

Fall 2017

PHIL 454: Ancient Moral Theory
Topic: Reason, Desire and Action. Aristotle, Stoicism, Epicurus

PHIL 454: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:35 to 12:55
Arts -20
Professor Gaëlle Fiasse
<http://www.mcgill.ca/philosophy/people/faculty/fiasse>

Contacting me

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Office hours (Leacock 940): 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 dianoêtikè*). 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 in-class test	20%	Sept. 28
One seven-page research paper (double-spaced)	40%	Nov. 7
One four-page assignment (double-spaced)	30%	Nov. 30

Details for the evaluation:

Class Participation, 10%

Participation includes attendance, readings of the texts (such as announced on the syllabus), preparation of particular questions, quality of group discussions, and active discussion in class when appropriate. Each student thus needs to bring the readings to class in order to be able to answer the questions. For group discussions, special attention will be paid to the role of the speaker and to the quality of the written answers.

One In-class test, 20%

The In-class test is based on the lectures and on the readings. It is a "closed-book" examination. The in-class test will test your understanding of a part of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The questions will reflect those questions raised and discussed during the lectures. The in-class test will not be postponed.

One seven-page research paper, 40%

Hardcopy in class at 11:35 and electronic version posted on Mycourse .docx or PDF, times 12, double-spaced.

The research paper will evaluate your understanding of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and your ability to think critically about it.

The marking criteria are the use of primary sources with proper citation of sources, analytical rigour (clarity of argument, logic, precision), personal reflection, structure of essay (logic and clarity), sentence mechanics (grammar and spelling), scholarship (choice of bibliography, quality of research: at least one article or book chapter).

One four-page assignment, 30%

Hardcopy in class at 11:35 and electronic version posted on Mycourse .docx or PDF, times 12, double-spaced.

This assignment will test your understanding of Epicurus and Stoicism, and might include a comparison with Aristotle. It will be based on all the readings in the course pack.

Late submissions

Late papers will be penalized by 1/3 of a grade per day (e.g. from a B to a B-, etc.). The hardcopy is the official submission of the paper. The electronic version on Mycourses must be absolutely the same as the hardcopy. The electronic version is mandatory but it is not a substitute for the hardcopy, which is due in class.

Academic Integrity

Not mentioning your sources, published or unpublished, constitutes an act of plagiarism. For instance, if you use a website without due reference in the text and in the bibliography; if you use a paper written by another (ideas or words of someone else), without making any reference to the author; if you quote a book or a paper as a reference of your own, without having read it; if you use your own work submitted for another class.

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/integrity).

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability please contact me to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would be helpful for you to contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 398-6009 (online at <http://www.mcgill.ca/osd>) before you do this.

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

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd edition, transl. T. Irwin, Cambridge: Hackett, 1999.
ISBN : 978-0-87220-464-5
- Epictetus, *The Handbook (The Encheiridion)*, transl. N.P. White, Cambridge: Hackett, 1983.
ISBN : 978-0-915145-69-0
- 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.

