

Political Science 5393: Advanced Seminar in Political Philosophy
Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Instructor: Professor Mary P. Nichols

Course overview:

Aristotle argues at the outset of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that political science is the comprehensive science because it aims at the highest human good. It is this good that he explores in the *Ethics*, as he discusses happiness, the moral and intellectual virtues, self-restraint, friendship, and contemplation. His treatment of the virtues raises the question of how the different virtues are related to one another, and how the various components of human happiness fit together. Aristotle designates the subject matter of political science as “the noble” and “the just,” but his analyses of several of the virtues, for example, magnanimity, indicate that there may be a tension between the two that plagues human and political life, and even calls into the question his famous statement that human beings are political by nature. Moreover, Aristotle presents friendship as holding together the political community at a variety of levels, from the friendship between members of the family, business associates, and fellow citizens. What is the relation between justice and the demands of friendship? How do statesman—who should encourage friendship, according to Aristotle—and citizens negotiate what looks like the sometimes conflicting obligations imposed by justice and friendship? Does Aristotle suggest that political life is ultimately a tragic endeavor, or does he hold out the possibility of successfully controlling political life for sake of human happiness? Finally, Aristotle’s discussion near the end of the text of divine-like contemplation raises the question of whether human fulfillment is found in community with others or in solitary pursuits. What is the implication of this question for Aristotle’s political science?

Goals and Objectives:

This course gives graduate students with background in political philosophy the opportunity for an in-depth study of a major thinker or text.

The principal aims of this course are:

1. to give students the chance to undertake concentrated work on a thinker, text, or theme
2. to prepare students for undertaking the research and writing of a thesis or dissertation
3. to produce a major paper that might be developed into a conference paper

Course requirements:

Two papers, the first 8-10 pages, the second 12-15 pages long

Students are expected to be thoroughly familiar with the weekly assignments, and come to class with questions and observations that will contribute to discussion. In accordance with Baylor’s attendance policy, a student who misses more than 25% of the scheduled classes, automatically fails the course

Grade Scale:

100-94 = A	93-90 = A-	89-87 = B+	86-84 = B	83-80 = B-
79-77 = C+	76-74 = C	73-70 = C-	70-61 = D	61-0 = F

Required Texts:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Focus Publishing)

Ronna Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates on the Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago, 2008)

Recommended Texts

Susan D. Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship* (Cambridge, 2006) (readings will be on blackboard)

Aristide Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) (readings will be on blackboard)

Assignments:

Week 1: August 25-27: Approaches to reading Aristotle's *Ethics*

Tessitore, introduction and chapter 1

Burger, introduction and chapter 1, pp. 13-36

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, chs. i-vii.

Week 2 (September 1-3): Political Science and Happiness

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, chs. viii-xiii.

Burger, chapter 1, pp. 36-43

Week 3 (September 8-10): Freedom, Choice, and Moral Virtue

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books II and III, chapters 1-5

Recommended: Burger, chapter 2

Week 4 (September 15-17): Courage and Moderation, Nobility and Happiness

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III, chapter 6-12

Recommended: Burger, ch. 3, pp. 69-82; and Collins, ch. 2, pp. 47-58

Lee Ward, "Nobility and Necessity: The Problem of Courage in Aristotle's

Nicomachean Ethics," *American Political Science Review* (March 2001) 95:71-83

Week 5 (September 22-24): Magnanimity and Political Life

Nicomachean Ethics, Book IV, chapters 1-4

Recommended: Burger, ch. 3, pp. 82-87; Collins, ch. 2, pp. 58-66, and Tessitore, ch. 2, pp. 25-34

Week 6 (Sept. 29-Oct. 1): The Social Virtues, Shame, and Righteous Indignation

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IV, chapters 5-9

Recommended: Collins, ch. 6 (blackboard)

Burger, ch. 3, pp. 87-92, and "Ethical Reflection and Righteous Indignation:

Nemesis in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy IV*, ed, John P. Anton and Anthony Preuss (SUNY, 1994): 127-39. (blackboard)

Week 7 (October 6-8): Justice and the Political Community

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, chs. 1-7

Recommended: Burger, ch. 3, pp. 92-102; Collins, ch. 3, pp.67-80

Week 8 (October 13-15): Politics and Tragedy

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, chapters 8-11

Recommended: Collins, ch. 3, pp. 80-90; Burger, ch. 3, 102-105; Tessitore, ch. 2, pp. 35-41

FIRST PAPER DUE October 16

Week 9 (October 20-22): Prudence, Political Knowledge, and Wisdom

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI

Recommended: Collins, ch. 4, pp. 91-102; Tessitore, ch. 2, pp. 42-50; Burger, ch. 4

Week 10 (October 27) (no class on Oct. 29): Virtue, Pleasure, and Freedom Revisited

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII

Recommended: Burger, ch. 5; Tessitore, ch. 3, pp. 51-72

Week 11 (November 3-5), Self-Restraint (continued), and Friendship

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII

Week 12 (November 10-12), Friendship, continued

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII and IX

Recommended: Burger, ch. 6

Week 13 (November 17-19): Friendship, continued

Recommended: Tessitore, ch.. 4

Week 14 (November 24) (Thanksgiving): Happiness and Contemplative Life

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, chapters 1-8

Recommended: Burger, ch. 7

Week 15 (December 1-3): The Turn to the *Politics*

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, chapter 9

Recommended: Tessitore, ch. 5 and conclusion

FINAL PAPER DUE: December 8