

V3131 Aristotle
Spring 2008, TR 10:35-11:50, Lewisohn 602

Aristotle

The course offers an introduction to Aristotle's philosophy—his ethics, metaphysics, physics, and theory of knowledge.

General Requirements

- No prior knowledge of Aristotle, ancient philosophy, ancient Greek, or philosophy in general is required.
- Regular and punctual attendance.
 - Announcements will be made at the beginning of class.
 - If you cannot come to class, please email me in advance.
- Announcements will also be made by class-email through Courseworks. Handouts will be sent out through Courseworks. Students are expected to read the emails associated with this class.
- You should read all assigned reading prior to the class for which it is assigned. The reading material can be dense and difficult. It is important to make time for the reading.

Written Work

- Two short papers, each counting for 15% of the grade (prior to midterm).
- Midterm—20% of the grade.
- One paper—counting for 20% of the grade (after midterm).
- Final exam—30% of the grade.

You receive paper-topics for every week. Students can choose which two papers they write prior to the midterm (however, everyone should write one of the two first papers), and which paper they write after the midterm. Paper-topics also serve as study-questions. Papers are due two classes after the material was covered in class. If you are not writing a paper, please use the topic to prepare for class.

Books

A New Aristotle Reader, ed. J. L. Ackrill (Princeton University Press, 1988). *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, translation, introduction, and commentary by Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe (Oxford University Press, 2002). *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1996). All books shall be ordered at Bookculture, formerly Labyrinth Bookstore at 112th st., between Broadway and Amsterdam. (In Plato, we need: *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Philebus*—but we only need brief passages. So, if you do not want to buy the book, because you perhaps have individual paperbacks of some of the dialogues anyway, it won't be a problem to read up on the brief passages we need in the library. We are not studying Plato's dialogues in this class; we only look at passages that Aristotle engages with.)

Outline of classes

Weeks 1-2/1

How does philosophical investigation work?

Readings: *Topics* I.1-2, *Metaphysics* B1 (up to 995b4), *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.1-3 (up to 1146b8), *Analytica Posteriora* I.1-3, 18, 31, 33, II.19.

- How does Aristotle respond to the problem that Plato formulates in the *Meno*? (We cannot investigate what we do not know at all—thus, we need some things that we already know in order to investigate; but where do we get these starting-points?)
- Working our way through ‘reputable opinions’, and through difficulties and perplexities.
- An example: How Aristotle discusses reputable opinions, and works his way through the perplexities of ‘*akrasia*’ (‘weak will’).

Weeks 2/2-3/1

Some basic Aristotelian vocabulary, and more on method.

Readings: *Categories* 4 and 10, *Topics* I.5, I.9, I.18 (108a18-36), *Nicomachean Ethics* V.

- Words are used in several ways.
- Words and things: the categories.
- Different kinds of opposites.
- Definition, property, genus, and accident.
- An example: ‘Justice’ is used in many ways. How Aristotle’s method of investigating the various uses of a term is basic to his theories.

Weeks 3/2-4/1

Theory of action: wanting the good

Readings: *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1-6, *Politics* I, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.9 (1180b29 ff.).

- Aristotle’s explanation of human action.
- Teleology and action: doing things for the sake of something.
- Ends and final ends.
- Why the *best state* of a thing is its *natural state*.
- What is the relationship between ethics and politics?

Weeks 4/2-5

The chief good: completeness and self-sufficiency

Readings: *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7-12, Plato, *Symposium* 202c, 205d and 207, Plato, *Philebus* 20c-22c.

- Goods, the greatest good, and the chief good.
- Completeness and self-sufficiency: Aristotle's criteria for the chief good.
- Herodotus' *Histories*, Plato's *Symposium*, and Plato's *Philebus* on completeness.

Weeks 5/2-6/1

The capacities and excellences of the human soul

Readings: *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7 and 13, II.1-6.

- The function of a human being.
- Reason and that which is able to obey reason.
- The intellectual virtues and the virtues of character.
- Why is the study of pleasure and pain central to Aristotle's ethics?
- Which virtues are explicable in terms of the right management of pleasure and pain?
- What is character? Does Aristotle think that we act 'from' our character?
- What is the role of the notion of the mean in Aristotle's ethics?

Week 6/2-7/1

Knowledge and wisdom

Readings: *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.1-6.

- Why does Aristotle discuss knowledge as part of his ethical theory?
- Deliberation, desire, and action.
- Technical expertise (*technê*).
- The difference between 'making' and 'acting'.
- Theoretical wisdom (*sophia*).
- Practical wisdom (*phronêsis*).
- Intelligence (*nous*).

Weeks 7/2-8

Wisdom and causes

Readings: *Metaphysics* A.

- All human beings by nature desire to know.
- Sense-perception, experience, expertise, science, and wisdom.
- Wisdom and knowledge of the 'why'.

- Principles and causes.
- The four kinds of causes.
- “Facts show the way.”

Weeks 9-10/1

Aristotle's conception of nature

Reading: *Physics* II.

- What is ‘a nature’?
- Artefacts and natural entities.
- What is the subject-matter of physics, as compared to the subject-matter of metaphysics?
- Again: the four kinds of causes.
- Necessity, luck, and *to automaton*.

Weeks 10/2-11

Change, and the beginning of change

Readings: *Physics* III.1 (up to 201a15), *Physics* VIII.1 (up to 252a5) and 5 (up to 256a21).

- Nature is a principle of change.
- Kinds of change.
- Does change have a beginning?
- Aristotle: There is eternal change.
- Everything that is in motion (that changes) is set into motion (is changed) by something.
- The unmoved mover.
- Why locomotion is the first and best kind of movement.

Week 12

Activity and God

Reading: *Metaphysics* XII.1 and 6-7.

- Who or what is God?
- The distinction between actuality and potentiality.
- Why actuality is prior to potentiality.
- God moves like (or as) an object of desire.
- Thought.
- The divine life.

Week 13/1

The science of being qua being

Readings: Met IV.1-2 (up to 1004a9).

- A science which does not study ‘beings’ (entities) under the perspective of a particular science, but rather studies being *qua* being.
- ‘Being’ is said in different ways.
- Focal meaning.
- ‘One’ and ‘being’.
- Each science—other than the science that studies being *qua* being—studies one *kind* of being.

Weeks 13/2-14/1

The life of theory

Readings: NE X.7-8, Met XII 9.

- Why the life of theory is best.
- What is contemplation?
- What is theoretical wisdom?
- God’s thoughts.

Review