CHOOSING THE GOOD LIFE: A CLASSICAL INTRODUCTION
aka "The Roots of Western Ethics"

CLAS 365E (Fall 2014) (CRN 74721)
Class meetings: MWF 2:10-3 PM, LA 342
Instructor: Hayden W. Ausland (Classics/FLL; office: LA 424 Phone: 243-2125)
Office Hours: TBA

The nature of this course. We shall be reading, discussing, and writing about a selection of classical works bearing on the moral formation of character as the basis for a good life. I shall devote some class time to introducing factual material; other times will feature discussions for which members of the class will bear some responsibility. In either case, the real teachers for this class will be our primary texts, and we thus have the obligation to get to know them and discuss them with one another in a responsible manner. I may often take the lead, but the "first" students in the class will characteristically spur conversation with questions and in this way encourage all other students to participate. Evaluation will be according to definite criteria (set forth in detail overleaf).

(Ethics and Human Values) This course familiarizes students with the Western tradition of ethical thought. It rigorously presents the basic concepts and forms of reasoning that define and distinguish this tradition. Its focus is on both the Greek and the Roman origins of this tradition, and it examines these by tracing several concepts (e.g. justice and the good life) as conceptualized within these phases in our tradition.

Anticipated schedule of readings, topics for consideration, and writing deadlines

Week 1 Introduction; Aesop, The Complete Fables (Penguin ed.)
Our tradition of moral understanding; its reflection in fable

Weeks 2-3 Homer, Iliad
Mythological moral exempla on an epic scale

Week 4 Sophocles, Oedipus the Tyrant; Euripides, Orestes
Tragic problems of moral responsibility

Week 5 Plato, Alcibiades I and II; Apology of Socrates
Socratic moral precept and example

Weeks 6-7 Plato, Gorgias & Protagoras

Week 8 Hesiod, Works and Days

Week 9 Xenophon, Memorabilia

Weeks 10-11 Aristotle, Eudemian Ethics
Ethics as a philosophical discipline

Weeks 12-13 Cicero, De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum
(trans. as On Ends, On Moral Ends, al.)
Fundamental principles of morality

Weeks 14-15 Cicero, De Officiis (trans. as On Obligations, On Duties, al.)
Application to life via practical precepts
Course standards and requirements

Performance will be evaluated and graded based on a number of factors to which it would be unduly rigid to assign "percentage" values, but which can be arranged and explained as follows:

A. Evidence of preparation of the work for class, including careful study of the assigned readings, & attendance and participation in the class-meetings.

B. Individual written work, including:
   1. Four (two-page maximum) written assignments;
   2. A one-hour midterm (in class during week 7) and a regular final exam.

Explanation of (B):

(1) The written assignments (due in class during weeks 2, 5, 10, and 15) will concern the readings then under consideration; they are not to exceed two pages in length, and should (except in the first case) aim more toward explaining than illustrating or summarizing. Topics will be announced the week previous to the deadlines indicated. At least one may undergo revision. Mechanical as well as substantive elements will be considered in grading.

(2) Examinations will have three parts: (i) a brief section on the identification of persons or themes; (ii) a quoted passage or two for close discussion; (iii) a more general problem posed for essay treatment.

NB: Students should acquaint themselves with the principles and rules governing enrollment, performance, and evaluation in university course work set out in the University Catalogue, Schedule of Classes, and Student Conduct Code. Note that grading is the traditional option only and that grades of incomplete are not recorded in this course.

The University's bookstore has been asked to make the following available:

Aesop, The Complete Fables (Viking-Penguin)
Euripides IV (Rhesus, Suppl. Women, Orestes, Iph. Aul.) (U. Chicago Pr.)
Socrates and Alcibiades (Focus Classical Library)
Plato, Protagoras (Hackett)
Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics (Oxford World Classics)
Cicero, On Obligations: De Officiis (Oxford World Classics)

But any other editions will do fine as well.

The selections from Plato's Republic, Cicero's De Finibus, and Seneca's Moral Letters and Essays will be supplied electronically.