

# Aristotle and the Good Life: Syllabus

**Instructor: Christopher Young**

**Course website:** <http://www.chrisyoung.net/teaching>

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**Available by appointment (just ask!)**

## Readings

- The following texts are available at the campus bookstore. They are all required.

1. Author: Aristotle.

Translator: Terence Irwin

Title: Nicomachean Ethics, 2nd Ed.

Publisher: Hackett

Edition: 2nd Ed. Paperback

**ISBN:**0872204642

2. Author: Aristotle

Title: Nicomachean Ethics

Translator: Christopher Rowe

Introduction and Commentary by: Sarah Brodie

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Edition: Paperback

**ISBN:**0198752717

3. Author: Aristotle

Title: Eudemian Ethics: Books I, II, and VIII (Clarendon Aristotle Series)

Translator: Michael Woods

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Edition: Second edition, paperback

**ISBN:**0198240201

- Please note that you will need to buy both translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- I may assign one or two scholarly papers at some point in the semester, but almost all of our reading in

the course will be from the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*.

- I strongly prefer that you avoid any other outside reading. Aristotle is very difficult, but I want you to grapple with the text by yourself. If you are stuck, we can use class discussion to try to sort things out. You may, if you like, read the commentaries that come with the translations. But this is not expected.
- You are expected to come to class having read the assigned material thoroughly. It is not enough to read the material once, even if you read it very carefully. You should spend the semester re-reading these two works.

## **Course Description**

- The course is divided into seven main sections:
  - I. Introductory Material
  - II. Happiness
  - III. Virtue
  - IV. Action and Decision
  - V. Pleasure
  - VI. Love and Friendship
  - VII. Retrospective - the Main Themes of the Ethical Writings Revisited.

We won't follow the strict order of the ethical writings. Please see the *Readings and Assignments* handout for details. We'll be working our way through the items listed on the handout at roughly the pace of an item for each class. But we'll see how things go. You should check the class website for updates regularly.

## **Grading and Assignments**

- Course work consists of:
  - I. a Term Paper, including a proposal and two major drafts (30% of your final grade);
  - II. five Short Assignments (50% of your final grade);
  - III. peer-Review Reports (10% of your final grade);
  - IV. participation (10% of your final grade).

### **I. The Term Paper**

- Term Paper deadlines are as follows:
  - First appointment with me to settle on a topic: Before February 14th.
  - Proposal: February 28th
  - First draft: Due March 30th

—Second draft: Last day of Classes.

- Your paper must not be late. Late papers (without a valid medical excuse) will be penalized. It is better to have handed in something imperfect than never to have handed in anything at all!
- Your Term Paper Proposal should be about 4 pages. In it, you should outline your proposed project and indicate where you think the main work needs to be done.
- We should meet at least 3 times in the semester: once to help you choose a topic, and then after I've seen the proposal and first draft. Of course, I am also available to meet other times.
- Your term paper should focus on some area of interest in Aristotle's ethics. You should consider two main questions in connection with your topic: What is Aristotle's view, exactly? And: Is Aristotle right? (And of course he might be partly right about something.) You'll need to define your topic narrowly enough that it is manageable, but broadly enough that it is philosophically interesting. Don't panic: We'll spend plenty of time in class and in meetings talking about how to do this.
- There is no strict length requirement for your term paper. Obviously it needs to be long enough to reflect a lot of hard work and thought about your subject, but it needn't be a massive magnum opus that I have trouble carrying home. If you feel more comfortable with clear guidelines, aim for something around 15 pages.

## **II. Short Assignments**

- See the *Readings and Assignments* handout for details.

## **III. Peer-Review Reports**

You will be asked to mark the work of other students as part of your grade. We'll discuss details in class.

## **IV. Participation**

You can get a decent participation grade (B-range) just by showing up and staying awake. You can get a good participation grade (A-range) by showing up, staying awake, and participating in class discussions. Unexplained (e.g., without a doctor's note) lateness or absence counts heavily against your participation grade and, if serious enough, will result in a C- or D-range grade.

## A Few Statements Regarding University Policies

A Statement on University policies and regulations<sup>1</sup>: “This instructor respects and upholds University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired student; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor.”

A Statement about Plagiarism<sup>2</sup>: Plagiarism is the misrepresentation -intentional or not – of someone else’s work as one’s own. Students will be held responsible for plagiarism, including both deliberate plagiarism and the sort that results from sloppy work habits. Students should also be aware (and should warn fellow students considering plagiarism) that plagiarism is surprisingly easy to detect. Punishments vary but typically include failure in the course and a permanent mark in a student’s record. I am always available to discuss your concerns about plagiarism. For more on plagiarism, see the sections in Cornell’s *Policy Notebook* on the ‘Code of Academic Integrity’ and ‘Acknowledging the Work of Others.’ The *Code of Academic Integrity* is available on the Web at:  
<http://www.cornell.edu/UniversityFaculty/docs/mail.html>

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1 From: “A Jump Start for New Instructors of First-Year Writing Seminars,” p. 5.

2 Adapted from *ibid.* p. 5.