

Virtue Ethics
PHIL 4500 Section 1
TR 10:30-11:45
Main 203

Spring 2019

Instructor: Erica Holberg (erica.holberg@usu.edu)
Instructor's Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-2:30 in Old Main 002K
and by appointment

Course Description:

In this course we will do a close reading together of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, a foundational text of Western ethical philosophy. To supplement our reading of this difficult text, we will read writings by contemporary philosophers working in virtue ethics. Our central aim is to better understand Aristotle's thought. Another related aim is to understand important ideas within contemporary virtue ethics, ideas that draw inspiration from but diverge in crucial ways from Aristotle's own writings. The questions we shall return to as we work our way through these texts are 1) how we should assess the strengths and weaknesses of Aristotle's characterization of our everyday ethical concerns and 2) how successful the arguments from contemporary virtue ethics are in their attempts to make Aristotle's ideas fit our contemporary lives and challenges.

Course Objectives:

1. *Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.*
We will be reading the inspiration for and central texts within contemporary virtue ethics. The goal is to understand the aims of the arguments presented, evaluate the arguments for their strengths and weaknesses, and to understand what assumptions underlie the argumentative steps taken.
2. *Develop skills in expressing oneself orally and in writing.* You cannot do well in this class if you do not participate in class discussion. Just as importantly, you will have three chances to get better at making a clear, persuasive, sophisticated argument in writing. Your grade is a direct result of your efforts and successes in communicating your thoughts clearly in class and in writing.
3. *Acquire an interest in learning more by asking questions and seeking answers.*
One guiding question for this course is how well virtue ethics helps us make sense of the ethical goods and concerns of contemporary life. Students are encouraged to come to class with questions, either about the previous class discussion or about the readings for that day.

Texts:

-*Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Broadie and Rowe, Oxford University Press,
-All other course readings are available as pdfs on canvas.

I strongly prefer for you to print out these readings for your use, which while expensive, is cheaper than a course reader.

Grading:

First Paper: 20%

Second Paper: 20%

Third Paper: 30%

Homework: 5.6%

Canvas Q & A: 3.9%

Class Participation: 20.5%

Class participation requires that you 1) ask questions, 2) contribute your own ideas and interpretations of the readings, and 3) follow up on the ideas of others.

The first two papers are to be 5 pages long, and the third paper should be 7-8 pages long. Paper topics will be distributed about a week before the draft is due. Three paper drafts and participation in the writings seminars are required. Papers are to be submitted on Canvas by **9 p.m.** I would also appreciate it if you bring one paper copy to the next class. If you are sick and cannot attend class, you must submit a copy to me electronically using either Canvas or email, and then bring a paper copy to the next class. Students are responsible for making sure the electronic file submitted is readable by the instructor (a file I cannot open is a late paper).

Drafts are also to be distributed to other classmates by **9 p.m.** on the due date. Please be thoughtful of others and respect this deadline, so that everyone has a chance to print and read the drafts in time for the workshop. The easiest way to distribute your draft to all your classmates is by using Canvas to send an email to your writing seminar group. Please print a copy of each person's drafts (including your own) and bring them to the writing seminar prepared to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each draft.

Days that homework assignments are due are marked with (HW#_). The homework questions can be found on Canvas. There are 14 homework assignments, worth 4 points each for a possible total of 56 points.

There will be 13 Canvas Question and Answer, worth 3 points each, for a possible total of 39 points. Every week, you must 1) post a question about the Aristotle reading that week, or about something that came up in class by **9 p.m. Wednesday**. You must also 2) post an answer to a question raised by your classmates by **midnight Wednesday**.

Plagiarism is forbidden. Plagiarism is a sign that the person has lost sight of one's role as a student and the ends of education. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask the instructor.

Schedule:**The Basic Assumptions of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics**

Tuesday, January 8th – NE I.1-3

Thursday, January 10th – NE I.1-7 (Q & A #1)

Tuesday, January 15th – Thompson, "The Representation of Life" (HW #1)

Thursday, January 17th – NE I.8-13 (Q & A #2)

Tuesday, January 22nd – Williams, "Moral Luck" (HW #2)

Thursday, January 24th – NE II (Q & A #3)

Tuesday, January 29th – Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good" (HW #3)

Thursday, January 31st – NE III.1-5 (Q & A #4)

Tuesday, February 5th – Hursthouse, "The Virtuous Agent's Reasons for Action" (HW#4)

Wednesday, February 6th – First paper drafts distributed to classmates by 9 p.m.

Character Virtues, Intellectual Virtues, and Akrasia

Thursday, February 7th – NE III.6-12 and NE IV (Q & A #5)

Thursday, Friday, February 7th and 8th – Writing Seminars

Tuesday, February 12th – Pears, "Courage as a Mean" (HW#5)

Wednesday, February 13th – First papers due by 9 p.m.

Thursday, February 14th – NE V (Q & A #6) No class. Instructor out of town.

Tuesday, February 19th – Williams, "Justice as a Virtue" (HW#6)

Thursday, February 21st – No class. Instructor out of town.

Tuesday, February 26th – Friedman, "Feminist Virtue Ethics" (HW#7)

Thursday, February 28th – NE VI (Q & A #7)

Tuesday, March 5th – McDowell, "Virtue and Reason" (HW#8)

Thursday, March 7th – NE VII.1-10 (Q & A #8)

March 11th - 15th, Spring Break

Tuesday, March 19th – Pickave and Whiting, "*Nicomachean Ethics* 7.3 on Akratic Ignorance" (HW#9)

Wednesday, March 20th – Second paper drafts distributed to classmates by 9 p.m.

Virtue as a Social and Political Achievement

Thursday, March 21st – NE VII.11-14 (Q & A #9)

Thursday, Friday, March 21st and 22nd – Writing Seminars

Tuesday, March 26th – Rorty, "The Place of Pleasure in Aristotle's Ethics" (HW#10)

Wednesday, March 27th – Second papers due by 9 p.m.

Thursday, March 28th – NE VIII (Q & A #10)

Tuesday, April 2nd – Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship" (HW#11)

Thursday, April 4th – NE IX (Q & A #11)

Tuesday, April 9th – Millgram, "Aristotle on Making Other Selves" (HW #12)

Thursday, April 11th – NE X.1-5 (Q & A #12)

Tuesday, April 16th – Lawrence, "Aristotle and the Ideal Life" (HW#13)

Wednesday, April 17th - Third paper drafts distributed to classmates by 9 p.m.

Thursday, April 18th – NE X.6-9 (Q & A #13)

Thursday, Friday, April 18th and 19th – Writing Seminars

Tuesday, April 23rd – Striker, "Aristotle's Ethics as Political Science" (HW#14)

Saturday, April 27th – Final paper due by 9 p.m.