

Aristotle's Theoretical Philosophy

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Course Description

Known in the middle ages simply as “The Philosopher,” perhaps no other thinker can claim as great an influence over the discipline of philosophy as Aristotle. In this class, you will see why. Aristotle wrote on philosophy across the discipline—from philosophy of language and metaphysics to philosophy of art and literature. His writings became the standard for disciplinary boundaries (Biology, meteorology, psychology, physics, etc.). And many of the concepts he developed are still paradigmatic today.

In this class, we read texts to try and understand the theoretical basis for Aristotle’s philosophy. For this reason, we will focus mainly on his “theoretical philosophy” (logic, philosophy of language, physics, and metaphysics). We will not read his “practical philosophy” (politics, rhetoric, ethics) or his biological and literary philosophy.

What will students accomplish by taking this course?

- (1) Students will learn how to read Aristotle.
- (2) Students will learn how to employ Aristotelian concepts.
- (3) Students will improve their ability to create and defend philosophical arguments.

How will students accomplish each of these goals?

- (1) Students will accomplish this first goal by using my reading guides and by practicing and talking about how to read Aristotle together in class.
- (2) Note that the second goal does not entail memorizing definitions of Aristotle’s concepts. Instead, we try to figure out what Aristotle means by applying, extending, and evaluating some of Aristotle’s ideas (through in-class activities and workshops). Students will be assessed on this goal through mid-term and final exams.
- (3) To accomplish the final goal, students will be exposed to current discussions about Aristotle by reading selected academic articles. In addition, each student will give a presentation on one of these articles during the course of the semester. Finally, students will complete several assignments that will help students prepare for writing a research paper.

Grading breakdown

Category	Weight
Engagement Evaluation	30%
Article Presentation	10%
Final Paper	30%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	15%

Grading scale

Grades	Percent
A	93%
A-	90%
B+	87%
B	83%
B-	80%
C+	77%
C	73%
C-	70%
D+	67%
D	63%
D-	60%
E	0%

Required Texts:

The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. McKeon.

Teaching Philosophy

I am dedicated to an “experiential” or “active” learning model—one in which real learning goes beyond mastery of concepts to higher-order skills like interpretation and analysis. Because of this, class time will not be used to “cover” everything that was in the day’s reading. Instead, it will be dedicated to solving problems, applying concepts, and evaluating Plato’s arguments. Of course, I will spend some of our time in class explaining difficult concepts, but we will spend as much of our time in class as possible doing other learning activities—actively learning. This format will require a higher level of dedication, and perhaps it will at first be unfamiliar, but it will greatly improve your philosophical abilities.

Special Considerations

Because of the engagement required in this class, this is not a class that you can “sit in the back row”—even electronically. If you would like a class where you will be able to do other work simultaneously (your job, driving, laundry, etc.), please choose a different course. As you can see from the grading breakdown, a large portion of your grade will be based on engagement.

Because Zoom format is a new medium that we are all getting used to, let’s work together to create a class climate that will promote everyone’s learning. Among other things, *please turn on your camera*. This is a small, upper-division course, and your presence will strengthen our learning community. (Of course, there will be times when this may not be possible, but I hope you will help ‘cameras-on’ be the norm.) And when you do turn on your camera, try not to do anything distracting (using animated backgrounds, driving, playing games with your pet dog, etc.).

Finally, *classes will not be recorded*. This is because, as explained above, I want to use our class time to develop skills. Part of this requires risk and the open exchange of ideas—an exchange which might be dampened if students are worried that they are being recorded.

Communication Strategy

Because this course is online, it is important that you know that I am available to help and that I will do my best to respond quickly to your questions and concerns. You can reach me by email at sean_driscoll@byu.edu, and I will check it regularly (though please note that I am not Google, so I am unplugged sometimes). Please do not send messages through Learning Suite (or Twitter or carrier pigeon or whatever other platform you might have in mind); the best way to contact me is email.

I will also hold regular office hours. During this time, I will be available to talk one-on-one, and I will use Zoom's "waiting room" function for this (students will be admitted from the waiting room individually). You can find the link to my office hours on Learning Suite.

University Honor Code

In keeping with the principles of the BYU Honor Code, students are expected to be honest in all of their academic work. Academic honesty means, most fundamentally, that any work you present as your own must in fact be your own work and not that of another. Violations of this principle may result in a failing grade in the course and additional disciplinary action by the university. Students are also expected to adhere to the Dress and Grooming Standards. Adherence demonstrates respect for yourself and others and ensures an effective learning and working environment. It is the university's expectation, and every instructor's expectation in class, that each student will abide by all Honor Code standards. Please call the Honor Code Office at 422-2847 if you have questions about those standards.

All course materials (e.g., outlines, handouts, syllabi, exams, quizzes, PowerPoint presentations, lectures, audio and video recordings, etc.) are proprietary. Students are prohibited from posting, distributing, or selling any such course materials without the express written permission of the professor teaching this course. Students are also prohibited from sharing links for online class lectures with others who are not registered for the course at BYU. The conduct described in this paragraph could be considered a violation of the Brigham Young University honor code, the Academic Honesty Policy, and potentially an infringement of federal copyright laws.

Preventing & Responding to Sexual Misconduct

In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Brigham Young University prohibits unlawful sex discrimination against any participant in its education programs or activities. The university also prohibits sexual harassment—including sexual violence—committed by or against students, university employees, and visitors to campus. As outlined in university policy, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking are considered forms of "Sexual Misconduct" prohibited by the university.

University policy requires all university employees in a teaching, managerial, or supervisory role to report all incidents of Sexual Misconduct that come to their attention in any way, including but not limited to face-to-face conversations, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. Incidents of Sexual Misconduct should be reported to the Title IX Coordinator at t9coordinator@byu.edu or (801) 422-8692. Reports may also be submitted through EthicsPoint at <https://titleix.byu.edu/report> or 1-888-238-1062 (24-hours a day).

BYU offers confidential resources for those affected by Sexual Misconduct, including the university's Victim Advocate, as well as a number of non-confidential resources and services that may be helpful. Additional information about Title IX, the university's Sexual Misconduct Policy, reporting requirements, and resources can be found at <http://titleix.byu.edu> or by contacting the university's Title IX Coordinator.

Student Disability

Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere that reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. A disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Whether an impairment is substantially limiting depends on its nature and severity, its duration or expected duration, and its permanent or expected permanent or long-term impact. Examples include vision or hearing impairments, physical disabilities, chronic illnesses, emotional disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety), learning disorders, and attention disorders (e.g., ADHD). If you have a disability which impairs your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the University Accessibility Center (UAC), 2170 WSC or 801-422-2767 to request a reasonable accommodation. The UAC can also assess students for learning, attention, and emotional concerns. If you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, please contact the Equal Employment Office at 801-422-5895, D-285 ASB for help.

***Tentative* Course Schedule (I will keep the Learning Suite schedule updated)**

Mon - Jan 11	Introduction to the class.
Wed - Jan 13	Intellectual Virtues: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , book VI.
Fri - Jan 15	Intellectual Virtues: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , book VI, again.
Wed - Jan 20	Back to the basics: <i>Categories</i> 1-3.
Fri - Jan 22	Substance: <i>Categories</i> 4-5.
Mon - Jan 25	Quantity and Relation: <i>Categories</i> 6-7
Wed - Jan 27	Loux, "Being, Categories and Universal Reference in Aristotle."
Fri - Jan 29	Philosophy of language: <i>On Interpretation</i> 1.
Mon - Feb 01	Philosophy of language: <i>On Interpretation</i> 1 (read it again) and 2-5.
Wed - Feb 03	Philosophy of language: <i>On Interpretation</i> 6-8. Also read Jones, "Truth and Contradiction in Aristotle's <i>De Interpretatione</i> 6-9"
Fri - Feb 05	There will be a sea battle! <i>On Interpretation</i> 9.
Mon - Feb 08	Hintikka, "The once and future sea fight: Aristotle's discussion of future contingents in <i>De Interpretatione</i> ix."
Wed - Feb 10	What is logic? <i>Prior Analytics</i> I.1-3.

Fri - Feb 12	What is a syllogism? <i>Prior Analytics</i> I.4-6.
Tue - Feb 16	Monday Instruction More on syllogism. <i>Prior Analytics</i> I.24-25, II.18.
Wed - Feb 17	Corcoran's "Aristotelian Syllogisms: Valid Arguments or True Universalized Conditionals?"
Fri - Feb 19	Workshop Day
Mon - Feb 22	Midterm Review
Wed - Feb 24	Midterm
Fri - Feb 26	Scientific (?) method: <i>Posterior Analytics</i> I.1-2.
Mon - Mar 01	Scientific (?) method: <i>Posterior Analytics</i> I.1-2. Yeah, you're gonna want to read it again. At least once.
Wed - Mar 03	More on method: <i>Posterior Analytics</i> I.6, I.33 and II.1-2. Also read Aagnostopoulos' "Aristotle's Methods."
Fri - Mar 05	Definition and Demonstration: <i>Posterior Analytics</i> II.3-4.
Mon - Mar 08	More on Demonstration: <i>Posterior Analytics</i> II.8-10.
Wed - Mar 10	What about the first principles? <i>Posterior Analytics</i> II.19. Also read Barnes' "Aristotle's Theory of Demonstration."
Fri - Mar 12	Change and causality: <i>Physics</i> I.1, II.1, II.3-6.
Mon - Mar 15	Change and necessity: <i>Physics</i> II.7-9.
Wed - Mar 17	Motion: <i>Physics</i> III.1-3. Anagnostopoulos' "Change in Aristotle's Physics 3."
Mon - Mar 22	Time: <i>Physics</i> IV.10-14.
Wed - Mar 24	First Philosophy: <i>Metaphysics</i> I.1-2.
Fri - Mar 26	Causality again: <i>Metaphysics</i> I.3-10. Also read Hankinson's "Causes."
Mon - Mar 29	The scope of "first philosophy": <i>Metaphysics</i> IV.1-2.
Wed - Mar 31	What is Being? <i>Metaphysics</i> VI.1-4.
Fri - Apr 02	Substance: <i>Metaphysics</i> VII.1-4, 17. Cohen's "Substances."
Mon - Apr 05	More on substance: <i>Metaphysics</i> VIII.1-2
Wed - Apr 07	Potency and Actuality: <i>Metaphysics</i> IX. 1-4, 6.
Fri - Apr 09	What really is the <i>Metaphysics</i> ? Read Leshner's "Aristotle on Form, Substance, and Universals: A Dilemma."
Mon - Apr 12	Workshop Day
Wed - Apr 14	Final Review
Mon - Apr 19	Final Exam: 11:00am - 2:00pm