Aristotle is one of the most important philosophers in history, whose life and work shaped Western and to a considerable extent Eastern intellectual tradition. Aristotle, unlike Socrates, is ‘philosophers’ philosopher’. He is rightly considered to be the founder of several philosophical disciplines which are now a constant part of university philosophy curriculum (logic, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, ethics). We owe him some of the most important concepts which still form a part of our philosophical lexicon. His thought continues to exercise influence on modern philosophical theories (think of virtue ethics or non-reductive physicalism in philosophy of mind). Exposure to his key ideas is a must for any aspiring intellectual today as it has been throughout the history of philosophy.

In this course we shall have a survey of some key themes in Aristotle’s theoretical philosophy: starting from his criticism of Plato, early ontology and theory of knowledge, we shall proceed to his philosophy of nature (physics) and his ‘first philosophy’, which received the name of metaphysics in the ancient Aristotelian tradition.

We will learn some core philosophical terminology, key problems and approaches developed by Aristotle that continue to be used and/or critically discussed by philosophers to this day. Our task will be to read and discuss all the ideas and arguments carefully, to get as clear understanding of the ancient texts as possible.

Course Readings.

The two kinds of readings for the course include the works of Aristotle and the secondary literature. The main focus of the course will be on the primary texts. But since these are very difficult and often controversial, we shall inevitably need to use some secondary literature in order to help our understanding or thinking about these texts.

Aristotle’s texts can be found in the following editions:


This edition has all the works of Aristotle collected in two bulky volumes. The merit is obvious: you have every work at hand. The demerit is lack of any commentary (there simply is no room for it!) You might want to purchase it if you think you’ll need to consult Aristotle’s corpus in future (e.g. if you are thinking of doing postgraduate work in philosophy, especially, but not only, history of philosophy)


It was new in 1980. Today there are newer readers, but Ackrill’s has its merits too: it is a very careful selection of really important texts in a thoughtful sharp translation. Annotations are on a minimalist side (but Professor John Ackrill was a first-class scholar, so even small notes by him may sometimes be valuable)

T. Irwin and G. Fine (eds), Aristotle: Selections, Hackett, 1995

A very good collection of texts, in a very expert translation by two excellent scholars (even if some editorial decisions may sometimes be questioned). The advantage is the abundant annotations: everything is explained, just as the students need. Especially good if you have not had any exposure to Aristotle.
For the texts we will discuss in our course, I recommend that people consult commented editions of texts. There is a good number of them now, and most of them our Library will have in electronic format accessible through the Library Catalogue. These commentaries are more than just annotations, they often raise original problems, offer original solutions, and are designed for a more advanced level of the audience (just as we are soon going to be). Here is the list, for your future reference (use it when you see a corresponding title in your weekly assignment, don’t try to to read the whole list now!)


If you are would like to get some prior information about Aristotle’s philosophy, you may want to read one of these texts:


They are written by a top Aristotle scholar who is also an excellent writer, fluent, thought-provoking and entertaining. These are good and gratifying quick reads.

An excellent recent accessible introduction to Aristotle’s biography is:


And these two books are suitable companions for some sections of this course:


*Weekly readings*

* indicates further readings
Week 1. Introduction. Criticism of Forms.

Primary sources

Aristotle Metaphysics 1.6 and 1.9
Plato, Parmenides (126-137C)

Secondary literature

*D. Frede, ‘The Doctrine of Forms under Critique - Part I’ ibid., 265-296
*M. Crubellier, ‘The Doctrine of Forms under Critique - Part II’ ibid., 297-335

Week 2. Early Ontology: the Categories

Primary sources: Aristotle, Categories (especially 1-5)

Secondary literature

Shields 172-211

*M. Furth, Substance, Form and Psyche: An Aristotelian Metaphysics, Cambridge, 1988, 9 – 47

Week 3. Early Ontology: Truth, Logical Square and the Sea Battle Tomorrow

Primary sources: Aristotle, De interpretatione (especially 1-9)

Secondary literature

Shields 211-231
Week 4. The tasks and tools of rational enquiry: Deduction, Demonstration, Definition

Primary sources:

Aristotle Prior Analytics 1.1-7; 2*
Posterior Analytics 1.1-10, 1.13; 2.8-10.19;
Topics 1*

Secondary literature:

Lear 1988, 209-230
Shields 2007, 116-171

Week 5. Physics I-II: The principles of change, causes, chance, teleology, necessity.

Primary sources:

Aristotle, Physics 1.7-9; 2; 3.1-3.
Aristotle On Generation and Corruption 1.5; 2.1-4, 9-11*

Secondary literature:

Lear, 15-54
Shields, 43-114

* D. Charles, ‘Teleological Causation’ in Shields 2012, 227-266
* C. Freeland, ‘Accidental Causes and Real Explanations’ in Judson 1991, 49-72
* L. Judson, ‘Chance and ‘Always or For the Most Part’ in Aristotle, in Judson 1991, 73-100

**Week 6. Physics III-IV: Understanding the physical structure of change: the infinite, place, time.**

*Primary sources:*

Aristotle Physics 3. 4-8; 4; 5.1-3; 6*

*Secondary literature:*

Lear, 55 – 95
Shields, 232-259

D. Charles, ‘Aristotle’s Processes’ in Leunissen 2015, 186-205

*U. Coope, Time for Aristotle, Oxford, 2004
*B. Morison, Aristotle on Location, Oxford, 2002

**Week 7. Motion and movers. The first mover.**

*Primary sources:*

Physics 3.1-3, 7.1, 8
Secondary literature:

Shields 259-270

U. Coope, ‘Self-Motion and Other-Motion in Aristotle’s Physics’ in Leunissen 2015, 245-264
A. Falcon, ‘Argument of Physics VIII’ in Leunissen 2015, 265-283
D. Furley, ‘Self-Movers’ in his Cosmic Problems, Cambridge, 1989, 121-132 (and many other reprints)

*R. Wardy, The Chain of Change, Cambridge, 1990


Primary sources:

Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1; 4 and 6.1 (with Clarendon commentary for 4 and 6)

Secondary literature:

Lear, 243-265
Shields 2007, 274-298

P. Gottlieb, ‘Aristotle on Non-Contradiction’, SEP

*R.M. Dancy, Sense and Contradiction, Assen, 1975
*C.D.C. Reeve, Substantial Knowledge, Hackett, Indianapolis, 2000
*G. Priest, Doubt truth to be a liar, Oxford, 2007, Chapter 1
*M.V. Wedin, Aristotle on the Firmness of the Principle of Non-Contradiction, Phronesis 49/3 (2004), 225-265


Primary sources:

Aristotle, Metaphysics 7 and 8 (with Bostock’s commentary)

Secondary literature:

Shields 2007, 298-314
Lear 273-292

*M. Furth, ‘Specific and individual form in Aristotle’ in Devereux, Pellegrin 1990, 85-111
*T. Maudlin, ‘Substances and Space-Time: What Aristotle would have said to Einstein’ in Devereux, Pellegrin 1990, 429-469
*D. Morrison, ‘Some remarks on definition in Metaphysics Z’ in Devereux, Pellegrin 1990, 131-144
*Ch. Witt, Substance and essence in Aristotle, Ithaca, 1989

Week 10. Potentiality and actuality.

Primary sources:
Aristotle, Metaphysics 9 (Theta), (with Makin’s commentary)

Secondary literature:
The main companion reader for Book 9 will be Stephen Makin’s excellent commentary.


*J. Beere, Doing and Being: an Interpretation of Aristotle Metaphysics IX, OUP, 2011

Week 11. The Philosophers’ God.

Primary sources:
Aristotle, Metaphysics 12 (Lambda), Nicomachean Ethics 10.7-9

Secondary literature:
Lear, 293-320
Further readings on Aristotle: some key monographs and article collections

General


Select topics

Logic and theory of science

P. Crivelli, *Aristotle on Truth*, CUP, 2004

Metaphysics

Philosophy of Nature

U. Coope, *Time for Aristotle*, OUP, 2005
R.J. Hankinson, *Cause and Explanation in Ancient Greek Thought*, OUP, 1998

Mind


Ethics and moral psychology

Legacy


For further bibliography, please check specific articles on different themes in Aristotle in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.