity with the course content, I do not mean that the post must reference material from the readings or discussions, but only that it must not ignore it by, for example presenting as novel an idea that ought to be familiar from the readings or treating as uncontroversial and idea that we have seen is disputed.) Students will not receive grades on individual posts; however estimates of your participation grade will be available upon request throughout the term.

Each student will be assigned two class sessions for which he will be required to write (300-400 word) **stimulus papers** based on the session's assigned readings. The purpose of the papers is to serve as a point of departure for classroom discussion by summarizing an important issue from one or more of the assigned readings and raising questions about it. Stimulus papers are due on the midnight preceding the relevant class session, and will not be accepted any earlier than three hours after the end of the preceding class session. The papers must be submitted in two ways: (1) they must be turned in via the Blackboard "Assignments" feature as an MS Word (.doc or .docx) file, and (2) they must be posted to the Blackboard discussion forum. When posted to the discussion forum, each stimulus paper should begin a new thread, and the post title, should begin with "Stimulus:" (Though posted to the discussion forum, stimulus papers will not count as part of the participation grade.) For most class sessions, several students will be writing stimulus papers, and the papers should raise distinct questions (and, ideally, focus on distinct issues from the readings). It is up to each student, when submitting a stimulus paper, to ensure that the paper adds something new rather than duplicating any stimulus papers that have already been posted for the day. Because of this, the first student to post a stimulus paper for a given day has a somewhat easier job than the last student to do so, so it is in your interest to post earlier rather than later. The author of a stimulus paper is expected to be present in class on the day that the topic is under discussion and prepared to elaborate on the paper upon

request. Up to ten points may be deducted from the paper's grade if this is not the case. If, for any reason, you will be unable to complete a stimulus paper (and to be present to discuss it) on one of the dates assigned to you, let me know prior to the previous class session, and I will assign you to an alternate date. In the case of illness or emergency, alternative arrangements can be made at any time.

Each student must, at some point in the term, submit a (900-1,200 word) **follow-up paper** on an issue already discussed in class (and/or on the discussion board). The paper must take and defend a position on the issue (or some aspect of it), engaging with the relevant assigned readings and with any directly relevant points made in class discussion (both in class and online). Appropriate topics for follow-up papers will be issues of the sort raised by (well written) stimulus papers and will typically be subjects of a single-day's classroom discussion. I will periodically suggest appropriate topics for follow-up papers, and students should feel free to solicit such suggestions or to run prospective topics by me. (Students may but needn't write follow-up papers on issues that they themselves raised in earlier stimulus papers.) (As with stimulus papers, follow-up papers will not count towards the online participation grade.)

**Final papers** (of between 1,500 and 1,800 words) will be due on the last day of class. Papers must take and defend a position on an issue studied in the course, engaging with the assigned readings and, where relevant, with positions articulated in discussion (both in-class and online). A student may write his final paper on a topic he has already treated in an earlier paper, but the final paper must be a distinct paper (rather than a revised or expanded version of earlier work). Final paper topics must be approved beforehand.