

PL120 Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Dr. David Hayes

Course Times: Monday and Wednesday: 17:00-18:30

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10:45-12:15 or by appointment

Course Description

How should a person live? For Aristotle, the answer to this question is that living well and happily involves becoming a certain sort of person, rather than applying universal principles of reason (deontology) or maximizing benefit (consequentialism). More specially, we ought to strive to become persons who possess a character that comprises numerous virtues involving the exercise of both the mind and the emotions.

This class is a close reading of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in its entirety. Some supplementary material from psychoanalytic theory, literature, and film will be offered in order to see what it is like to "fill in" what Aristotle suggests can only be given "in outline." Additionally, and contrarily, we will consider a contemporary philosophic challenge (John Doris) to the viability of any virtue-ethical project.

Requirements

Text: *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Focus Philosophical Library)

It is required to use this translation. You must purchase this text or borrow it from the library.

Course Reader (required to purchase):

D.W. Winnicott "The Development of the Capacity for Concern," "The Capacity to Be Alone"
from *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*

Katherine Mansfield, "The Garden Party"

Benjamin Franklin, from *The Autobiography*

John Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics"

Issac Bashevis Singer, "Zlateh the Goat",

Leo Tolstoy, "The Three Hermits"

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will affect the participation grade for the course. Please consult the Student Handbook for college regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Assessment

This is a discussion class. You should come to class not only having done the reading, but also already having taken time to think about what you have read. I will evaluate class participation according to the following criteria:

- 1) Ready to discuss the reading assignment from the beginning of each class
- 2) Manifestly prepared for each and every class
- 3) Able to connect the discussion in the current class with the discussion in previous classes
- 4) Able to converse with other students about their concerns and to contribute to lines of discussion that other students have initiated
- 5) Quality of contributions
An interesting or important thought matters much more than quantity. Dominating the discussion is a negative. If you have a lot to say, for the sake of the general discussion you may need to exercise some restraint by picking your spots.
- 6) Quality of questions
A good question is also an excellent contribution to a discussion—often even better than a good point.

Writing Assignments

Short paper assignment (x2): Consider (only) one book and chapter of Aristotle's *Ethics*. In one paragraph (only), present what Aristotle is saying as concisely and accurately as possible. Then in one paragraph (only) write what you think about what Aristotle is saying.

Ethical virtue papers: This is an exercise in the imitation of Aristotle's method of articulating a virtue. In the presentation (also graded), you concisely explain your work to the rest of the class.

Final paper topics will be distributed. You may also devise your own topic in consultation with me in person or by email.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Please note the following college policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

Classroom policy

Research has shown that the presence of screens in the classroom is detrimental to learning—not only for those who use the screens, but also for others sitting near them. Therefore, laptops and phones are not permitted in this class. Please put all phones out of sight.

Grade Breakdown

Seminar grade: 25%

Ethical virtue paper: 20%

Ethical virtue presentation: 5%
Short papers x2: 10% each
Final essay (2500 words): 30%

Schedule

Week 1 (Jan30)	M 1.1-5	W 1.6-13
Week 2 (Feb6)	M 2.1-7	W 2.8-9; 3.1-5 (short paper due)
Week 3 (Feb13)	M 3.6-9	W "High Noon" (85 minutes)
Week 4 (Feb20)	M 3.10-12; 4.1	W 4.2-4 & Mansfield
Week 5 (Feb27)	M 4.5-9	W 5.1-11
Week 6 (Mar6)	M Virtue Presentations	W Winnicott
Week 7 (Mar13)	M 6.1-7	W 6.8-13
Week 8 (Mar20)	M Franklin	W 7.1-14
Week 9 (Mar27)	M Doris	W 8.1-8
Week 10 (Apr3)	M 8.9-14	W Singer and Tolstoy
	April 10-17: Spring break	
Week 11		W (Apr19) 9.1-7
Week 12 (Apr24)	M 9.8-12	W 10.1-5
Week 13 (May1)	M: Holiday	W 10.6-9
Week 14 (May8)	M Contemplation	W Final discussion and painting (with Geoff Lehman)

Essay Deadlines

Week 2 W: the first short paper is due. (Turn in a hard copy to me by class time.)
The second short paper is due **at any time** during the semester. (Turn in a hard copy to me.)
Week 6 M: Ethical virtue papers and presentations
A final paper deadline will be made in consultation with the class.