

*Nicomachean Ethics*  
Winter 2023

Seminar Information:

PHIL 210  
Professor Shields  
Lectures: M 4.00-6.50 in RWAC 472

Office Hours and Contact Information:

Office: Arts & Humanities Building 447  
Office hours: W 14.00-15.00 and by appt.  
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N.b. I prefer e-mail to telephone as a manner of student contact. I make an effort to answer student e-mails promptly, but please be aware that I measure promptness in this domain in days rather than hours or minutes.

Texts:

Required:

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. w/ notes by Terence Irwin, Third Edition (Hackett: 2019)

Not required, but it will be useful for you to have available (and every philosopher should own):

- Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* vols. I and 2, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton: 1984)

Less complete but superior in terms of translation, and with a marvelous annotated glossary is:

- Irwin, T. and Fine, G., *Aristotle: Selections* (Hackett: 1995)

Recommended:

In progress and available on Canvas:

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. w/ introduction and notes by Christopher Shields

Other readings are accessible via Philosopher's Index, available in Geisel Library. Where copyright infringement is not an issue, I will provide links or upload .pdfs to our Canvas site.

N.b. For the primary reading: I will expect that you will have read Irwin's translation; but I invite you to read my translation as well, which will be incrementally available on our Canvas site.

### Requirements and Protocol:

Seminar participants will offer one seminar presentation and write one essay, in the neighbourhood of 4,000-5,000 words. It is assumed, though not required, that your essay will grow out of your seminar presentation.

Due date for the essay: 20 March

Essay topics will be developed on an individual basis in conjunction with the seminar leader.

The essay is to be submitted electronically in a main-stream word-processing format or (if you use something non-standard) as .pdf documents, to the addresses given above. Papers will be accepted until 17.00 on its due date.

Attendance is expected at all seminar meetings.

### Prospectus:

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* advances a comprehensive eudaimonistic ethical theory, rooted in a highly nuanced account of human nature. The work draws freely upon its author's metaphysical and psychological theories and so cannot be fully understood without a foundational understanding of his commitments in these areas. We will, accordingly, begin with a précis of the metaphysical and psychological basis of Aristotle's ethics as a prolegomenon to our study of the *EN*; we will then visit and revisit relevant details as the term progresses.

Our plan will be to march through the entire *EN*, more or less one book per week, though two seminars will need to cover two books each due to public holidays falling on our term dates; we will thus cover the entire *EN* in our ten week term. Our focus will be on the text itself, though we will advert to a small fraction of the vast secondary literature on this text as an aid to understanding.

Each seminar meeting will comprise three components: (i) a discursive overview of the book(s) to studied; (ii) a deep examination of a special problem (or set of special problems) encountered in the stretch of primary text read for that meeting; and (iii) a student presentation on a theme pertinent to those issues, to be developed in concert with the seminar leader.

## Topics and Readings:

### Week One

#### Topics:

- Metaphysical and Psychological Background to the *EN*
- The Character and Plan of the *EN*
- Eudaimonism
- The Function Argument

#### Reading:

- *EN* i
- Kraut, 'Aristotle Ethics,' *Stanford Encyclopedia* of §§1-3  
Note that this entry also contains an up-to-date bibliography of important secondary literature in English, arranged thematically.
- Irwin, 'The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics,' in A. Rorty ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (University of California Press: 1980), 35-53 [Available on our Canvas site.]
- Kraut, 'Two Conceptions of Happiness,' *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), 167-197 [Available on our Canvas site.]

Week Two: No lecture: Martin Luther King Day

## Week Three

### Topics:

- The Role of Virtue in Ethical Theory
- The *Archê* of Practical Reasoning
- The Acquisition of Virtue
- The Doctrine of the Mean
- A First Approach to Particular Virtues

### Reading:

- *EN ii*
- Kraut, 'Aristotle Ethics,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* §§4-5
- Brown, 'What is the Mean Relative to Us in Aristotle's Ethics?' *Phronesis* 42 (1997), 77-93
- Urmson, 'Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1973), 223-23; reprinted in A. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (University of California Press: 1980)
- Korsgaard, C, 'Aristotle on Function and Virtue,' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3 (1986), 259-279

## Week Four

### Topics:

- Voluntary Action and Character
- Preference
- Wish
- Our Powers and Abilities in the Domains of Vice and Virtue

### Reading:

- Irwin, 'Reason and Responsibility in Aristotle,' in A. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (University of California Press: 1980), 117-155
- Ackrill, 'Aristotelian on Action,' *Mind* NS 87 (1978), 595-601
- Anscombe, 'Thought and Action in Aristotle,' in R Bambrough ed, *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Routledge: 1965); variously reprinted.
- Wiggins, 'Deliberation and Practical Reasoning,' in A. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (University of California Press: 1980), 221-240

## Week Five

### Topics:

- Individual Virtues of Character (TBD by participant presentations)
- Justice

### Reading:

- *EN iv-v*
- Williams, 'Justice as a Virtue,' in A. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (University of California Press: 1980), 189-200
- Santas, *Goodness and Justice: Plato, Aristotle, and the Moderns*, Blackwell: 2001) [Recommended sections.]

## Week Six: No lecture: Presidents' Day

## Week Seven:

### Topics:

- Intellectual Virtues

### Reading:

- *EN vi*
- Kraut, 'Aristotle Ethics,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* §6
- Charles, 'Aristotle on Well-Being and Intellectual Contemplation,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 73* (1999), 205–223

## Week Eight:

### Topics:

- *Akrasia*
- Intemperance
- Pleasure: Preliminary Treatment

Reading:

- *EN* vii

## Week Nine

Topics:

- Friendship
- Eudaimonism and Other-regarding Attitudes

Reading:

- *EN* viii-ix
- Kraut, 'Aristotle Ethics,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* §9
- Annas, 'Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism,' *Mind* 86 (1977), 532-554
- Brink, 'Eudaimonism and Cosmopolitan Concern,' in D. Brink, S. Meyer, and C Shields edd., *Virtue, Happiness, Knowledge* (Oxford University Press: 2018), 270-291

## Week Ten

Topics:

- Pleasure: Final Treatment
- Happiness and Contemplation
- Intellectualism in Ethics

Reading:

- *EN* x
- Kraut, 'Aristotle Ethics,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* §8
- Keyt, 'Intellectualism in Aristotle,' *Paideia* 7 (1978), 138–157.

- Whiting, 'Human Nature and Intellectualism in Aristotle,' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (1986), 70–95
- Shields, 'Perfecting Pleasures: the Metaphysics of Pleasure in *Nicomachean Ethics* x," in *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: A Critical Guide*, ed. J. Miller (Cambridge University Press: 2011), 191-210

Week Ten+

Topics:

- The Best Life After All
- Quodlibetal