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Aristotle and Philosophical Method

Prof. Downey
PHIL 011:01
9:40-11:10
FAH 140

Course Description: This course is designed to provide an introduction to philosophy in general, and the philosophizing of Aristotle in particular. 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 Catholic Church. As the title of the course indicates, the philosophical method Aristotle uses as he examines questions of Ethics and Metaphysics is what we are after. It will be a bit like studying grammar along with speaking a language. 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 of 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 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 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, and part 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 possibly even answer philosophical questions regarding virtue, justice, 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

Required texts:

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* trans. Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2011

Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, trans. Joe Sachs, Green Lion Press, Santa Fe, NM, 1999

Course Requirements: Attentive and sustained participation in class is the primary requirement. Hence no more than two unexplained absences 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 mid-term oral exam and a final written exam.

Classroom decorum: There will be no speaking, eating, or reading in class apart from the text or class discussion. This means no open laptops, iPads, smart phones etc. Notes should be taken in the text, in the head, or on paper. If you are not able to abide by this, please leave now, or you will be asked to leave later. All texts must be purchased or owned by you by the first week of class (i.e. no library texts) and you should consider yourself an uneducable fool if you sell them back to the bookstore at the end of the semester.

Grading: There will a mid-term exam and a final. Your grade will be determined as follows : One third for each exam, and one third for participation, insight and other non-quantifiable qualities subjectively determined by your professor.

CALENDAR

Tuesday, August 30	Introduction
Thursday, September 1	Nicomachean Ethics Book I, 1-7
Tuesday, September 6	Nicomachean Ethics Book I, 8-13
Thursday, September 8	Nicomachean Ethics Book II, 1-6
Tuesday, September 13	Nicomachean Ethics Book II, 7-9
Thursday, September 15	Nicomachean Ethics Book III, 1-5

Tuesday, September 20	Nicomachean Ethics Book III, 6-11
Thursday, September 22	Nicomachean Ethics Book IV, 1-9
Tuesday, September 27	Nicomachean Ethics Book V, 1-6
Thursday, September 29	Nicomachean Ethics Book V, 7-13
Tuesday, October 4	Mid-term Oral review
Thursday, October 6	Nicomachean Ethics Book VII 1-7
Tuesday, October 11	Nicomachean Ethics Book VII 8-14
Thursday, October 13	MIDTERM HOLIDAY
Tuesday, October 18	Politics Book I (handout)
Thursday, October 20	Politics Book I (handout)
Tuesday, October, 25	Nicomachean Ethics Book VI
Thursday, October 27	De Anima Book III 4-8 (handout)
Tuesday, November 1	Nicomachean Ethics Book VIII 1-5
Thursday, November 3	Nicomachean Ethics Book VIII 6—Book IX 3
Tuesday, November 8	Nicomachean Ethics Book IX 4—Book X 5
Thursday, November 10	Nicomachean Ethics Book X 6-9
Tuesday, November 15	Metaphysics Book I, 1-3
Thursday, November 17	Metaphysics Book II, 1—Book III, 2
Tuesday, November 22	Metaphysics Book IV, 1-7

Thanksgiving Recess November 23-27

Tuesday, November 29 Metaphysics Book XII, 1-5

Thursday, December 1 Metaphysics Book XII, 6-7

Tuesday, December 6 Metaphysics Book XII, 8-10

Thursday, December 8 Final Review

Final Exam Thursday December 15 @ 9:00-11:00 in Dante 219