

Winter 2016

PHIL 454: Ancient Moral Theory

Topic: Reason, Desire and Action. Aristotle, Stoicism, Epicureanism

PHIL 454: Tuesday-Thursday: 1:05 PM-2:25 PM, Leacock Building 110

Professor Gaëlle Fiasse

<http://www.mcgill.ca/philosophy/people/faculty/fiasse>

Contacting me

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Office hours (Leacock 940): after class meetings and by appointment at scheduled times of mutual convenience

Topic:

Can we separate reason from desire? Do we really have to suppress our passions in order to be moral? What is the role of experience in leading an ethical life?

While some philosophers want to separate reason from emotions, passions, feelings or desires, Aristotle defines ethical choice as an intellect which desires (*noûs orektikos*) or a desire which understands (*orexis dianoêtikê*). We will analyze the correlation between desire and reason, by focusing closely on the ethics of Aristotle. While Aristotle will be our major point of reference, we will also pay attention to the control of the passions in Stoicism, and the roles of pleasure and desire in Epicureanism. Through the theme of reason, desire and action, we will revisit the notion of happiness in ancient philosophy, the role of pleasure, the distinctions made between different desires, the correlation between the activity and its determination, the definition of a voluntary action, the relationship between reason and what is external to it, and ultimately the particular role of friendship.

Electronic equipments are not permitted in lectures

All computers, mobile phones, web-accessible electronic devices (IPads, etc.) must be turned off during the class period and stored. Exceptions will only be made with an official note from the student disabilities office.

Evaluation:

Class Participation	10%	
One four-page assignment (double-spaced)	20%	Feb. 4
One seven-page research paper (double-spaced)	40%	March 22
One four-page assignment (double-spaced)	30%	April 14

Required textbooks (available at McGill Bookstore, and on reserve at the library):

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. T. Irwin, Cambridge: Hackett, 1999.
- Epictetus, *The Handbook (The Encheiridion)*, transl. N.P. White, Cambridge: Hackett, 1983.
- Course Pack

I recommend Terrence Irwin's translation and edition of the *Nicomachean Ethics* for the quality of the translation. Irwin's edition also contains interesting endnotes, a glossary and a bibliography.