

Fourth Paper Topics

Philosophy 25A

August 8, 2014

Write an essay of **5–6 pages** on **one** of the following topics.

1. **The function argument.** In *Nichomachean Ethics* I.7, Aristotle argues that “the human good turns out to be the soul’s activity that expresses virtue” (1098a17). Explain what this conclusion means, and reconstruct Aristotle’s argument for it, drawing on the text in 1097b20–1098a25. Some parts of Aristotle’s argument assume claims first expressed by Plato. In your reconstruction of Aristotle’s argument, be sure to explain where and how he is influenced by Plato’s function argument in *Republic* I (cf. 352e–354a).

Is Aristotle’s conclusion right? Do humans have a function which is unique to them, and has Aristotle correctly identified it? And is it true that leading a good human life requires performing this function in a way that expresses virtue? Explain your reasoning as to why or why not.

2. **Virtue of character.** In *Nichomachean Ethics* II.5, Aristotle provides a definition of virtue of character as “a state that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, which is defined by reference to reason, i.e., to the reason by reference to which the intelligent person would define it” (1107a1–3). Explain what this definition means, and how Aristotle argues for it, using a *brave* or courageous person as an example. Your explanation should draw on the text in *NE* II.1–7.

Is Aristotle’s definition correct? Consider how Plato might evaluate this definition, given his own description of the brave person in *Republic* IV (cf. 429a–430c and 441d–442c). Which parts of Aristotle’s definition would Plato agree with? Which parts of Aristotle’s definition would Plato object to, and why? How might Aristotle respond?

Formatting: Your paper must be double spaced, in 12 point, Times New Roman font, with 1 inch margins. Your title should be in bold. At the top of your paper, include only your student ID number; do not put any other information (e.g. name, date, class number, instructor name, GSI name, etc.). Remember to cite the text using the standard pagination.

Deadline: Your essay is due to Alex by **5PM on Friday, August 15**. Please follow Alex’s instructions about how and where to turn it in.