

Philosophy 103: Philosophy and The Good Life
AC Wagner Correctional Facility, Spring 2013

Instructors:

Daniel Wodak, PhD Student, Princeton University
Sukaina Hirji, PhD Student, Princeton University
Ella Haselswerdt, PhD Student, Princeton University
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Guest Lecturers

Dr. Benjamin Morison (Associate Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University)
Dr. Gideon Rosen (Stuart Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Council of the Humanities at Princeton University)
Dr. Michael Smith (Michael Smith, McCosh Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University)

This course has two central, and interrelated aims. The first aim is to provide an introduction to philosophy and reasoning. It aims to improve students' abilities to read, respond to and compose arguments. The course focusses on this directly by discussing introductory material in logic and critical thinking. The course also focusses on this indirectly, by applying the skills developed to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The second aim is to introduce students to one of the most canonical texts in Western philosophy, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Both the questions Aristotle posed and the answers he offered remain central to contemporary ethical thought: "What is the good life?"; "What is responsibility?"; "What is virtue?"; "What is justice?"; "What are the values of pleasure, friendship and community?"; and perhaps most importantly, "What is the value of philosophy?". Students will also be introduced to more contemporary literature to compare and contrast with Aristotle. Argument analyses, short and long response papers, and a final exam will provide opportunities for students to carefully consider their understanding of Aristotle, develop their own answers to these central ethical questions, and improve their analytical and argumentative writing skills. The importance of these skills goes well beyond the classroom. In Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asks "Will not the knowledge of [the highest good] have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right?"

Grading:

Argument Analyses (5% x 2) and Short Response Essays (5% x 2): 20%
Long Argument Analysis (25%) and Long Response Essay (25%): 50%
Exam: 20%
Class participation: 10%

Week 1: Introduction

- i) What is Philosophy? Course overview.
Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"
- ii) *Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction*, and *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.1-5
Introduction to Aristotle and the central question of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: What is the best life for man?

Week 2: Aristotle I - The Good Life

- i) *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I.6-13; Herodotus *Histories* I.26-34, 84-91
What is the nature of happiness? Virtue and the function argument.
Can our happiness be affected by luck? By what happens after our deaths?
- ii) Thomas Nagel, "Death", from *Mortal Questions* (New York: Cambridge U. Press, 1979) pp. 1-10;
Plato *Republic* X.13-16
Contemporary perspectives on whether death, and events that happen after our deaths, can affect our happiness.

Week 3: Aristotle I (cont)

- i) *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II.1-6; Plato, *Protagoras* 320c1-8d2
How do we become good? The role of habituation, and learning to be good.
The difference between actions performed with a virtuous character and those performed without a virtuous character.

Assignment I Due: Short Argument Analysis

- i) *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II.7-9, Book III.6-Book IV.1-9 and Susan Wolf, "Moral saints", *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (8):419-439 (1982).
How is virtue a mean between extremes? What are examples of virtuous character traits? What is shame?

Week 4: Logic I - Extracting Arguments

- i) *Rulebook for Arguments*, Ch 1-4
Introduction to logic: What is an argument? How to extract an argument?

Assignment II Due: Short Response Essay

- ii) *Rulebook for Arguments*, Ch 6
Deductive arguments and common fallacies; practice extracting an argument

Week 5: Aristotle II - Responsibility and Justice

i) *Nicomachean Ethics* Book III.1-5; Herodotus *Histories* I.8-13

What is a voluntary action? When are we responsible for our actions? What is deliberation?

Assignment III Due: Short Argument Analysis

ii) Guest lecture: Gideon Rosen

Contemporary perspectives on responsibility.

Week 6: Aristotle II (cont)

i) *Nicomachean Ethics* Book V, Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War* V.84-116

What is justice? Justice in distribution, in punishment and in exchanges. What is political justice? The nature of natural and legal justice. Is it possible to be just or unjust to oneself?

(ii) Michael Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (excerpt)

Contemporary perspectives on justice.

Week 7: Logic II - Constructing Arguments

i) *Rulebook for Arguments*, Ch 5, 7

Varieties of argument forms. Causal arguments and complex arguments.

Assignment IV Due: Long Argument Analysis

ii) *Rulebook for Arguments*, Ch 8; Jim Pryor, "How to Write a Philosophy Paper"

How to build an argument, and how to write an essay; in class assignment

Week 8: Aristotle III - Rationality

i) *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VI

Practical wisdom and the virtues of thought. What is the relationship between the rational and non-rational parts of the soul.

ii) Guest lecturer: Ben Morison. *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VII.1-12, BkX.1-5

Can we act against what we know to be best? The nature of "akrasia" and the role of temperance. Two sorts of pleasure, and the place of pleasure in the happy life.

Week 9: Aristotle III (continued)

i) Guest Lecture: Michael Smith

Contemporary philosophical perspectives on rationality.

Assignment V Due: Short Response Essay

- ii) Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, fast and slow* (excerpts)
Contemporary psychological perspectives on rationality.

Week 10: Logic III - Dialectic

- i) Entering a debate. Engaging with objections.
- ii) *Rulebook for Arguments*, Ch 9
Practice public speaking and making oral arguments; in class debate practice

Week 11: Aristotle IV - The Best Life

- i) *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VIII-IX
Why is friendship so valuable? What are the different sorts of friendship? Is there friendship in a political community?

Assignment VI Due: Long Response Essay

- ii) Julia Annas, "Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism," *Mind*, Vol. 86, No. 344 (1977), pp. 532-554.
Classical and contemporary philosophical perspectives on friendship.

Week 12: Aristotle IV (cont)

- i) *Nicomachean Ethics* Book X.6-9
Is philosophy the happiest life? What is the role of luck in a happy life? Why does moral education matter for politics?
- ii) Fred Feldman, "Disgusting Happiness", from *What is This Thing Called Happiness?*, Oxford University Press (2010).
Contemporary philosophical perspectives on the relationship between virtue, pleasure and happiness.

Week 13

- i) Course overview.
Reviewing the course material so far. Answering final questions.
- ii) Preparing for the exit essay.
In class outlining exercises. Final questions on revisions and the exit essay.

Week 14

- i) **EXIT ESSAY** (in class)
- ii) **MAKE-UP EXIT ESSAY** (in class) and final revisions due.

Assignments

Assignment I - Short Argument Analysis

You will be assigned a short argumentative passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In at least one page,

- Identify the conclusion of the argument and write it in your own words. Remember, this should be a full sentence.
- Identify the premises and write each of them in your own words. Be sure to write these in full sentences.
- Write a paragraph responding to the argument. Do the premises seem true to you? Do the premises support the conclusion?

Assignment II - Short Response Essay

You will be given a short, provocative statement, such as, “Death is not bad for the person who dies.” You must write a short essay (at least one page) either arguing for or against this statement.

Your essay must include an introductory paragraph, three paragraphs detailing the three strongest arguments for your position, and a concluding paragraph.

Assignment III - Short Argument Analysis

You will be assigned a short argumentative passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In at least one page,

- Identify the conclusion of the argument and write it in your own words. Remember, this should be a full sentence.
- Identify the premises and write each of them in your own words. Be sure to write these in full sentences.
- Write a paragraph responding to the argument. Do the premises seem true to you? Do the premises support the conclusion?

Assignment IV - Long Argument Analysis

You will be assigned a long (two or three page) argumentative passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In at least three pages,

- Identify the main conclusion of this argument. Write it in your own words.
- Identify the premises of the main argument and write each of them in your own words.
- Find a sub-argument for one of the premises. Write the conclusion of this sub-argument and each of its premises in your own words.
- Find a sub-argument for a different premise. Write the conclusion of this sub-argument and each of its premises in your own words.
- Write a paragraph responding to the main argument. Do the premises seem true? Are the premises that seem false supported by sub-arguments? Do the premises support the main conclusion?

Assignment V - Short Response Essay

You will be given a short, provocative statement, such as, “Death is not bad for the person who dies.” You must write a short essay (at least one page) either arguing for or against this statement.

Your essay must include an introductory paragraph, three paragraphs detailing the three strongest arguments for your position, and a concluding paragraph.

Assignment VI - Long Response Essay

You will be given a two to three page argumentative passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In at least three pages, you must do three things: reconstruct Aristotle’s argument in this passage, critique Aristotle’s argument, and provide your own arguments either for or against Aristotle’s conclusion.

Your essay must include an introductory paragraph, paragraphs presenting Aristotle’s argument in your own words, paragraphs critically evaluating Aristotle’s argument, paragraphs presenting your own arguments either for or against Aristotle’s conclusion, and a concluding paragraph.