**Description**

This course is designed to be an optimally broad and deep survey of Aristotle that is tailored to graduate students in philosophy. It presupposes no knowledge of Greek and focuses on those parts of Aristotle’s work that are especially alive in contemporary philosophy. But the course also should be accessible to advanced undergraduates and to graduate students in other programs.

In one semester, we could not responsibly cover the whole of Aristotle’s surviving corpus. We will be skipping the lion’s share of this corpus, which is work in biology. This work is foundational and fascinating, but of primarily historical interest. We will be sidestepping most of his work in natural philosophy. We will also skip over his contributions to logic, which were quickly superseded by Stoics, and then again by medievals, and finally, again, by Frege. Last, there will be no discussion of his work in poetics, rhetoric, or politics (narrowly construed). These probably deserve more attention from philosophers than they typically get, and they definitely receive lots of attention outside philosophy. But time is limited, and a graduate course should not entirely surrender digging deep in order to survey more ground.

What will the course focus on? Some basic questions of metaphysics and ethics. In metaphysics, what exists, and how do the existents relate to each other? In ethics, how should a person live, and what role(s) should other people play in one’s life? Throughout the semester, epistemological questions (what would it take to know such a thing?) and meta-philosophical questions (how should we investigate?) will arise, and we will not ignore them. In fact, to prepare for them, we will look at Aristotle’s most programmatic remarks about knowledge and method before we proceed to his work in metaphysics and ethics.

**Prerequisites**

The official prerequisites are simple: the course is open to anyone who is a graduate student in philosophy OR who has completed at least one philosophy class at the 300-level (or its equivalent at
another university) and at least two philosophy courses overall OR who has the permission of the instructor.

The unofficial prerequisites are more important, and they explain how the instructor grants permission. Simply put, it will be difficult to keep up with this course if one does not have (1) some comfortable acquaintance with philosophy, (2) some comfortable acquaintance with Aristotle, and (3) a significant amount of time in which to study the required readings. Any student who has done well in the 300-level survey of ancient philosophy should have the necessary comfort-level with philosophy and with Aristotle, and other routes to the informal prerequisites are possible. But these requirements should be taken seriously. It is possible to overcome some deficit in one's philosophical background or one's past experience with Aristotle, but this will require extra reading and re-reading, which will require still more time.

**Grades and Requirements**

A. **Participation.** Because the class is designed to provide an advanced survey of Aristotle, the instructor will do a lot of talking to cover an extensive amount of ground. But he expects to be interrupted with questions at any moment, and will be disappointed if he is not interrupted. All students are expected to be ready and willing to participate when discussion arises. (bonus points at instructor's discretion)

B. **Writing.** There are two options.

(1) Two short papers (maximum 2500 words each, excluding notes), one due at noon on **Monday, 18 March**, and the other due at noon on **Friday, 3 May**. The essays should be submitted with your **student number and not your name**, as a .docx or .pdf file uploaded under the relevant assignment on the Canvas site. Some topics will be made available on Canvas as the assignment, but students are free to write on a topic of their own choosing, so long as that topic was clearly raised in class about Aristotelian metaphysics (for the first essay) or about Aristotelian ethics (for the second). (100 points each)

(2) One longer, research paper (maximum 7500 words, excluding notes), due at noon on **Friday, 3 May**. As a research paper, this is expected to take account of the literature in the field. This option is available only by petition, and petitions are due by noon on **8 March**. If you are interested, express your interest to me in writing by then. (An email suffices. No, you do not have to have a settled topic at that point. But you’d better have some ideas.) (200 points)

C. **Exam.** There will be a final exam to test for acquaintance with Plato’s philosophical achievement. The test will consist of identifying ten of twelve short passages from dialogues assigned in this course.
Identifications must explain what is being said and the significance of what is being said to the dialogue. This requires placing the passage in its context, and explaining how it contributes to the philosophical work being done. (100 points)

The deadlines are firm, and tardiness will be penalized by ten points per twenty-four hours or fraction thereof. An incomplete for additional work on a research paper is available by a written petition that specifies a new deadline, but the standards for papers handed in later will be significantly higher.

It should not be necessary to say, but all work submitted for credit in this class must be the student’s own and written for this particular class. If ideas or words are borrowed without attribution from another person or are borrowed from work done for another class, or if there is any other violation of the academic integrity policy printed in the course listings, the student will automatically fail the course and be referred to the committee on academic integrity.

There are 300 points possible, and the final grade will be based on a simple conversion to a common scale (97-100 A+, 94-96 A, 90-93 A-, etc.). The instructor reserves the right to revise a student’s grade upward to reward progress. Students taking the class pass/fail need a C+ conversion to pass, and must have satisfied the first option, of two short papers.

Texts

The texts of Aristotle are a problem. There is no great translation of his complete works by one consistent hand. Some editions are variable in their translations, some are incomplete, and some are both. Worse, the best option is also the most expensive. But for the sake of clear discussion, I prefer that we all use this same edition in the course. With the conviction that everyone seriously interested in philosophy should own the complete works of Aristotle, I have thus ordered the expensive edition at Subterranean Books (6275 Delmar, in the Loop):

The Complete Works of Aristotle, vol. 1  

The Complete Works of Aristotle, vol. 2  

If the cost is prohibitive in your case, and if you already have an alternative edition that contains most of what we are reading—A New Aristotle Reader, ed. Ackrill, for instance, of perhaps the Hackett volume of Selections, ed. and trans. Irwin and Fine—you should feel free to use that and to make
photocopies from a library volume of any required readings you lack. There is the potential for terminological confusion here, but we will do our best.

If you don’t read Greek, you will want to consult a second or even third translation before you make any careful attributions in your essay(s). You might want to compare what is in the Revised Oxford Translation (the two-volume set edited by Barnes) with what Irwin and Fine offer (Hackett), or C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett), or the Clarendon Aristotle Series, or Apostle (Peripatetic Press). If you find yourself enchanted by the central books of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and want a translation that tries to stay as close to the Greek as possible, I recommend Montgomery Furth’s rendering (Hackett). If you find yourself interested in Aristotle’s ethics, at all, I strongly recommend purchasing the translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* by Christopher Rowe, with introduction and commentary by Sarah Broadie (Oxford), and the translation of the *Eudemian Ethics* by Raphael Woolf and Brad Inwood (Cambridge). I would avoid the Loeb translations, except for *De Caelo* and the biological works.

If you do read Greek, grab yourself at least the library copy of the most recent edition you can find for the text we are reading and give it a look.

For secondary material, you might want to start with the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online, open access), which has a general overview of Aristotle by Christopher Shields, a survey of Aristotle’s ethics by Richard Kraut, and a survey of Aristotle’s metaphysics by Marc Cohen. All of these are good — though naturally I don’t endorse every bit of them — and all of them have relatively up-to-date bibliographies that will help you search for more.

For additional bibliographical searching, I recommend PhilPapers for searching some keywords, and a perusal of the Oxford Bibliographies Online articles on Aristotle’s ethics and on Aristotle’s metaphysics. (If you navigate the old-fashioned way, keep in mind Oxford classifies these under “Classics,” not “Philosophy.” But a google search should work, so long as you are on campus or using the Olin library server as a proxy.) The *Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*—Olin has electronic access to this series — also has a great bibliography, though it is not up-to-date.

**Note for Readers of Greek**

If there is interest, I will be happy to meet a few times to read (in Greek) and discuss (in English) a short passage of the required reading. I will make available photocopies of the selected passage.
Suggestions for Reading

Aristotle’s writing is much too dense to be read casually. Even in the context of philosophical writing, Aristotle’s is difficult.

In my lectures, I will generally try to spiral into the day’s selection. I will start by situating it in the broader context of Aristotle’s corpus, and I will proceed by offering a general characterization of its main thesis or theses. Where there is controversy about the situation or thesis of the passage, which is virtually everywhere, I will make these steps by lay out the contending interpretations. Then I will offer a coarse outline of the reading (or, in the case of Metaphysics Zeta, the competing coarse outlines), before I turn to progressively finer outlines that highlight the arguments that are most important to the interpretive controversy and especially (where these are not the same) the arguments that are most significant for assessing Aristotle’s position.

I suggest that everyone read with a similar strategy in mind. Start by working through the whole selection, with some glances to its broader context. Note that Aristotle frequently buries his main point at the end of a chapter, or even the end of a series of chapters. That is why you need to read through the whole selection to figure out what he is trying to do. Once you have figured out what he is trying to do, work through the selection again to see how he gets there. Start by reading through a bit more slowly to establish a coarse outline of the whole selection, and read once more, painstakingly, trying to fill in each part of the outline and account for every sentence.

Collect your questions as you do this. Where do there seem to be gaps or inconsistencies? One of these would make for a terrific short essay.

Syllabus

I have listed here only the required primary texts.
I might also suggest some secondary texts along the way, and will be happy to help guide you toward secondary reading if you are interested in exploring.

Jan 15

Introduction

Jan 17

Metaphilosophy and Epistemology
Prior Analytics I 23, 30
Posterior Analytics I 1-4, II 19
Topics I 1-3
Topics VI 4
Sophistical Refutations I-2
Physics I 1
Meteorology I 1
Parts of Animals I 1
Metaphysics I 1
Metaphysics G (IV) 1 995a24-b4
Metaphysics Δ (V) 1
Metaphysics Z (VII) 3 1029b3-12
Nicomachean Ethics I 3 1094b11-27
Nicomachean Ethics I 4 1095a28-30
Nicomachean Ethics VII 1 1145b2-7

Jan 22-24  Basic Ontology
Categories 1-5 and 11
Topics I 4, 9
Posterior Analytics I 22

Jan 29-31  Change and Hylomorphism
Physics III 1 200b33-34
Physics I 1
Physics I 5-9
Physics II 1-3
Metaphysics Δ (I) 3
Metaphysics Δ (V) 2
Posterior Analytics II 11

Feb 5-7  Teleology
Physics II 7-9
Metereologica IV 12
Parts of Animals I 1
Parts of Animals I 5
Parts of Animals II 1
Generation of Animals V 1 through 778b20
Generation of Animals V 8

Feb 12-14  Psychology
On the Soul I 1
On the Soul I 4
On the Soul II 1-6
On the Soul II 12
Feb 19  
**First Philosophy**
*Physics* I 1 and I 9 192a34-192b2  
*Metaphysics* A (I) 1-3  
*Metaphysics* B (III) 1  
*Metaphysics* G (IV) 1-2  
*Metaphysics* E (VI) 1  
*Metaphysics* Z (VII) 1  
*Metaphysics* L (XII) 6-7

Feb 21-28  
**Substantial Being**
*Metaphysics* G (IV) II  
*Metaphysics* Z (VII)  
*Metaphysics* H (VIII) 1, through 1042a22

Mar 5-7  
**Theology**
*Physics* VIII 6  
*De Caelo* I 1-3  
*Metaphysics* L (XII)

Mar 8  
Notification of intent to write long essay due at noon

Mar 12-14  
NO CLASS — Spring Break

Mar 18  
**First Short Essay Due at Noon (for two short essay option)**

Mar 19-21  
**The Ultimate Goal (Living Well, Eudaimonia, the Human Good)**
*Nicomachean Ethics* I 1-13  
optional: *Eudemian Ethics* I-II 1

Mar 26-28  
**Virtues of Character**
*Nicomachean Ethics* I 13-II, III 6-IV  
optional: *Eudemian Ethics* II 1-5, III

Apr 2-4  
**Virtues of Intellect**
*Nicomachean Ethics* III 1-5 and VI  
optional: *Eudemian Ethics* II 6-11 and VIII 3
Apr 9-11  
**Friendship**  
*Nicomachean Ethics* VII-VIII  
optional: *Eudemian Ethics* VII

Apr 16-18  
**Pleasure**  
*Nicomachean Ethics* VII 11-14 and X 1-5

Apr 23-25  
**Politics and Philosophy**  
*Nicomachean Ethics* X 6-9  
*Politics* I 1-2  
*Politics* III 1-7  
*Politics* VII 1-3  
optional: *Eudemian Ethics* VIII

Apr 30  
Optional Review, 1-4 pm

May 3  
**Second Short Essay or Long Essay Due at Noon**

May 7  
Final Exam, 1-3 pm

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**GUIDELINES FOR WRITING**

1. There is no excuse for typographical **errors**, orthographical errors, or grammatical errors. Nor is there any excuse for those errors of diction that are not easily ensnared in the nets of grammar and orthography. You can avoid most of these errors by sticking to words that you know very well in their written form, remaining on friendly terms with a good dictionary, and editing carefully. When you edit, you should look for the common errors of grammar and style that William Safire summarizes as follows:

   No sentence fragments. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read. A writer must not shift your point of view. Reserve the apostrophe for it’s proper use and omit it when its not needed. Write all adverbial forms correct. In their writing, everyone should make sure that their pronouns agree with its antecedent. Use the semicolon properly, use it between complete but related thoughts; and not between an independent clause and a mere phrase. Don’t use no double negatives. Also, avoid awkward or affected alliteration. If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times: Resist hyperbole. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is. Avoid commas, that are not necessary. Verbs has to agree with their subjects. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky. And don’t start a sentence with a conjunction. The passive voice should never be used. Writing carefully, dangling participles should be avoided.
Unless you are quoting other people’s exclamations, kill all exclamation points!!! Never use a long word when a diminutive one will do. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out. Use parallel structure when you write and in speaking. You should just avoid confusing readers with misplaced modifiers. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences—such as those of ten or more words—to their antecedents. Eschew dialect, irregardless. Remember to never split an infinitive. Take the bull by the hand and don’t mix metaphors. Don’t verb nouns. Always pick on the correct idiom. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies. “Avoid overuse of ‘quotation “marks.’”” Never use prepositions to end a sentence with. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.

Editing is tricky business, and you cannot trust computer software to do it right. Seek out a friend for a fresh perspective on your writing or the Writing Center in Eads Hall 111 (935-4981) for help in learning how to learn to edit.

2. Writing that is free from error is not yet good writing. Prose style is difficult to cultivate except by practice, but there are some general guidelines worth learning. Great prose is concise (it wastes no words), precise (it says exactly what it means), and concrete (it does not use hazy concepts whose meanings are contested). Several guidebooks provide helpful advice about how to achieve concise, precise, and concrete prose; in particular, Joseph Williams’ Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace is worth reviewing periodically. Among the most broadly helpful pieces of advice are these:

   - organize your sentences from old information (at the start) to new information (at the end);
   - don’t forget that verbs convey information, often more concisely than constructions built around a simple linking verb;
   - be wary of abstract (Latinate) nouns and prefer concrete (Anglo-Saxon) words;
   - shun jargon and technical vocabulary except where nothing less wieldy will do (and in these cases explain each term that you introduce);
   - prefer simple constructions to more ornate ones; and
   - use similes, metaphors, and intensifying adjectives and adverbs (e.g., ‘very’) sparingly.

In addition to collecting and reviewing advice, one who aspires to write great prose should cultivate taste for great prose. Make a habit of reading in The New Yorker, Harper’s, or The Atlantic Monthly, and seek out the essays of past masters of English prose such as Orwell and E.B. White.

So much for prose style in general. Keep in mind that there are multiple successful prose styles. Good writing varies in its register or tone, its wit, its elegance, and its vigor. Careful writers will vary their style of prose to suit its function, from piece to piece and sometimes from section to section. So what is the point of your essay, and who is it for? In this class, you are not writing informative essays but argumentative essays, and you are writing for a formal occasion. So here are some upshots of that.

(a) Unless you hate your readers, your essay shouldn’t sound pretentious and obscure, but because you are writing for a formal occasion, your essay shouldn’t sound chatty, either. But it should definitely sound: prose style is best checked by being read aloud.
(b) Your prose will be rewarded for wit, elegance, and vigor, but not as strongly as it will be penalized for lacking concision, precision, or concreteness.
(c) Your audience is captive, so you do not need to draw us in with an anecdote or an arresting claim. Given that your words are limited, you shouldn’t waste them on what you do not need.
(d) You might think that your audience is well-informed, but you should not take anything for granted. What we take to be obvious is not necessarily what you take to be obvious. These texts and the topics they involve are complicated, and language is frequently ambiguous in ways that can confound successful communication. There are many potential obstacles here. To make your case as clear and unlikely to mislead as possible, assume that we are ignorant and hostile.
(e) Your essays are short, so they shouldn’t need elaborate directions to chart your course, or a summing up at the end.
(f) You are writing as an advocate for a position and not as a faceless journalist, so it is not at all inappropriate for you to use the first-person singular pronoun.

3. Since you are writing argumentative essays, the most important feature of your essay is its thesis. Your essay must advance a clearly formulated contestable claim, and it must be organized in the service of building a case for that claim. To arrive at a good thesis, try to find the question you mean to answer. You can sharpen the formulation of your thesis by considering alternative ways of formulating the question. (What exact question do you want to answer, and what questions do you want to set aside?) You can test the contestability of your thesis by asking whether a reasonable person could make a decent case for a different answer to your question. (If they couldn’t, your thesis is not contestable.) Be especially sure that the scope of your question and thesis is explicit. Make your thesis as narrow as it needs to be so that you can make a strong case for it in a short essay. (It sometimes helps to say what you are not arguing for.) There will be time enough later to fashion a broader thesis, with a larger supporting case. You need to master the skill of writing an argumentative essay before you write an enormous argumentative essay.

4. For all the importance of the prose as prose, and of the thesis itself, your essay will be primarily evaluated on the basis of the argument it offers for its thesis. (This is why your thesis is so important: if it is unclear, your argument cannot succeed. We do not care whether we find your thesis especially plausible or not. Make a good case for a clearly stated, contestable claim, and you’ve written a good argumentative essay.) Are the reasons you offer clear? How good are they? In particular, where your reasons depend on evidence, how well do you marshal that evidence?

5. The best case for a contestable claim must be better than the best case for rejecting that claim, and it must be strong enough to overcome the best objections it faces. A strong argumentative essay will not leave these matters to the reader’s imagination, but will engage with how a reasonable person might resist the case being made or might argue against the thesis. To assess your essay, ask yourself, Do you confront potential objections to your reasons or potential alternatives to your interpretation of the evidence? Have you answered such objections? Do you consider counter-evidence to your reasoning,
and do you show why such evidence does not undermine your case? Have you confirmed your case by comparing it to the best case for the most plausible alternative to your thesis?

If the prose is at least unproblematic; the thesis is explicit, precise, and contestable; there are well-organized reasons in favor of thesis, with well-handled evidence; and there is some clear engagement with another perspective (some objection, some counter-evidence, some counter-interpretation), then the essay meets expectations. That’s a very good achievement, especially if you’ve never been asked to write an essay like this before. But because our sights are set high here, the essay that meets expectations earns a B+ (87-89).

Especially good prose earns a bonus point or two, as does an especially interesting thesis. But the bulk of the difference between a good essay that meets expectations and a very good one (A-, 90-93) or a great one (A, 94+) depends on the quality of the argumentation. How good are the reasons? How much evidence is marshaled, and how deftly? How thoughtfully are alternatives considered?

Conversely, problems with the prose, the thesis, the organization, the handling of evidence, or engagement with alternative possibilities will be noted, and points subtracted accordingly.