

# PHIL 139 - FALL 2014

## ETHICS: ARISTOTLE & PLATO

Instructor: Anne Jeffrey  
Email: [aml242@georgetown.edu](mailto:aml242@georgetown.edu)

MW 5-6:15 pm, Maguire 102  
Office Hours: W 12-1 pm; by appt

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

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Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle investigated and developed revolutionary accounts of what it means for human beings to live well. It is tempting to assume that the temporal and cultural distance between these ancient Greek philosophers and us makes their discussions of the good life of little to no relevance to us. But in fact, that distance creates the opportunity for us to step back from our own historical context and look critically at how it shapes our ideas about how we ought to live. Careful attention to the arguments presented in Plato's and Aristotle's texts will shed light on and perhaps even unsettle our judgments about our assumptions about reasons to be moral, authenticity, integrity, character formation, and the nature of friendship.

Much of what we stand to learn from Plato and Aristotle emerges only after serious interpretive work and philosophical reflection. With this in mind, in this course you will learn to:

- Perform close readings of the texts
- Provide arguments for your interpretation of the text
- Read texts charitably, considering the philosophical merits of competing interpretations
- Engage critically with the positions laid out in the text and the author's reasoning for those positions
- Build up critical reasoning skills through discussion with one another

These skills are aimed to help you to appreciate the sorts of questions an account of the good life must answer, as well as to critically evaluate the ideas about living well dominant today.

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### REQUIRED READINGS

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Plato, *The Republic*

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Additional readings will be made available through the library reserve as well as on the course website: <https://sites.google.com/a/georgetown.edu/the-ethics-of-aristotle-and-plato/>

## SOCIAL ACTION TRACK

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For those interested in engaging the ideas we discuss in the classroom with real experience, there is an opportunity to take the Social Action Track of the course. The Social Action Track integrates ideas about justice, psychological health, friendship, and community involvement we will discuss in class with the opportunity to work with underserved and disadvantaged persons in the greater D.C. community. Those who complete 40 hours of service with an organization designated by Georgetown's Center for Social Justice, in addition to orienting the final paper around the community project, will be eligible to earn a fourth credit hour for the course.

## POLICIES

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**Attendance.** I will not keep a record of attendance. However, class participation figures in the final grade; attendance is necessary for participation; thus attendance figures in the final grade. You'll be expected to come to class on time, prepare notes on the readings, and stay home when ill (especially if contagious, out of consideration for others' health).

**Electronics.** Cell phones, tablets, and laptops are not permitted in class unless special arrangements are made with me in advance.

**Late Submissions.** Extensions on papers are available *only if* you make arrangements with me 48 hours in advance. It's best, then, to plan to complete at least a draft of your assignments a couple days before the due date. If you require extra time on assignments, please speak with me at the beginning of the term.

If there is a special circumstance you think may affect your performance in the course, please let me know; it will be kept in strict confidence. I am happy to work with students finding themselves in adverse circumstances. But it is considerably harder to do so fairly if you wait to notify me until after it has negatively impacted your performance.

**Academic Integrity.** Students are responsible for knowing and abiding by Georgetown policies regarding academic integrity. *General guidelines:* If it's a direct quotation, **cite it**. If it's a paraphrase, **cite it**. If it's an idea you got from a discussion with a particular person or from reading a particular source, **cite it**. If you're in doubt about whether it should be cited, **cite it**. The only items that are not cited are those that you think up on your own or that belong to general

knowledge.\* **Plagiarism on any assignment may result in an automatic failure of the course.**

## ASSIGNMENTS

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**Reflection Paper.** The reflection assignment, due at the beginning of the term, is designed to get you thinking about the values and norms we currently associate with a well-lived human life so that you can later compare these ideas with those we will encounter in Plato's and Aristotle's texts.

You will write a **450-600** word reflection on a contemporary assumption about living a good life. In your paper, you should answer three questions clearly and succinctly:

- What is an idea about the good life widely adopted today?
- What is evidence that this assumption is operative today? Give examples
- What rationale might we give for thinking that the assumption is true?

The paper should be turned in via SafeAssign on Blackboard no later than 11:59 pm on Wednesday, 9/3.

**Class Participation.** Excellent class participation is marked by thoughtful and respectful engagement with others in discussion and active involvement in the variety of activities we will perform in class. Engaging *thoughtfully* requires:

- Undivided attention during class
- Preparation for class by reading carefully
- Preparation for class by bringing notes on the readings that help you articulate your questions and thoughts in discussion (occasionally I will collect and mark these notes)

Engaging *respectfully* in discussion involves:

- Taking posture of readiness to learn from instructor and others
- Recognizing the value of your peers' insights and criticisms
- Listening to others' comments
- Responding to or incorporating others' ideas in your comments

**Short Papers.** The short paper assignments provide you an opportunity to develop your critical reading and reasoning skills on paper and give me a chance to assess and offer feedback on ways to improve those skills. For each paper, you will write **800-1000** words on an argument from one of the readings of your choosing. You will be asked to:

- Paraphrase and interpret the argument and its conclusion
- Provide evidence for your interpretation of the argument and its conclusion

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\* I am indebted to Mark Murphy for this suggestion.

- Offer a philosophical evaluation of the argument (for instance, you may develop an objection to one of the premises, analyze the form of the argument, or envision an implication of the argument or its conclusion)

The first paper is due Wednesday, 10/15 and the second paper is due Wednesday, 11/12. Papers are to be turned in via SafeAssign on Blackboard no later than 11:59 pm on the respective due dates.

**Final Paper.** The final paper grade has three components, serving the purposes of the course in an integrated way. The first and final drafts of the paper will require you to exercise techniques you've learned and practiced throughout the course: close reading, textual interpretation, careful philosophical reasoning, and examination of implications for us. The peer comments on the first draft will put to work your skills for reading charitably, evaluating arguments, and engaging constructively with others through philosophical discussion.

*First draft.* You will write a **1450-1600** word paper that uses ideas in one of the texts we've read to offer critical insight on a particular aspect of the conception of a good human life prevalent in today's society. In a successful paper you will do three things:

- Accurately state the thesis from the text and explain arguments for that thesis
- Identify the contemporary idea it challenges, problematizes, modifies, or supports
- Diagnose the contemporary idea you've identified using the textual thesis and arguments for it, comparing and contrasting the ancient and contemporary ideas or rationales

You will turn in the first draft to a fellow student no later than 11:59 pm on Friday, 11/28.

*Peer comments.* You will turn in the first draft of the paper to a fellow student. You will then provide constructive comments on another student's paper, Comments should:

- Summarize the textual interpretation and the evaluative arguments in the paper, showing the author what she or he effectively communicates
- Highlight strengths of the paper
- Raise questions and potential objections to the arguments
- Suggest strategies for improvement

These comments will be turned in to me and to the student whose paper you've reviewed by the last day of class, 12/3, no later than 11:59 pm.

*Final paper.* The final draft of your paper should noticeably incorporate the feedback you have received from your peer commenter. The paper must be

turned in via SafeAssign on Blackboard no later than 11:59 pm on Wednesday, 12/10.

**Assessment.** The final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Reflection paper	5%
Participation	15%
Short paper 1	20%
Short paper 2	20%
Peer comments on final paper	10%
Final paper	30%

### Grading Scale.

A	95-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-94	C	73-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-72
B	83-86	D	60-69
B-	80-82	F	0-59

### **READING SCHEDULE** (\*subject to change; see course website for up-to-date schedule)

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#### **1 WHAT IS JUSTICE?**

8/27 Plato, *Republic*, I

9/3 Plato, *Republic*, I (reread); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Chap 11

\*No class; reflection paper due

#### **2 WHY BE MORAL?**

9/8 Plato, *Republic*, II (357a-368d)

9/10 Plato, *Gorgias*, 523a-527e

#### **3 MORAL PSYCHOLOGY AND THE CITY/SOUL ANALOGY**

9/15 Plato, *Republic*, II (368d-376c), III (404a-412e)

9/17 Plato, *Republic*, IV (427d-445e)

#### **4 KNOWLEDGE AS VIRTUE**

9/22 Plato, *Republic*, I (349b-350d), II (352d-354b, 357a-360e);

9/24 Plato, *Protagoras*, 329b5- 334c5, 349b-361a; *Charmides* 174b-d;  
*Euthydemus* 280b-281b

#### **5 TEACHING VIRTUE**

9/29 Plato, *Protagoras*, 318a-329d3, 339a-349b1, 361a-362a5

10/1 Plato, *Republic*, II (376c3)- III (403c5)

10/6 Plato, *Republic* IV (419a-434c), VI (508a)- VII (541b)

## **6 LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

10/8 Plato, *Symposium* 210a-212e; *Phaedrus* 230a-234e, 237a-257e

10/15 Plato, *Philebus*, TBD  
\*First short paper due

## **7 WHAT IS HAPPINESS?**

10/20 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I

10/22 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.11-14, X.1-8

## **8 MORAL PSYCHOLOGY**

10/27 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.1-5; *De Anima* 402b, 411b, 413b13-32

10/29 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.1-10

## **9 VIRTUE, THE VIRTUES, AND HITTING THE MEAN**

11/3 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13; II.3-9

11/5 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.6-12; IV.1-9

## **10 PRACTICAL REASONING**

11/10 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI

11/12 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI (reread)  
\*Second short paper due

## **11 LEARNING TO BE GOOD**

11/17 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1-2; X.9

11/19 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V

## **12 FRIENDSHIP AND SELF-LOVE**

11/24 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII-IX

11/26 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII-IX (reread); Aristotle, *Politics*, TBD

11/28 \*First draft of final paper due

## **13 RETREIVING ETHICS**

12/1 Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics*, Chapter 7

12/3 Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Chapter 3  
\* Comments on final paper due

12/10 \* Final paper due