

# PHIL 452: Advanced Topics in Ethics Aristotle's Ethics

Spring 2015  
Tu, Th 2:30–3:45

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Office: PAHB 463

Office Hours: Tuesday, 11:45-12:45 and by appt.

Functional Competency Satisfied by this Course: Critical Analysis and Reasoning

## Course Goals:

Aristotle's ethical theory has exerted a profound influence on the history of Western Philosophy. In this course we will aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of his ethics, focusing on its presentation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Central notions we will examine include *eudaimonia* (happiness or human flourishing), *arête* (virtue or excellence), *phronêsis* (practical or moral wisdom), *akrasia* (lack of self-control), *philia* (friendship), and *hêdonê* (pleasure). We will also consider some of the scholarly debate over the interpretation of Aristotle's ethics, and delve into some of the recent literature that takes inspiration from Aristotle (especially so-called 'virtue ethics') or takes up philosophical issues his ethics raises.

## Required Texts:

–*Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* Translated by Terence Irwin, Second Edition (Hackett: 1999) [**NB: You must have this edition**]

–Additional required readings will be posted on Blackboard

## Assignments and Evaluation:

–**Weekly questions: 10%**. Each week, by midnight Monday, you will submit via Blackboard **two** questions that occur to you concerning the upcoming reading for that week. The submission form will be posted in the 'Weekly Questions' folder of the 'Course Documents' section on Blackboard. These questions must be based on a genuine attempt to understand the text. **NB:** In order to receive credit in this portion of the course you must turn in *every* week's questions (so, for example, if you miss a week, the highest grade you can receive in the course is 90%).

–**Papers: 80%** of your grade is based on three papers divided in the following way—40% of your grade is based evenly on two short (3-4 page) papers (due **3/13** and **4/17**) and 40% of your grade is based on one longer (6-8 page) final paper (due **5/20**). **NB:** You must turn in all three papers to receive any credit for this portion of the course (so, for example, if you fail to turn in one of the papers, the highest grade you can receive is 20%).

For the two short papers, topics will be circulated two weeks in advance of the due date. For the final paper, although we will briefly discuss general issues on 4/28, you will come up with your own topic. By **5/7** you will email me the topic you plan to write about in the form of a 1-sentence statement of the main claim you will argue for.

–**Attendance and Participation:** 10% of your grade is based on attendance and participation. Absences will affect your A&P grade as follows (**NB:** showing up more than 10 minutes after class has started or leaving before class finishes, unless approved by me beforehand, will count as an absence):

1-3 absences: 0 points off            4-6 absences: 5 points off

7 or more absences: 10 points off

Note that these are only points for attendance. In order to receive full A&P credit you must not only attend but participate in class discussions. Participation is not simply a function of the amount you speak, but is a matter of being fully prepared for and engaged in the discussion at hand. This crucially involves listening to, thinking about, and responding respectfully to the comments of your classmates.

### Course Policies

–Bring the book to class. Do not use your cell phone in class.

–I will do my best to respond to emails within two days of receiving them (if I do not, please send me a (polite) reminder). Note that if your email is merely informing me of something, I might not respond.

–As noted above, you must turn in *all* weekly question assignments and papers to receive credit for the respective portion of the course

–Papers must be submitted via Blackboard. I will comment and return them via Blackboard as well.

–Extensions will only be granted in extreme circumstances (e.g. prolonged medical illness) for which official documentation *must* be provided.

–Final grades will be converted from a percentage to a letter grade in keeping with standard UMBC policy (with standard rounding of partial percentage points):

100–89.5% = A    89.4–79.5% = B    79.4–69.5% = C    69.4–59.5% = D    59.4–0% = F

–Plagiarism of any kind, **including allowing a fellow student to plagiarize your work**, will result in an F on the relevant assignment, an F for the course and possible reporting to the relevant administrative authorities.

### UMBC Statement of Values for Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. To read the full Student Academic Conduct Policy, consult the UMBC Student Handbook, or the Office of Undergraduate Education.

## Tentative Schedule (alterations will be announced in class)

Listed here are the readings we will be discussing during each session. Although assigned sections are often short, they are difficult, and multiple readings are strongly advised. It should be noted that the following schedule is extremely tentative and will almost certainly be revised on the fly. All numbers refer to Book and Chapter numbers in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (e.g. the reading for 1/29, '1.1–1.6' means *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1, Chapter One through Chapter Six inclusive).

### Week 1

1/27: Introduction and course overview

1/29: 1.1–1.6

### Week 2

2/3: 1.7

2/5: 1.8–1.13

### Week 3

2/10: 2.1–2.4

2/12: 2.5–2.9

### Week 4

2/17: John Doris, 'Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics' (BB)

2/19: Gopal Sreenivasan, 'Errors About Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution'

### Week 5

2/24: Catch up

2/26: 3.1 (**First paper topics distributed**)

### Week 6

3/3: 3.2–3.5

3/5: Gideon Rosen, 'Culpability and Ignorance'

### Week 7

3/10: 3.6–3.9

3/12: 5.1–5.7

**3/13: First paper due by 10 PM**

### Week 8: Spring Break, No Classes

3/17, 3/19: No Class

### Week 9

3/24: 6.1–6.6

3/26: 6.7–6.13

### Week 10

3/31: 7.1–7.3

4/2: 8.1–8.4 (**Second paper topics distributed**)

### Week 11

4/7: 9.9–9.12

4/9: Catch up

### Week 12

4/14: 10.1–10.5

4/16: 10.6–10.9

**4/17: Second paper due by 10 PM**

### Week 13

4/21: Summation of *Nicomachean Ethics*

4/23: Gavin Lawrence, ‘Aristotle and the Ideal Life’ (BB)

### Week 14

4/28: Elizabeth Anscombe, ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’ (BB) (**Final paper topics discussed**)

4/30: Rosalind Hursthouse, ‘Virtue Ethics’ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: available online at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>

### Week 15

5/5: Rosalind Hursthouse, ‘Normative Virtue Ethics’ (BB)

5/7: Julia Driver, ‘A Consequentialist Theory of Virtue’ (BB) (**Final paper topics vetted via email**)

### Week 16

5/12: Retrospective

**5/20: Final paper due by 5:00 PM** (NB: If you would like comments returned to you on this paper, write ‘Please comment’ on the top of your paper)