

PHIL10130 - Aristotle

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1. Course Summary:

The course will introduce students to the main concepts and arguments of Aristotle's philosophy, and examine the links between Aristotelian and modern philosophy. It will commence with a survey of Aristotle's theories of truth and scientific method, and then proceed to the metaphysics of substance and some of its applications in philosophy of mind and ethics. The main texts to look at will include *Physics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Metaphysics*, *De anima*, and selections from the ethical corpus.

2. Intended Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course, students will be able to:

- grasp and analyse some of the central concepts in Aristotle's logic, philosophy of language, metaphysics and philosophy of mind
- state and discuss the main principles and arguments of Aristotle's theories of truth, method and explanation; hylomorphic metaphysics of substance and its applications in philosophy of mind
- understand the nature and methods of ancient philosophical debates and their relevance to modern discussions of the same topics
- situate Aristotle and Peripatetics within their own intellectual context
- read ancient philosophical texts in a more expert way, using analytic and critical tools (with respect to both doctrinal and textual problems)

Students will also acquire the following transferable skills:

- written skills
- analytical skills
- oral communication skills
- the ability to recognise and critically assess an argument
- the ability to do literature searches for both primary and secondary sources

3. Texts

All of the course **primary readings** can be found in:

T. Irwin and G. Fine, *Aristotle: Selections, Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995.

I highly recommend that you have access to this translation. Among other things, the notes and glossary are extremely helpful.

If you can't access this text, a good second option with most of the readings is:

J. Ackrill, *A New Aristotle Reader*, OUP, 1979

In a pinch, all of the assigned primary texts may be found online at the MIT Internet Classics Archive: <http://classics.mit.edu/Browse/browse-Aristotle.html>

The central **secondary readings** will be taken from:

Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

**You should bring a copy of the assigned primary text(s) with you to class for purposes of discussion.*

4. Assessment:

This course will be assessed by a shorter mid-term essay (approx. 1500 word) due on **Thursday 24th of October, by 12pm** (40%), and a final essay (approx. 2500 word) due **Thursday 12th of December, by 12pm** (60%).

You may pick any question from weeks 1-6 listed below as your mid-term topic, and any question from weeks 7-11 as your final essay topic, aside from those listed with an asterisk. If you choose to do your own essay question, please check with me first.

5. Seminar and Tutorial Content:

Material to be read *before* seminars is marked with 'S'; material to be read *before* Tutorials is marked with 'T'.

You should attempt to read *all* of the primary texts listed for each seminar and tutorial, and *at least one* of the secondary texts.

Week 1

SEMINAR TOPIC: ARISTOTLE ON THE SUBSTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Primary Reading:

(S) *Categories* 1–3; (*Selections* 1–3); *De Interpretatione* 1, 4, 7 (*Selections* 13, 15–16).
(T) *Categories* 4–5, 12 (*Selections* 3–10)

Secondary Reading:

Edel, A. (1975). 'Aristotle's *Categories* and the Nature of Categorical Theory'. *Review of Metaphysics* 29:45-65.

Questions:

1. *Is language a good guide to what sorts of things exist?
2. Did Aristotle overlook any categories, and would it matter if he did?
3. Why does Aristotle count secondary substances as substances at all?
4. Do truth and falsity really require combination?
5. *What is a universal and what is a particular?

Week 2

SEMINAR TOPIC: DEDUCTION, DEMONSTRATION, AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

Primary Reading:

(S) *Prior Analytics* I.1, 4 (Selections 29–34); *Posterior Analytics* I.1–3 (37–45)

(T) *Posterior Analytics* II.1-2 (Handout); *Posterior Analytics* II.8–10; 19 (Selections 61–68)

Secondary Reading:

Lear, Aristotle: *The Desire to Understand*, chapter 6, sect. 1.

Barnes, J. (1969), 'Aristotle's Theory of Demonstration'. *Phronesis* 14:123-152.

DeMoss, D. and D. Devereux. (1988). 'Essence, Existence, and Nominal Definition in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* II 8-10'. *Phronesis* 33: 133-154.

Ferejohn, M. (1982). 'Definition and the Two Stages of Aristotelian Demonstration'. *Review of Metaphysics* 36:375-395.

Questions:

1. Why does Aristotle think it is important to distinguish between a demonstration and a deduction?
2. What does scientific knowledge consist in, according to Aristotle?
3. Does Aristotle provide a good account of how we come to know the immediate premises of demonstrations?
4. Why does Aristotle think universals are so important to scientific knowledge?
5. How does Aristotle solve Meno's paradox?

Week 3

SEMINAR TOPIC: HYLOMORPHIC PHYSICS

Primary Reading:

(S) *Physics* I.1, 5–6, 7–9 (Selections 83–95)

(T) *Physics* II.1–6 (Selections 95–112)

Secondary Reading:

Lear, Aristotle: *The Desire to Understand*, chapter 2, sect. 1–2.

Kelsey, S. (2003). 'Aristotle's Definition of Nature'. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 25:59-87.

Questions:

1. Why does Aristotle think that 'all the things that come to be naturally are either contraries or from contraries'?
2. Why does Aristotle think that final causes are important to physics?
3. Does Aristotle give good reasons for thinking that living beings could not have come to be by chance?

Week 4

SEMINAR TOPIC: ARISTOTLE ON MOTION AND TIME

Primary Reading:

(S) *Physics* III.1–3 (*Selections* 120–126)

(T) *Physics* IV.10–11, 14 (*Selections* 126–133).

Secondary Reading:

Lear, Aristotle: *The Desire to Understand*, chapter 2, sect. 3; chapter 3, sect. 2.

Kosman, L.A. (1969). 'Aristotle's Definition of Motion'. *Phronesis* 14:40-62.

Questions:

1. Why does Aristotle try to define motion? Is he successful?
2. Must we rely upon the concepts of potentiality and actuality to define motion?
3. According to Aristotle, what is the relation between time and motion?
4. *What does the soul have to do with the perception of time?
5. Do Aristotle have a coherent view of time?

Week 5

SEMINAR TOPIC: THE SCIENCE OF BEING AS BEING

Primary Reading:

(S) *Metaphysics* I.1–2 (*Selections* 221–227); *Metaphysics* IV:1–2 (*Selections* 244–250)

(T) *Metaphysics* IV.3–4 (*Selections* 250–262)

Secondary Reading:

Lear, Aristotle: *The Desire to Understand*, chapter 6, sects. 3–4.

Questions:

1. Why does Aristotle need to argue that there is such a thing as a 'science of being'?
2. Why does Aristotle think it belongs to the science of being to study axioms like the law of non-contradiction?
3. Does Aristotle give good reasons for thinking that truth is tied to the law of non-contradiction?
4. If Aristotle is right, is metaphysics the queen of all sciences?
5. Do our words force us to assume the principle of non-contradiction?

Week 6

Mid-term Essay Due Thursday 24th of October, by 12pm

SEMINAR TOPIC: THE METAPHYSICS OF SUBSTANCE

Primary Reading:

(S) *Metaphysics* VII.1–4 (*Selections* 272–282);

(T) *Metaphysics* VII.13–17 (*Selections* 302–314);

Secondary Reading:

Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, chapter 6, sects. 5–6.

Questions:

1. Why does Aristotle think that a science of being should take substance as its focal item of study?
2. What are the criteria that Aristotle gives for identifying substances? Are any criteria missing? Should any be rejected?
3. Is Aristotle right to identify substance with essence?
4. Why can't substance be a universal?
5. Why can't substance be matter?
6. What is a form?

Week 7

SEMINAR TOPIC: POTENTIALITY, ACTUALITY, AND GOD

Primary Reading:

(S) *Metaphysics* IX.1–2, 5–6 (Selections 324–331)

(T) *Metaphysics* XII.6–7 (Selections 332–338); *Metaphysics* XII.9–10 (Selections 342–344)

Secondary Reading:

Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, chapter 6, sects. 7.

Questions:

1. According to Aristotle, what is the difference between a motion and an activity?
2. Does Aristotle's account of rational potentialities imply that we have free will?
3. Is Aristotle right to think that in order to act or be affected things have to have potentialities?
4. Why does Aristotle think there is a divine being?
5. Is Aristotle's divine being capable of rational choice?

Week 8

SEMINAR TOPIC: HYLOMORPHIC PSYCHOLOGY: THE SOUL-BODY RELATION

Primary Reading:

(S) *De Anima (On the Soul)* I.1–2 (Selections 169–173)

(T) *De Anima (On the Soul)* I.3–4; II.1 (Selections 173–179)

Secondary Reading:

Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, chapter 4, sects. 1.

Shields, C. (1988). 'Soul and Body in Aristotle'. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 6:103–137.

Heinaman, R. (1990). 'Aristotle and the Mind-Body Problem.' *Phronesis*, 35: 83–102.

Questions:

1. Is Aristotle right that a complete definition of an emotion like anger must make reference to his four causes?

2. Is Aristotle a dualist in respect of the soul-body relation?
3. Is Aristotle right to think that things can't be what they are if they have lost their essence?

Week 9

SEMINAR TOPIC: HYLOMORPHIC PSYCHOLOGY: PERCEPTION AND UNDERSTANDING

Primary Reading:

(S) *De Anima (On the Soul)* II.3, 5–6, 11–12 (*Selections* 182–184; 188–193);

(T) *De Anima (On the Soul)* III.4–5 (*Selections* 198–202)

Secondary Reading:

Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, chapter 4, sects. 2–5.

Burnyeat, M. 'Is an Aristotelian Philosophy of Mind Still Credible? A Draft', in M.C. Nussbaum, A.O. Rorty (eds) *Essays on Aristotle's De anima*, 2nd edition, OUP, 1992:15–26).

Questions:

1. Why is Aristotle not content with defining the soul as the 'first actuality of an organic body'?
2. Is perception for Aristotle a material alteration, a formal activity, or both?
3. What do you think Aristotle means when he depicts perception as the reception of the form of a thing apart from its matter'?
4. Does Aristotle think that 'understanding' is a non-physical process?
5. According to Aristotle, how is understanding both like and unlike perception?

Week 10

SEMINAR TOPIC: ETHICS, HAPPINESS, AND VIRTUE

Primary Reading:

(S) *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1–2, 4–5, 7 (*Selections* 347–348; 350–352; 354–358)

(T) *Nicomachean Ethics* II.1–3; II.5–7 (*Selections* 366–369; 371–376;)

Secondary Reading:

Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, chapter 5, sects. 1–3.

Irwin, T. (1991), 'The Structure of Aristotelian Happiness', *Ethics* 101:382–391.

Questions:

1. According to Aristotle, what is the meaning/goal of life?
2. Assess Aristotle's arguments for thinking that there is a 'highest good'.
3. What would Aristotle say to someone who said that 'happiness is different for different people'?
4. According to Aristotle, is virtue all we need for happiness?
5. Lay out, and then criticise Aristotle's function argument.
6. What would Aristotle say about Hume's 'is-ought' problem?

Week 11

SEMINAR TOPIC: ETHICS, HAPPINESS, AND VIRTUE

Primary Reading:

(S) *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.1–3; VIII.8 (*Selections* 417–421; 426–429)

(T) *Nicomachean Ethics* X.6–8 (*Selections* 438–445)

Secondary Reading:

Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, chapter 6, sects. 8.

Nagel, T. (1980). 'Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*', in A. Rorty (ed), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (UCal. Press).

Questions:

1. Does Aristotle offer us a good theory of friendship?
2. Is Aristotle's virtuous person egoistic?
3. Does Aristotle give good reasons for thinking that the life of contemplation is the happiest form of life?
4. In *Nicomachean Ethics* book X, does Aristotle successfully address his objection in book I that a virtuous person will not be happy if they suffer too many misfortunes?

***Final Essay Due* Thursday 12th of December, by 12pm**

6. Further Reading

Primary sources:

Full corpus in English:

J. Barnes (ed), *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volumes I and II, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984

Substantive selections covering most of the course material:

J. Ackrill, *A New Aristotle Reader*, OUP, 1979

T. Irwin and Fine, G., *Aristotle: Selections, Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995

Secondary sources:

General Introductions:

Akrill, J., *Aristotle the Philosopher*, OUP, 1981.

Jaeger, W., *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development*, OUP, 1934.

Ross, W. D., *Aristotle*, London: Methuen and Co., 1923

Lloyd, G.E.R. *Aristotle: The Growth and Structure of his Thought*. Cambridge, 1968

Shields, C., *Aristotle*, London: Routledge, 2007.

Monographs and article collections:

- J. Barnes (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, CUP, 1995
J. Barnes, M. Schofield, R. Sorabji, *Articles on Aristotle, vols 1 - 4*, Duckworth, 1979
J. Beere, *Doing and Being: an Interpretation of Aristotle Metaphysics Theta*, OUP, 2011
E. Berti (ed), *Aristotle on Science*, Padova: Antenore, 1981
D. Bostock, *Space, Time, Matter and Form: Essays on Aristotle's Physics*, OUP, 2006
J.W. Carter, *Aristotle on Earlier Greek Psychology*, CUP, 2019.
D. Charles, *Aristotle's Theory of Action*, Cornell University Press, 1984
U. Coope, *Time for Aristotle*, OUP, 2005
P. Crivelli, *Aristotle on Truth*, CUP, 2004
M. Furth, *Substance, Form and Psyche: An Aristotelian Metaphysics*, CUP, 1988
M.L. Gill, *Aristotle on Substance: The Paradox of Unity*, Princeton, 1989
A. Gotthelf (ed) *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things*, Pittsburgh, 1985
A. Gotthelf and J. Lennox (eds) *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, CUP, 1987
P. Gregoric, *Aristotle on Common Sense*, OUP, 2006
R.J. Hankinson, *Cause and Explanation in Ancient Greek Thought*, OUP, 1998
E. Hartman, *Substance, Body and Soul: Aristotelian Investigations*, Princeton, 1977
T.H. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, OUP, 1988
T.H. Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, vol. 1, OUP, 2007
R.A.H. King, *Aristotle on Life and Death*, Duckworth, 2000
M.R. Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*, OUP, 2007
G. Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: an Essay on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, OUP, 2004
J.G. Lennox, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Biology*, CUP, 2000
G.E.R. Lloyd (ed), *Aristotle on Mind and the Senses*, CUP, 1978
G.E.R. Lloyd, *Aristotelian Explorations*, Cambridge, 1996
H. Lorenz, *The Brute Within*, OUP, 2006
D. Modrak, *Aristotle: the Power of Perception*, Chicago, 1987
D. Modrak, *Aristotle's Theory of Language and Meaning*, CUP, 2000
M. Mohan (ed) *Aristotle Today: Essays on Aristotle's Ideal of Science*, Edmonton, AB, 1987
B. Morison, *On Location: Aristotle's Concept of Place*, OUP, 2003
M.C. Nussbaum, A.O. Rorty (eds) *Essays on Aristotle's De anima*, 2nd edition, OUP, 1992
P. Pellegrin, *Aristotle's Classification of Animals*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986
A.O. Rorty (ed) *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980
F. Solmsen, *Aristotle's System of the Physical World*, Cornell University Press, 1961
R.R.K. Sorabji, *Necessity, Cause, and Blame*, Duckworth, 1980
R.R.K. Sorabji, *Matter, Space, and Motion*, Duckworth, 1988
S. Waterlow, *Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics*, OUP, 1982
M. Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*, Yale University Press, 1988