

PHI 501/CLA 519

Location: 201 Marx

Time: Fall 2015, Wednesday 10am-12:50pm

Value, Motivation, and Agency in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

1. Course Description

The course explores central themes in Aristotle's ethics: happiness, motivation, agency, excellence, deliberation, and the nature and subject matter of ethics.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asks "what is the good?". He approaches this question from the perspective of agency. From this perspective, the good is the end, that which motivates action. Activities such as going to the market or studying or swimming aim at some good. They also aim, or so Aristotle argues, at *the* good: the good life. Aristotle envisages agents who are already on board with wanting to get things right. When they aim for a good life, they aim for a life that really is good, not only good by their lights. The task of ethics is to figure out what a good life looks like and what is needed to attain it.

As one thinks through these questions, puzzles about the nature of agency, psychology and motivation, and the sphere in which we act may arise. One may wonder what decisions and pursuits are, and even more basically, what actions are. One may wonder whether the goings-on in human life are necessary or contingent. One may ask to what extent excellence in thinking matters to leading a good life, and how it relates to more familiar excellences, such as justice, courage, and moderation. Along these lines, the course focuses on *Nicomachean Ethics* I, II.1-6, III and VI, combined with some attention to additional sections from the *NE*, other works by Aristotle, and selections from Plato.

Some of the working hypotheses of the class are that *NE* I is under-appreciated by philosophers interested in Aristotle's views on motivation; that Aristotle responds not only to the Plato of the *Republic*, but also engages with the *Philebus*; and that action theory that is inspired by Aristotle focuses too much on small-scale, particular actions, rather than pursuits and aiming to have one's life go well.

2. Requirements

For each class meeting, there's an assigned primary reading as well as recommended secondary literature. Please consult the bibliography at the end of this syllabus for further reading.

Students will have access to chapter drafts of a book I am currently writing, entitled *Desiring the Good: Ancient Proposals and Contemporary Theory*.

Some contemporary readings in ethics and theory of action will be recommended, either because they have shaped scholarship on Aristotle, or because they are inspired by Aristotle.

Students will be given the chance to give brief presentations of 10-15 minutes.

Please consult with the instructor if you are interested in writing a paper.

3. Week-by-Week Plan

Week 1: Agency and the good

NE I.1, selections from Plato on the Socratic Paradox: *Meno* 77a-87c and *Symposium* 199-207.

Katja Maria Vogt, “The Guise of the Good” and “Death, Love, and the Good: The Nature of Pursuits” [chapter drafts from my book manuscript *Desiring the Good*]

Week 2: What is the good?

NE I with special attention to NE I.6.

Christopher Shields, “The *Summum Bonum* in Aristotle’s Ethics,” in: eds. Joachim Aufderheide and Ralf M. Bader, *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Heda Segvic, “Aristotle on the Varieties of Goodness.”

Recommended contemporary reading: Judith J. Thomson, *Normativity* (2008), pp.1-12.

Week 3: What is the good?—continued

EE I.1 (beginning), Plato’s *Philebus* 11a-14b and 64a; selections from Herodotus’s *Histories*; NE I.9-12.

Katja Maria Vogt, “A Blueprint for Ethics,” “The Good is the Good Life.”

Week 4: The function argument, finality and self-sufficiency

NE I.7, I.13; Plato, *Republic* I.335b-335e and 352e-354b; *Meno* 71b-73c, *Philebus* 20b-23b. Rachel Barney, “Aristotle’s Argument for a Human Function.”

John Cooper, “Plato and Aristotle on Finality and Self-Sufficiency.”

John McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics.” In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 23–40.

Week 5: The virtues of character

NE II.1-6 and NE VII.1; NE VI.13 on ‘natural’ virtue.

Myles Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good."

Week 6: Character virtue and conceptions of the good life

NE II.1-6 (again) and *NE* X.6-8.

Sarah Broadie, "On the Idea of the *Summum Bonum*" and "What Should We Mean by 'The Highest Good'?"

John Cooper, "Contemplation and Happiness: A Reconsideration," Chapter 9 in Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*.

John McDowell, "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics."

Week 7: What are actions?

NE III.1

Ursula Coope, "Aristotle on Action."

Week 8: What deliberation is about

NE III.2, 3, 4 and 5 (first sentence)

Heda Segvic, "Deliberation and Choice in Aristotle," in Michael Pakaluk and Giles Pearson (eds.), *Moral Psychology and Human Action in Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Week 9: Excellent deliberation

NE VI.5, 8, 9

John Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986, pp. 1-88.

John McDowell, "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology" and "Deliberation and Moral Development in Aristotle's Ethics."

Week 10: The virtues of thought

NE VI (now all of it); discussion of the excellences of thinking, the role of *techne* (expertise, skill), the relationship between excellent deliberation and other kinds of excellent thinking.

Week 11: An inquiry that aims at leading a good life

NE I.1, *NE* VI.8, *NE* X.9 and *Politics* I.1-2

John Cooper, "Political Community and the Highest Good," in *Being, Nature, and Life, Essays in Honor of Allan Gotthelf*, ed. James Lennox and Robert Bolton (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Week 12: Contingency and the material of ethics

NE I.3, *De interpretatione* 9 on future contingents; *Posterior Analytics* 1.30, *Prior Analytics* 1.13 (32b4-23), and *Metaphysics Theta* 4 on contingency; *Poetics* IX on history and poetry. Marko Malink, selections from *Aristoteles Handbuch* on relevant texts and notions from Aristotle's *Organon*.

Katja Maria Vogt, "The Subject-Matter of Ethics."

4. Readings

Primary Texts

- Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002 (paperback).
- C.D.C. Reeve, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014 (paperback).
- Plato, *Philebus*, translated by Dorothea Frede; either in John Cooper, *Plato, Complete Works*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997, or as individual dialogue published by Hackett.
- Other selections from Plato will be supplied on handouts.

We will work closely with the following monographs and collections of papers:

- Broadie, Sarah. *Ethics with Aristotle*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- *Aristotle and Beyond: Essays in Metaphysics and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Especially: “Aristotle and contemporary ethics,” pp. 113-134; “On the Idea of the Summum Bonum” pp. 135-52; “What Should We Mean by ‘The Highest Good?’” pp. 153-65.
- Cooper, John M. *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986.
- *Reason and Emotion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Pakaluk, Michael and Giles Pearson (eds.). *Moral Psychology and Human Action in Aristotle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Segvic, Heda. Ed. Myles Burnyeat. *From Protagoras to Aristotle: Essays in Ancient Moral Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. Especially: “Aristotle on the Varieties of Goodness” pp. 89-110 and “Aristotle’s Metaphysics of Action,” pp. 111-143.

Introductory articles on SEP:

- “Aristotle” by Christopher Shields (not much on ethics): <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle/>>
- “Aristotle’s Ethics” by Richard Kraut: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/>>
- “Ancient Theories of Soul” by Hendrik Lorenz: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ancient-soul/>>

Secondary literature (including the papers mentioned on the week-by-week schedule):

- Anscombe, Elizabeth. “Modern Moral Philosophy.” (1958).
- *Intention*. (1957).
- Barnes, Jonathan. “Aristotle and the methods of ethics.” *Revue Internationale de la Philosophie*, 34 (1981), pp. 490-511.
- Barney, Rachel. “Aristotle’s Argument for a Human Function.” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 34 (Summer 2008), pp. 293-322.
- “Plato on the Desire for the Good.” In ed. S. Tenenbaum, *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- Burnyeat, Myles. “Aristotle on Learning to be Good.” In ed. Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (1980). 73-92.

- Chiasson, C.C. "The Herodotean Solon." *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 27 (1986), 3: 249-62.
- Coope, Ursula. "Aristotle on Action." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Suppl. Vol. 81 (2007): 109-138.
- Cooper, John. "Political Community and the Highest Good," in *Being, Nature, and Life, Essays in Honor of Allan Gotthelf*, ed. James Lennox and Robert Bolton (Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- "Political Animals and Civic Friendship," in *Aristotle's Politics: Critical Essays*, eds.
- "Aristotelian Responsibility," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Volume 45 (2013). Richard Kraut and Steven Skultety (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).
- Frede, Michael. *A Free Will, Sather Lectures* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011).
- Gröngross, Gösta. "Listening to Reason in Aristotle's Moral Psychology." *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 32 (Summer 2007), pp. 251-72.
- Heinaman, Robert. "Eudaimonia as an Activity in Nicomachean Ethics I.8-12." *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 33 (Winter 2007), pp. 221-54.
- McDowell, John. "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology." In *Mind, Value, and Reality*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, pp. 23-49.
- "Deliberation and Moral Development in Aristotle's Ethics." In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 41-58.
- "Incontinence and Practical Wisdom." In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 59-76.
- "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics." In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 23-40.
- Kraut, Richard. *Aristotle on the Human Good*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- "Doing Without Morality: Reflections on the Meaning of Dein in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics." *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 30 (Summer 2006), pp. 169-200.
- Shields, Christopher. "Goodness is Meant in Many Ways". In G. Rudebusch and J. Hardy (eds.) *Grundlagen der Antiken Ethik / Foundations of Ancient Ethics* (Göttingen: Vanderhoek & Ruprecht, 2012) 185-199.
- "The *Summum Bonum* in Aristotle's Ethics," in: eds. Joachim Aufderheide and Ralf M. Bader, *The Highest Good in Aristotle and Kant*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Velleman, David, *Nous* 26 (1992): 3-26.
- Vogt, Katja Maria [Draft/Manuscript], chapters from *Desiring the Good: Ancient Proposals and Contemporary Theory*.