

ARISTOTLE PAPER PROMPTS

Choose one of the questions below. Support your claims by quotations from Aristotle's text – regardless of whether you are reconstructing or criticizing his argument. Never criticize without first having clarified the position you argue against. Where of help, support your argument with additional examples. As a textual basis for your essay, the parts of *Nicomachean Ethics* we discussed in class up to this point will be sufficient and it is recommended that you concentrate on those. References to the rest of the book may be included only where necessary for your argument, and in a supplementary function.

(1) Everything we do aims at some good, says Aristotle in book I.1, and goods come in hierarchical orders. Once we have such orders, book I.2 continues, they must cohere and lead all the way up to a highest good, for otherwise the entire economy of goods (and consequently every one of our desires) would be “futile and pointless.” What do you make of this argument? Is there any necessity by which the human economy of goods requires such an absolute point of foundation? You may use for your argument Aristotle's theory of virtuous action, as well as his model of human community based on exchange and especially money in book V.

(2) To what extent is the successful pursuit of a good life within our powers? In other words: What is the relationship of the good life with regard to fortune? First, reconstruct Aristotle's position in book I.10 in detail. Then subject it to a critical evaluation. You may (but you don't have to) consider composing your argument in light of his discussion of the relationship between the voluntary and the involuntary, the structure of choice, and responsibility for our actions in book III.1-5, as well as the relationship of virtuous action to nature and to habit in book II.1. Support your argument by examples of human action at every step.

(3) What does Aristotle in book V. mean by equality, the supreme criterion for justice? Who and what is equal, for whom, and what is the formal structure of equality? You may (but you don't have to) consider for your argument: In what ways does the discussion of equality draw on the basic theory of virtue developed in book II? How is equality related to distribution, and how to rectification? Why does exchange matter? Finally, please show how equality is constitutive for Aristotle's model of political community, and conclude your essay by a critical evaluation of that model.

(4) What is at stake in the notion of equity developed in V.10? Provide a detailed interpretation of the passage on p. 141-142 that starts describing the equitable as “a corrective of what is legally just. The reason is...” and ends by the end of the paragraph with “...given situation.” What can you infer from the passage about the practice of the law? And what about the structure of human judgment (choice) more generally? Finally, what role do you ascribe to judgment within the larger design of Aristotle’s ethical project (to the extent to which we have discussed it so far)?