I. Purpose and Scope

What is noble? What is human excellence? What are citizen and political excellence? Are these things mutually compatible and internally coherent? What are their prerequisites, and how can they be achieved? Do human beings really act freely, or is our behavior determined by our natures or our early education? What is the basis of morality, and what is the relation between morality and intellectual or spiritual virtue? between morality and happiness? between intellectual virtue and happiness? What is the best life for a human being? These questions, each of which is of decisive importance to both the individual and society, are addressed in intricate, illuminating, and sometimes paradoxical detail in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, which we will study with great care. Aristotle’s perspective is in some ways familiar and in other ways alien to us. Yet even what is alien—in part because it is alien—is fresh and illuminating. The *Ethics* offers much on first reading and is in this sense more accessible than some of Aristotle’s other works. But it is also a multifaceted and multi-layered (and therefore difficult) book, and one that rewards careful and renewed study.

II. Course Requirements

By far the most important requirement is that you read all assigned passages closely and before class. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is one of those great philosophic works which, although difficult to penetrate, nevertheless offers much to the first-time reader. But it offers even more to the persistent reader, so you are advised to read the assignments more than once. Grades will be based on three 6-8 page papers (30% each) and class participation (10%).

III. Academic Honesty

Strict standards of academic integrity will be upheld in this class. Your submission of written work means that your work is your own, that it is in accord with Carleton’s regulations on academic integrity (it is your responsibility to read “Academic Honesty in the Writing of Essays and Other Papers”), and that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Students who are found to have violated these standards should expect severe sanctions.

IV. Assigned Text

The only required reading in this course is the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Be sure to purchase the translation by Joe Sachs (Focus Publishing), which is available at the bookstore. I selected the Sachs translation for its literalness, which is the primary virtue for any translation of a philosophic work. Literalness isn’t the only virtue for a translation, though. Those who wish to
consult an alternative translation for the sake of greater clarity should consult Martin Ostwald’s
translation (Macmillan).

V. Secondary Reading

You are not required to read anything but the assigned text, and you should always read Aristotle
before looking at any interpretive work. For those interested, however, I have made the
following studies available. Each is on Closed Reserve, with the exception of Bartlett’s article,
which is on eReserve:


Robert Bartlett, “Aristotle’s Introduction to the Problem of Happiness: On Book I of the

Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins, eds., Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and
Political Thought of Aristotle.


John M. Cooper, Reason and Human Good in Aristotle.

Richard Kraut, Aristotle on the Human Good.

Carnes Lord and David O’Connor, eds., Essays on the Foundations of Aristotelian Political
Science.

Lorraine Pangle, Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship.


Leo Strauss, The City and Man.

________, Natural Right and History.

Aristide Tessitore, Reading Aristotle’s Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy.
VI. Class Schedule

All reading assignments are from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Note that this is an *approximate* schedule. We may depart from it if and when class discussion so requires.

January 3: Introduction

January 5: Book I, chapters 1-5

January 7: Book I, chapters 6-13

January 10: Book I, continued

January 12: Book II

January 14: Book II, continued

January 17: Book III, chapters 1-5

January 19: Book III, chapters 6-12

January 21: Book III, continued

January 24: Book IV, chapters 1-3

January 26: Book IV, chapters 4-9

**FIRST PAPER DUE THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 5:00 PM**

January 28: Book IV, continued

January 31: Book V, chapters 1-5

February 2: Book V, chapters 6-11

February 4: No class

February 7: No class—midterm break

February 9: Book V, continued

February 11: Book VI
February 14: Book VI, continued

February 16: Book VII, chapters 1-10

SECOND PAPER DUE THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 5:00 PM

February 18: Book VII, chapters 11-14

February 21: Book VII, continued

February 23: Book VIII

February 25: Book VIII, continued

February 28: Book IX

March 2: Book IX, continued

March 4: Book X, chapters 1-5

March 7: Book X, chapters 6-9

March 9: Book X, continued

THIRD PAPER DUE MONDAY, MARCH 14, 5:00 PM