

PHIL 402: Aristotle

Key concepts in Aristotelian metaphysics

Tuesdays 2:30PM–5:00PM, Crown Center for the Humanities 110

Instructor: Joshua Mendelsohn <jmendelsohn@luc.edu>.

Instructor's office hours: Crown Center 377, directly after class or by appointment.

This course will provide an in-depth introduction to some key ideas in metaphysics that trace back to Aristotle and resound throughout subsequent philosophical and theological traditions. These include the distinctions between substance and accident, form and matter, and potentiality and actuality, and the concepts of essence, God as self-thinking thought, and the soul as the form of the living body. Students will benefit from previous studies in ancient Greek philosophy and related areas, but the course is designed to be accessible to those with no special background.

Course goals and rationale

After completing this course, students will be familiar with some of the central concepts and distinctions that underpin Aristotle's thinking about issues in the field that has since come to be known as metaphysics. They should be able to describe and employ these distinctions, to think critically about their virtues as well as their limitations, and also grasp where these ideas arise in the text and the interpretive problems these texts give rise to. Students will have some sense of the afterlife of these ideas, and be ready to engage with other texts that make use of technical Aristotelian concepts.

Books

Unfortunately, Aristotle's writings on metaphysics are not accessible in any single volume with a high-quality translation and commentary. Readings will be provided, drawing mainly from the following volumes:

- *Aristotle: Categories and De Interpretatione*. Trans. J. L. Ackrill. Clarendon Aristotle Series.
- *Aristotle: Metaphysics Z [zeta] and H [eta]*. Trans. David Bostock. Clarendon Aristotle Series.
- *Aristotle: Metaphysics Θ [theta]*. Trans. Stephen Makin. Clarendon Aristotle Series.
- *Aristotle: Metaphysics Λ [lambda]*. Trans. Lindsay Judson. Clarendon Aristotle Series.
- Anna Marmodoro and Erasmus Mayr, *Metaphysics. An Introduction to Contemporary Debates and their History*. Oxford University Press.

All assigned texts will be provided digitally, but students are encouraged to purchase some of these to ease access to them. Ackrill's translation of the *Categories* and Bostock's translation of *Metaphysics Z and H* will give you some of the most important texts.

Assessment

1. *Reading journal*: You should keep a journal in which you give your interpretation of the assigned texts. The requirement is not that you get Aristotle right, but that you seriously try and become aware of the difficulties in interpreting Aristotle, so that you are in a position to come to a better understanding as a result of class discussions. Pay special attention to the connections between the different things we've read and use this as an opportunity prepare questions that you'll raise in class. Sometimes it will be appropriate to focus on one or two key chapters and read the remainder for context. I won't always be reviewing your journal entries, but evidence that you've been doing this consistently throughout the semester will earn you 15% of the grade. If you don't wish to use the reading journal function on Sakai, that's okay, but you must talk to me in the first two weeks of the semester.
2. *Show and tell*: Once during the semester, each student will present a text of their own choosing that is not assigned as part of the scheduled readings. This will typically be a text in philosophy or theology, but there are other possibilities. The chosen text should employ a particular Aristotelian concept in a way that is striking or notable. The student should prepare a presentation on this text, introducing it to other students and answering the following questions: (1) What is the author trying to establish, show or explain? (2) What Aristotelian concepts does the author employ? (3) What are the relevant texts in Aristotle? Can you tell how the author is interpreting them? The presentation itself will not be graded, but students should write up a brief report of their findings (3-5 pages) which will account for 20% of the grade.
3. *Term paper*: At the end of the semester, students should write a term paper about one of the issues we have discussed in class. The paper should provide exegesis of Aristotle's texts regarding a philosophically interesting issue. The topic should be discussed in advance with the instructor. The term paper is worth 65% of the grade.

Academic honesty

All work you submit in this class is presumed to be your own. Cheating and plagiarism will incur very serious consequences. At a minimum, the student will fail the relevant assignment. More serious or repeat offenders may fail the course or face expulsion. Review the definition of plagiarism and the consequences at <https://www.luc.edu/cas/advising/academicintegritystatement/>.

Student accommodations

The university is committed to supporting students who require special accommodations to participate fully, and I'll be glad to work with you to make any reasonable accommodations as hassle free as possible. The standard procedure is (i) register with the Student Accessibility Center (<http://www.luc.edu/sswd>), (ii) present your accommodation letter to the instructor during the first two weeks of class, and (iii) notify the SAC of any upcoming exams two weeks in advance (step (iii) only applies to students with accommodations related to testing). If this seems overwhelming, just talk to me and I'll guide you through what needs to happen.

Course schedule

Tue 16 January	The ontology of the <i>Phaedo</i>.	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> 95b–107b.
Tue 23 January	Against Platonic Forms. Aristotle's theory of predication.	Aristotle, <i>On Ideas</i> pp. 13–16. Aristotle, <i>Categories</i> 1–3 (w/ commentary). Aristotle, <i>De Interpretatione</i> 4–7. Aristotle, <i>Posterior Analytics</i> I.4. Bogen and McGuire, <i>How Things Are, Introduction</i> §§I–V. Striker, G. “A note on Aristotle's <i>Categories</i> 2”.
Tue 30 January	The analogy of being and the idea of categories	Aristotle, <i>Categories</i> 4. Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> Γ.1–2, Δ.7. Aristotle, <i>Topics</i> I.9. McDaniel, K. <i>The Fragmentation of Being</i> , ch. 4.
Tue 6 February	Substance	Aristotle, <i>Categories</i> 5. Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> Z.1–2. Marmodoro and Mayr, <i>Metaphysics</i> ch. 1.1–3. Dancy, R. “Aristotle on substances”.
Tue 13 February	The Third Man	Plato, <i>Parmenides</i> , 130a–134c. Alexander of Aphrodisias, commentary on <i>Metaphysics</i> I 9, 84.21–85.23. <i>Metaphysics</i> Z 6. Alan Code, “On the Origins of some Aristotelian Theses About Predication”.
Tue 20 February	Qualities	Aristotle, <i>Categories</i> 8. Paul Studtman, “Aristotle's Category of Quality”. Marmodoro and Mayr, <i>Metaphysics</i> ch. 2.1–4.
Tue 27 February	Relatives	Aristotle, <i>Categories</i> 7. Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> N 2, 1088a21–b4. David Sedley, “Aristotelian Relatives”. Marmodoro and Mayr ch. 2.7–8.
Tue 5 March	NO CLASS: Spring Break	—
Tue 12 March	Aristotle's project in the <i>Metaphysics</i>	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> A.1–3, B.1–2, 4, 6, Γ.1–3. Vasilis Politis, <i>Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle and the Metaphysics</i> , ch. 2–3.
Tue 19 March	The nature of substance: Form and matter	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> Z.3–9. Aristotle, <i>Physics</i> I.7, II.2. Wilfrid Sellars, “Aristotle's Metaphysics: An Interpretation”.

Tue 26 March	More on form and matter	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> H.1–3, 6. Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> Z.10–13, 16–17. Michael Frede, “Individuals in Aristotle”. Graham, D. “The Paradox of Prime Matter”.
Tue 2 April	Actuality and potentiality	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> Θ .1–9. Kosman, L.A. “The activity of being in Aristotle’s <i>Metaphysics</i> ”.
Tue 9 April	The nature of the soul	Aristotle, <i>De Anima</i> I.1–2, II.1–5, III.1–8.
Tue 16 April	The objects of scientific knowledge	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> E.1. Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> M.1, 3, 10. Mendelsohn, J. “Aristotle on the objects of mathematical and natural sciences”.
Tue 23 April	The nature of God	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> Λ .6–10. DeFilippino, J. “Aristotle’s Identification of the Prime Mover as god”. Frede, M. “The Unity of General and Special <i>Metaphysics</i> ”.