

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
PHL 415.201
M, 6-9 pm
O'Connell 250

Sean D. Kirkland
2352 N. Clifton, 150.31
Office Hours: W 12-2, & by appt.
skirkla1@depaul.edu

Topic

In this class, we will read together Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in its entirety. We will begin in the first meeting by posing the question of whether or not what Aristotle sets out in this text is a "tragic" ethic, a question that we will draw from and clarify on the basis of a few passages in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Having done so, we will then simply read through the *Ethics*, taking a phenomenological approach to the task of interpretation.

Taking a 'phenomenological' approach means nothing terribly technical, abstruse, or mysterious. Indeed, it means simply that we will take Aristotle at his word, which is to say, as a practitioner of *dialektikê* and thus as a student of *endoxa*, these being understood as the *phainomena* or 'appearances' of a given subject matter to everyone, to most, or to the wise. Indeed, Aristotle's confidence in this method indicates that these are taken as always the appearances of *something*. In other words, there are no 'mere appearances,' and no quasi-Cartesian subject/object relation that brings with it the possibility of radical subjective deception or isolation from 'what is.' For Aristotle, appearances are where we start when we seek to understand our world, and this alone shows him to be a thinker of a (to us) unfamiliar stripe—a manifestly non-modern thinker. As we read and attempt to think along with him, we will remind ourselves of this fact, and thus of the intellectual distance that both separates us from and (via the tradition we inherit) still binds us to Aristotle today. We will hope to avoid thereby the egregious anachronism of those interpretations that locate Cartesian and post-Cartesian problems in Aristotelian ethical thought. To be sure, it is precisely by getting back to an original and emphatically ancient Aristotle that we will discover a thinker with some illuminating contributions to make to the contemporary philosophical discussion of ethical and political issues.

Required Text: Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. J. Sachs (Newburyport, MA, 2002).
Recommended Text: A.O. Rorty, ed. *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley, 1980).

Schedule (subject to change)

| | |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1.9 : Introduction (<i>EN</i> Book I) | |
| 1.16 : <i>EN</i> Book I | 2.13 : <i>EN</i> Book VI |
| 1.23 : <i>EN</i> Book II | 2.20 : <i>EN</i> Book VI |
| 1.30 : <i>EN</i> Book III | 2.27 : <i>EN</i> Book VII |
| 2.6 : <i>EN</i> Book IV & V | 3.5: <i>EN</i> Book VIII & IX |
| | 3.12 : <i>EN</i> Book X |

Grade

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Class Presentation (30 min.) | 20% |
| Paper (12 pages) | 60% (DUE Friday 3.16, 5 pm) |
| Attendance and Participation | 20% |

If any student has any condition that might interfere with his or her timely completion of the assignments, please let me know and I will be happy to make arrangements.