5AANB002 Greek Philosophy II: Aristotle
Syllabus – Academic year 2016/17

Basic information

Credits: 15
Module Tutor: Dr Joachim Aufderheide
Office: Room 706, Philosophy Building
Consultation time: Wed 12-1; Thur 1-2
Semester: 2
Lecture time and venue*: tba

*Please note that tutorial times and venues will be organised independently with your teaching tutor

Module description (plus teaching arrangements, aims and objectives)

This course is designed to introduce the students to Aristotle’s wonderfully rich but intricate philosophical writings by focusing on some of the most prominent topics in Aristotle’s philosophy. Students will learn how to read, how to criticise, and how to make sense of Aristotle and will thus be in a position to benefit from the wealth of Aristotle’s thought. In the first four weeks we will study Aristotle’s theoretical philosophy through his treatise *On the Soul* (touching on epistemology, psychology, and metaphysics). The last six weeks are devoted to key topics in Aristotle’s practical philosophy, studied mainly through the *Nicomachean Ethics*. While the module will build on the Greek Philosophy I module for students who have taken it, it does not presuppose that module and can be taken without prerequisite.

Assessment methods and deadlines

- **Formative assessment:** 1 essay of 2000 words length
  - Deadline 16:00 on 27 February 2017

- **Summative assessment:** 2 essays, each of 2000 words length
  - Deadline 12:00 (NOON) on 26 April 2017

Outline of lecture topics (plus readings)


**Week One** The meaning of ‘life’
Reading:
primary (p): *De Anima* I.1-2 & II.1-4

**Week Two** The soul in perception
Reading:
(p): *De Anima* II.5-12;

**Week Three** The soul in thought
Reading:
(p): *De Anima* III.2-6

**Week Four** The soul in desire and action
Reading:
(p): *De Anima* III.6-13

**Week Five** Ethics and the Human Good
Reading:
(p): *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1-12;

READING WEEK – NB FIRST FORMATIVE ESSAY DUE – 27 February 2017, 16:00
Outline of lecture topics (plus readings) – continued

Week Six Virtues of Character
Reading:
(p): EN I.13; II; VI.13;

Week Seven Practical Reason and Wisdom
Reading:
(p): EN III.2-4; VI, esp. 1-2; 8-9; 12;

Week Eight Pleasure
Reading:
(p): EN VII.11-14; EN X.1-5;

Week Nine Perfect Happiness
Reading:
(p): EN X.6-8;
(f): S. Broadie, Ethics with Aristotle, Ch. 7; R. Kraut, Aristotle on the Human Good, Ch.1 (although the whole book is relevant); J. Cooper, ‘Contemplation and Happiness: a Reconsideration’. in J. Cooper, Reason and Emotion.

Week Ten Happiness in the City
Reading:
(p): EN X.9; Pol. I.1-2; II.1-2; VII.1-3; 13-17; VIII;
(s): R. Kraut, Aristotle: Political Philosophy, 192-239 (on the ideal city) and 240-76 (on “political animals”).
Essay questions

Task 1: Write one 2000w **formative essay** on one of the following topics.

1) Explain Aristotle’s definition of the soul.
2) Why does Aristotle reject soul-body dualism?
3) Why does Aristotle reject his predecessors' accounts of perception?
4) How does an animal move, according to De Anima III.9-13?
5) Explain Aristotle’s conception of happiness.
6) Aristotle’s ethical philosophy is often summed up as 'the philosophy of the golden mean'. Is this an apt characterisation? Explain and discuss.
7) Explain Aristotle’s conception of practical reasoning. Is the Grand End Theory plausible?
8) Are the accounts of pleasure in EN VII and X compatible?
9) Is Aristotle’s sketch of the ideal life in X.7-8 in line with the rest of the EN?
10) Is the *Nicomachean Ethics* a continuous discourse with the *Politics* or can both be understood independently of each other? Which assumptions do they share, if any?

Task 2: Write two 2000w **summative essays**, choosing one topic from each section.

**NB** You may choose to write formative and summative essays on a similar topic, provided that you **avoid significant overlap**.

**Section 1**

1) Does Aristotle’s definition of the soul contain a vicious circle?
2) How can we best describe Aristotle’s theory of mind: dualist, functionalist, or sui generis?
3) In your view, what is the most plausible interpretation of Aristotle’s account of perceiving?
4) In your view, what is the most plausible interpretation of Aristotle’s account of thinking?
5) Do you think Aristotle’s account of desire is too intellectual?

**Section 2**

1) Can you make sense of the function argument so that it does not come out stupid?
2) Considering the formal criteria for happiness, do you take Aristotle to be an inclusivist?
3) Is Aristotle a virtue ethicist in the contemporary sense of the term? Answer with reference to EN II.6.
4) Is Aristotle entitled to make the mean central to his account of virtue, or should he speak the good and right instead?
5) Do you agree with Aristotle that one cannot have virtue of character without practical wisdom and vice versa? Explain your choice.
6) What is the role of intellect and desire respectively in acting virtuously?
7) Which view of pleasure do you find more plausible, that of EN VII or of EN X?
8) How does Aristotle in Book X argue that the best activities are the most pleasant ones?
9) For Aristotle the best life centres on theoretical contemplation. Does this mean that a morally bad person can be happy, given that she puts enough effort into thinking? Discuss.
10) Is a life of theoretical contemplation really better than the life of moral virtue? Discuss by reference to EN X.7-8.
11) Explain and assess Aristotle’s claim that human beings are "political animals"
12) Which good is prior, that of the citizen or that of the city?
Suggested additional readings

Translations and commentaries:

**De Anima**

**Nicomachean Ethics**
Broadie, Sarah and Christopher J Rowe. 2002. *Aristotle: Nicomachean ethics*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press [This book is worth having because it contains not only the best translation of the EN available, but also because of the very good commentary and fine introductory essays.]

More generally on the ethics:

Even more generally:
J. Barnes, *Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* contains a very full (and commented) bibliography which should serve as an excellent starting point for further research on pretty much any topic in Aristotle.

There are also two recent collections of papers that contain excellent overviews of complex topics: