

How to Live Well: Reading Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Spring 2024 | Class #: 29748
IDH2930 | Honors, (Un)Common Reads

Time and Location

Thursday, Period 4 (10:40 am - 11:30 am)
Little Hall, 0117

Instructor

Prof. David McPherson
davidmcperson@ufl.edu
Office Hours: Thursday, 2-3:30 pm, and by appointment.
Location: Computer Science and Engineering Building (CSE) E 572.

Description

What does it mean to live well as human beings? In this course we will explore this question through engagement with Aristotle's classic work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This text is arguably the greatest philosophical account of the ethical life. Interestingly, however, it begins not with a discussion of our moral duties but with a reflection on the human quest for happiness. Aristotle says that everything we do seems to seek some ultimate end, and most people would agree that what we seek is happiness, and they "suppose that living well and doing well are the same as being happy" (I.4, 1095a18-19). But people disagree in their understandings of happiness. Some think it consists in pleasure, others in honor or social status, others in wealth or in some combination of these elements. Aristotle's bold thesis is that true happiness is found rather in the life of virtue, where this includes both the virtues of character (courage, temperance, generosity, justice, etc.) and the virtues of intellect (practical wisdom, theoretical wisdom, etc.). More specifically, the claim is that virtue is constitutive of our happiness (that is, virtue is its own reward), where happiness is understood as a normatively higher, noble, more fulfilling form of life.

We will consider Aristotle's argument for this thesis, known as the "function argument," which maintains that the good of something is found in performing its function or characteristic activity well, and for human beings this means that our good is found in living well as rational social animals, which Aristotle fills out through his accounts of the virtues of character and the virtues of intellect. We will explore these accounts and how he thinks these virtues can be acquired. We will also consider the role of luck in human well-being, examining Aristotle's view that while virtue is necessary for happiness it may not always be sufficient. Furthermore, we will explore the problem of weakness of will (or lack of self-control) and how this can be addressed. Additionally, we will explore how our good is tied to the good of others through examining Aristotle's account of the role of justice and friendship in human well-being. Finally, we will examine and assess what to many contemporary readers seems like Aristotle's most controversial claim, namely, that

contemplation is the best, most fulfilling activity in human life. In exploring all of these ideas, we will be concerned to consider their relevance for our lives today.

Required Text

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2014)
Paperback ISBN: 978-1624661174

Course Schedule

Jan. 11	Introduction
Jan. 18	Book I.1-7, pp. 2-11; Book X.9, pp. 190-5
Jan. 25	Book I, pp. 11-20.
Feb. 1	Book II, pp. 21-34.
Feb. 8	Book III, pp. 35-56.
Feb. 15	Book IV, pp. 57-76
Feb. 22	Book V, pp. 77-97.
Feb. 29	[In-class midterm]
Mar. 7	Book VI, pp. 98-112.
Mar. 21	Book VII, pp. 113-35
Mar. 28	Book VIII, pp. 135-55
Apr. 4	Book IX, pp. 156-74
Apr. 11	Book X.1-8, 175-190
Apr. 18	[In-class final]

Grading

Assignment	Due Date	Value
Participation	All term	40%
Midterm Exam	Feb. 29th	30%
Final Exam	April 18th	30%

I. Attendance and Participation (40%)

This is a text-focused, discussion-based seminar. You should come to class on time and fully prepared to discuss the assigned reading for the week. Your participation grade comprises both active class participation and the submission of written reading reflections:

1. 20% of your grade is based on class participation. An exemplary participant shows evidence of having completed the assigned reading before each class, consistently offers thoughtful points and questions for discussion, and listens respectfully to other students and the instructor. Half of your participation grade depends on being present and respectful in class, and half of it depends on your coming to class having carefully read the assigned text.

2. 20% of your grade depends on the submission, once a week, of a reading reflection. Reading reflections should be around 250-300 words in length (though they can go beyond that) and demonstrate close engagement with the text, including at least one quotation from the text with page number(s) (though this will not be included in word count). Reading reflections should be posted to our Canvas discussion board by the night before class each week (so, Wednesday before midnight); no credit will be given for late submissions. Students should be prepared to discuss their reading reflections during class time. Reading reflections are only due in weeks when there is assigned reading. All written work will be checked for plagiarism, including AI usage.

Class participation involves regular and timely attendance. Students are allowed one free unexcused absence during the semester; any further unexcused absences will result in a 5 point deduction from your *overall course grade*. Please see the Attendance Policy below for further details on excused absences. Students are expected to be present, engaged, and respectful towards the professor and fellow students. Please avoid cell phone use, and please do not eat in class.

II. Midterm Exam (30%)

The midterm exam will be an in-class, closed-book written exam comprised of short answer questions.

III. Final Exam (30%)

The final exam will be an in-class, closed-book written exam comprised of short answer questions.

A minimum grade of B is required to earn Academic points towards your Honors Completion Requirements. (Exception: Honors Quest I and II sections require a C). Once you have earned your final grade in this course, please upload the course information and final grade from your Unofficial Transcript into your Honors Canvas Cohort: Honors Completion module to earn Honors Completion credit.

A Note on Technology

To avoid distractions, please silence your phone and put it away during class. Unapproved/inappropriate phone use in class will affect your participation grade for the day.

In the interest both of a productive and engaged discussion, and of protecting your own focus, I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand and keep all technology use to a minimum. However, I understand that some students may need to use a laptop to take notes. If you plan to use a laptop in class, please avoid Internet use, and use your laptop only for note-taking. Inappropriate laptop or tablet use will affect your participation grade.

Attendance Policy

Class attendance and participation are expected, and are an important part of your final grade. One free unexcused absence per semester is allowed; any further unexcused absences will result in a 5 point reduction in your overall final grade. Excused absences are permitted consistent with university policies in the undergraduate catalog (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>). Students requesting an excused absence should email the instructor as soon as possible and may be asked to provide supporting documentation of the reason for their absence.

Make-up dates for in-class exams will only be allowed in the event of a documented illness or emergency. Students should contact the professor as early as possible to make arrangements.

Students Requiring Accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

UF Evaluations Process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/> , 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

The Writing Studio

The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 2215 Turlington Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

Honors Program

Contact: Honors Program, 201 Walker Hall, 352-392-1519

Quick questions for an Honors advisor? Email advisor@honors.ufl.edu

Need an Honors advising appointment? Schedule via Microsoft Bookings:
<https://bit.ly/ufhonorsadvising>