

# Phil 360: Bootcamp in Aristotle

## Fall 2023

**Instructor:** Brennan K. McDavid, [mcdavid@chapman.edu](mailto:mcdavid@chapman.edu)

**Room:**

**Course Dates/Times:**

**Office Hours:**

### Course Description:

Aristotle's *Metaphysics* has held a central place in the Western canon since Aristotle's lifetime in 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The text is dense, perplexing, and very difficult. We will spend half of this course preparing to read the *Metaphysics*—through intellectual workouts with Aristotle's *Categories*, *Prior Analytics*, and *Posterior Analytics*—with the aim of positioning ourselves well for embarking on study of the *Metaphysics* itself in the second half. We will encounter Aristotle's wholly original theories in ontology, epistemology, logic, hylomorphism, and methodology.

The value of this course is two-fold. First, the rigorous training in Aristotle's ideas produces a sharper, more disciplined philosopher. Once you enter the ring with Aristotle, you are forced to toughen up and acquire some (philosophical) survival skills. Second, engagement with his texts arms you with the ability to discern the origin and function of ideas that are woven deeply into our culture. Central tenets of institutions as wide ranging as religion and science can be seen for their Aristotelian roots. Understanding Aristotle is like getting a key to the kingdom. Here we will do our best to acquire such understanding.

### Course Learning Outcomes

- Execute an Aristotelian analysis of propositions, syllogistic arguments, causal relationships, change, and first principle frameworks.
- Explain Aristotle's conception of the origin of goodness.
- Identify persisting Aristotelianisms in our modern world.
- Think more rigorously.

### Philosophy Program Learning Outcomes

- Writing: Ability to state and support a thesis, apply knowledge of critical reasoning, accurately interpret philosophic sources, and clearly communicate a balanced account in writing.
- Critical Reasoning: Ability to construct and analyze complex arguments, and distinguish good reasoning from bad.
- History of Philosophy: Ability to demonstrate a deep understanding of important figures and theories from the history of philosophy.

## General Education Learning Outcomes

- Students identify, frame and analyze social and/or historical structures and institutions in the world today.
- Students articulate how values and ethics inform human understanding, structures, and behavior.

## Grading:

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|--------------------------------|-----|
| • Bi-weekly problem sets       | 40% |
| • Mid-term paper (1,000 words) | 20% |
| • Final paper (1,000 words)    | 30% |
| • Participation                | 10% |

## Problem Sets

The most intensive work for the course will be the homework assignments. You will receive them every other week. I will post them on our Canvas site. You are encouraged to collaborate with other students in discussing the problems on the assignments, but the work you turn in must be your own. You cannot turn in the exact same work as another student. That is plagiarism. (Cf. the university's definition and policy on plagiarism.) Philosophical thinking is nourished by dialogue, so please talk with your classmates, roommates, family, and pets about the ideas we are discussing in the course.

## Papers

The papers are a diagnostic for me to gauge how well you are comprehending the material. The mid-term paper is a halfway check up on that comprehension, and the final paper is the last assessment. You are not expected to produce new, original ideas in Aristotle scholarship, but you are expected to write clearly and demonstrate understanding of what we cover in the course. Additionally, **you are to write the papers independently. Discuss your ideas with other students (and certainly with me), but the writing process is solitary, and you are expected to produce a paper written by you alone.**

- Mid-term paper prompt: The Scientific Revolution of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries was the long and often painful, but enlightening, rejection of the Aristotelian worldview in favor of modern science. Drawing on what we have learned thus far of his principles, methods, and conclusions, describe the Aristotelian worldview. Identify what elements of this worldview are decidedly (per the Scientific Revolution) not modern and what, if any, persist in their explanatory power.
  - For GE committee (not to be included in final syllabus): This prompt enables students to summarize the development of their thinking about the way that Aristotle's thought has shaped institutional and cultural patterns. This prompt focuses explicitly on the institution of science (the Scientific Revolution was an *institutional* revolution and a moment of significant historical change, even upheaval) because I want the students to conduct a careful study of the four causes in the *Physics* as a final preparation for starting the *Metaphysics*. As will be discussed in class, the "Aristotelian worldview" just is a worldview framed by Aristotle's four

causes.

- Final paper prompt: In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Aquinas adapted Aristotle's *Metaphysics* to be compatible with Christian theology (or was the adaptation the other way around?), identifying the unmoved mover of Book Lambda as God. At one point, Aquinas claims that "to be good belongs pre-eminently to God. For a thing is good according to its desirableness" (*Summa Theologica* 1.6.1). Trace this idea to its origins in Aristotle's work, accounting for how firmly this central tenet of Christian values is owed to Greek philosophy. Provide your own reflections on how this conception of the good continues to reverberate in modern society.
  - For GE committee (not to be included in final syllabus): This prompt functions as a final reflection on the ultimate conclusion of Aristotle's life's work. It brings together (1) social inquiry into the influence of Aristotle's (pagan) arguments on the most culturally dominant institution of the West (the church) and (2) value inquiry into the history/origins of a notion of goodness that undergirds the Church's moral system and, potentially, our own.

### Participation

Participation is basic. Attend class, turn in all assignments, and engage in classroom discussion to whatever extent you feel comfortable. I also expect everyone to be respectful of each other. This means showing up on time, leaving your phone in your bag, and logging off of social media during class time.

### Required Texts:

- *Aristotle's Complete Works*. Volume One. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton University Press, 1984.
- *Metaphysics*. Translated by C.D.C. Reeve. Hackett, 2016.

## Schedule

DATE	WORK OF ARISTOTLE	SECONDARY LITERATURE
August 28	<i>Categories</i> 1	Shields, "The Varieties of Homonymy"
August 30	<i>Categories</i> 2	Frede, "Individuals in Aristotle"
September 4	<i>Categories</i> 3, 4	
September 6	<i>Categories</i> 5	
September 11	<i>Prior Analytics</i> 1.1	Robin Smith, Intro to <i>Prior Analytics</i>
September 13	<i>Prior Analytics</i> 1.2-3	
September 18	<i>Prior Analytics</i> 1.4	
September 20	<i>Prior Analytics</i> 1.5-6	
September 25	<i>Posterior Analytics</i> 1.2	Jonathan Barnes, Intro to <i>Posterior Analytics</i>
September 27	<i>Posterior Analytics</i> 1.3	
October 2	<i>Posterior Analytics</i> 1.4	
October 3	<i>Posterior Analytics</i> 1.5-6	Corcoran, "Aristotle's Demonstrative Logic"
October 9	<i>Physics</i> 2.3, 194b16-195a3	
October 11	<i>Physics</i> 2.3, 195a4-195b30	
October 16	<i>Metaphysics</i> Alpha.1	Code, Alan. "Aristotle's Metaphysics as a Science of Principles."
October 18	<i>Metaphysics</i> Alpha.2	
October 23	<i>Metaphysics</i> Alpha.3	
October 25	<i>Metaphysics</i> Delta.1	Reeve, C.D.C., "Introduction"
October 30	<i>Metaphysics</i> Delta.7-8	
November 1	<i>Metaphysics</i> Epsilon.1	
November 6	<i>Metaphysics</i> Zeta.1	
November 8	<i>Metaphysics</i> Zeta.2-3	
November 13	<i>Metaphysics</i> Zeta.4-5	
November 15	<i>Metaphysics</i> Zeta 13, 17	
November 20	<i>Metaphysics</i> Lambda.1-3	
November 22	<i>Metaphysics</i> Lambda.4-5	
November 27 and 29	No Class – Happy Thanksgiving	
December 4	<i>Metaphysics</i> Lambda 6-7	
December 5	<i>Metaphysics</i> Lambda 8-10	