

Aristotle Then and Now

Prof. Redemer

Course Description: This course is designed to provide an introduction to the philosophizing of Aristotle. Along with Plato, Aristotle is the source of the most profound thinking in the West, and because of his influence upon Saint Thomas Aquinas, uniquely influential in the thinking of the Church. The philosophical method Aristotle uses as he pursues questions in what are later termed “Ethics” and “Metaphysics” is what we are after. It will be a bit like studying grammar along with learning a language while speaking it. No one needs grammar to speak their native tongue, but a new language usually requires knowledge of grammar along with speaking. Philosophy, because of its self-reflexive nature, is always a new language, so its grammar or method cannot be neglected. Nevertheless, Ethics and Metaphysics are what we will use this method to talk about; and Aristotle himself will help us to know what these subjects are and how we might talk about them.

Ethics, to Aristotle, has to do with character and virtue and their relation to human well-being or happiness. To speak of “human” well-being, however, we must discuss our nature as humans and distinguish what in us is merely conventional and cultural rather than born into us by nature. All these questions lead up to the question of our political nature and the question of justice. What is justice? What is it to be just? Is there a difference between “social justice” and justice per se? Put differently, Ethics inquires into the nature of the good, both the particular good of individuals and the common good we share between us.

Metaphysics is an inquiry into being itself, what it is for something to exist and be what it is. Such an inquiry is twofold, however, because we must look both at what we are asking after and what would constitute an answer. Metaphysics is thus both methodological and ontological, which is to say, there is no possibility of getting answers to our greatest questions if we do not pay attention to what we are doing in asking them.

The class will be part lecture, part discussion seminar, depending on the particular subject matter and the disposition of the class and instructor.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course the student will be able to:

Recognize a distinctly philosophical question.

Ask and answer philosophical questions regarding virtue, politics, nature and being.

Distinguish between asking “what should we do” and “who should we be” ethical questions.

Raise the question of the good, particular goods, common good, and the good in general

Recognize a performative contradiction, especially in relation to questions of being

Understand the structure of the argument for an unmoved mover

Classroom Decorum

Philosophical inquiry is a text based, and conversation based endeavor, so you must read and converse (in the form of notes in margins or notebooks) *outside* of class with your texts, in the same way you will be expected to read and converse with your professor and fellow students *in* class.

Required texts:

The Basic Works of Aristotle, Aristotle, Modern Library Edition

Course Requirements: Attentive and sustained participation in class is the primary requirement. Hence no more than one unexplained absence will be tolerated. This also assumes you have done the reading before class and can be called upon any time to demonstrate you have done so. There will be a final paper for credit bearing students.

Grading: There will a final paper for credit bearing students. Your grade will be determined as follows: One third for the final paper, and one third for participation, and one third for the weekly written work.

CALENDAR

Course Schedule

Wee k	Dates	Discussion Topics	Reading
1	1/11	Reading Aristotle, <i>Telos</i> , & Virtue	Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
2	1/18	An Exploration of the Virtues	Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
3	1/25	The Natural Ends of Man	Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
4	2/1	The Relation of Ethics and Politics	Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
5	2/8	The Constitution of the Regime	Aristotle's <i>Politics</i>

6	2/15	Man as the political animal	Aristotle's <i>Politics</i>
7	2/22	The Soul, and the Thinking Thing	Aristotle's <i>De Anima</i>
8	3/1	Existence: What means?	Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i>
9	3/8	The Problem of Change.	Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i>
10	3/15	How can we know?	Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i>