Aristotle Guide
PHIL301
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*Categories*: Chapters 1-5: 1a1-4b19 (RAGP pp. 694-700) | Metaphysics: Ontology  
Epistemology: Empiricism  
Idealism and Naturalism |
| Mar. 31    | *Physics*: Book I, Chapters 1, 5, 6, 7: 184a11-184b5, 188a32-188b26, 189a28-189b4, 189b30-191b34,  
Book II, Chapters 3-9: 194b17-200b8 (RAGP pp. 732-739, 745-757);  
*Meterologica*: IV.12, (RAGP pp. 785-6)  
*Parts of Animals*: 639b12-645a38 (RAGP pp. 788-795) | Metaphysics: Causation and Change  
Empiricism, cont.  
Chance and Luck: Limits to Logic? |
| Apr. 7     | *Nicomachean Ethics*: Book I, Chapters 1-9, 13, Book II, Chapters 1-6: 1094a1-1100a9, 1102a5-1107a27 (RAGP pp. 870-890) | Human Being  
Human Nature  
Human Virtue  
Further limits to logic? |

See also the lecture note files, Aristotle I, Aristotle II, Aristotle III, and Aristotle IV, on our webpage.

In General:
- Note that most of the extant works of Aristotle are lecture notes, so they tend to be condensed.
- Aristotle is a rationalist, as we have defined that term. He believes that the world we live in is a logical cosmos, open to understanding by humans. He believes that it is highly systematic, so that a relatively small number of principles governs all reality. He believes that we can come to know these principles and other details about reality by means of careful sense observation and reasoned analysis.
- Aristotle is also more of an *empiricist* or *empirical scientist* than was Plato. Plato, as we have seen, was suspicious of the capacity of sensation to reveal truth, and postulated an ideal realm of truth, open only to the intellect. Aristotle, by contrast, is more cautious where non-sensible things are concerned, and tends to regard the world of sense as the only reality, a reality that sense observation can help us to understand. Moreover, as an empiricist, Aristotle’s method involves collecting “data” – often in the form of how we talk about things – and then organizing and analyzing the data for commonalities and differences. (Note the congruence of data analysis with the rationalist method generally: it reveals the principles and system of the cosmos.)
- Aristotle is also more in line with the *naturalism* of the Pre-Socratics. While Plato was an *idealist*, identifying ultimate reality as an ideal realm, Aristotle, as above, believed that
reality consists primarily in the physical world. At certain points in his work, however, it becomes less clear how completely Aristotle resists Plato’s idealism.

Introduction (pp. 683-692)

Note: The introduction will be useful in gaining an overview of Aristotle’s work, its variety, and its relationship to that of the Pre-Socratics, Socrates, and Plato.

1. What are the general scope and subject of Aristotle’s inquiries?
2. Why is Aristotle difficult to read?
3. What is Aristotle’s general view of the possibility of empirical knowledge?
4. What is the study of “being qua being”?
5. Which are the “primary” things, on Aristotle’s view?
6. What is it for a thing to be alive, on his view?
7. Why does Aristotle think that the intellect might in some sense be separable from the body?
8. How does Aristotle go about answering the question, what is the human good?

Categories 1-5 (pp. 694-700)

Note: A predicate is a form of speech that says something about a thing; a subject is that to which a predicate applies.
Note: To say something of a thing is to classify it: e.g., if horse is said of Barbaro, then Barbaro is classified as a horse.
Note: To say that something is in a thing is to indicate a dependence relation: e.g., if knowledge is said to be in a man, then that knowledge cannot exist except in a man (or in something like it).

More specific notes:

1.1a1-15: homonyms, synonyms, and paronyms. Aristotle is calling attention to the specific functions of single words. Some words (homonyms) have multiple meanings, e.g., ‘tie’, which can mean an article of clothing or a part of a railroad. Others (synonyms) have one meaning but apply to different kinds of thing, e.g., ‘animal’, which applies both to horse and to man. Some words (paronyms) derive from others of a different kind, e.g., ‘runner’ comes from ‘run’. (We may suppose that these examples are not intended by Aristotle to be exhaustive of the different classes of words.)

2.1a16-19: Building now on the notion of single words and their various forms and functions, Aristotle points out that words can function both “in combination” and by themselves. I.e., we can form sentences with words, or use them singly. When words are combined to form sentences, we typically have a subject (‘man’, e.g.) and a predicate (‘runs’, e.g.).

What Aristotle is doing, here, is calling our attention to words, their various functions, and in particular the various ways in which they allow us to consider one aspect of the world or another. Note, too, the empiricist method: the empiricist operates by collecting a wide range of data (i.e., observations), and then organizing that data into some intelligible arrangement or classification, thereby revealing the basic arrangement or order of the world around us. In this case, he is looking at words, observing certain basic similarities and differences among their functions, with an eye towards gleaning from them, perhaps, information about the basic organization of the cosmos.

Aristotle’s next observation is central to the Categories:
2.1a20-1b6: a four-way distinction in predication: some predicates are *said of* a subject, but not *said in* any subject; some predicates are *said in* a subject, but not *said of* any subject; some predicates are both *said of* and *said in* a given subject; some predicates are neither *said of* nor *said in* any subject. This simple observation constitutes the key to Aristotle’s (early) ontology.

1. Identify examples of the following: something both *said of* and *said in* a subject; something neither *said of* nor *said in* a subject; something *said of* but not in a thing; something *said in* but not of a thing.
2. What sort of things are *primary substances*, for Aristotle? What does it mean to be a primary substance?
3. What sort of things are *secondary substances*, for Aristotle? In what way does Aristotle think that secondary substances are like primary substances?
4. Why is it that only substances can change?
5. Why does Aristotle maintain that only individual horses, men, etc. (and perhaps also those species and their genera) can qualify as *substance*?

*Physics I.1, 5-8 (pp. 732-739)*

1. What is the proper object of “scientific knowledge”, for Aristotle?
2. What does Aristotle mean by saying that change is not to or from “any old thing”? From and to what does change occur?
3. Why do contraries require something further to stand as their subject?
4. What is the difference between “simple” and “compound” coming to be? Which things persist, in change, and which things do not?
5. What are the roles in change of matter and form (or shape)? Which is the “subject” of change?
6. How does Aristotle respond to Parmenides’ prohibition against the intelligibility of change?

*Physics II.3-8: The Four Causes (pp. 745-756)*

*Meterologica VII.12 (pp. 785-786)*

*Parts of Animals: 639b12-645a38 (pp. 788-795)*

Note: In addition to considering the following questions as you read, you will benefit from the Glossary items: ESSENCE, FOR SOMETHING, CAUSE, FORM, MATTER, Etc. See pp. 973ff. The Glossary contains useful information concerning translation and basic concept meaning.

7. What are the four causes? What role does each play in the account of a thing?
8. In what sense are luck and chance causes? How are luck and chance alike or different, as causes?
9. Are the causes of natural objects the same as those for artifacts (i.e., things of human product)?
10. Which of the four causes is the “primary” cause, for Aristotle? What kind of cause is a soul? How are matter and substance different, as causes?
Nicomachean Ethics: Book I, Chapters 1-9, 13, Book II, Chapters 1-6: 1094a1-1100a9, 1102a5-1107a27 (RAGP pp. 870-890)

Notes:
- The Nicomachean Ethics is one of two studies of moral philosophy extant in Aristotle's corpus. We suppose his son, Nicomachus, to have taken the notes constituting this work – thus its name.
- As a study of ethics, Aristotle's chief concern is to define the human good. That is, he seeks to answer these questions: What makes human life "good"? Under what conditions do we call a human act "good" (or "right")? Under what conditions do we call a human being "good"? Etc.
- In Book I, Chapters 1-3, Aristotle sets out the general scope and method of his inquiry. He proceeds to more specific accounts of the human good, concluding (our reading) with a definition of virtue, which is the key concept in his ethical theory.
- Consider, as you read, the extent to which Aristotle views human being as a rational order. To what extent, exactly, on his account, does logic penetrate to our nature? To what extent is every detail of the human world describable in precise logical terms?

Study Questions (by chapter)

I.1 What is the good? How are various goods distinguished? In what way are some goods subordinate to others?
I.2 How does Aristotle go about identifying a “best” or highest good? Why is knowledge of the highest good of value, according to Aristotle?
I.3 What “degree of clarity” should we expect of a study of the human good, and why?
I.4 What is the highest good, generally speaking? Why is it, according to Aristotle, that a good up-bringing is important to the study of this question?
I.5 On what grounds does Aristotle reject pleasure, honor, and wealth as constituting happiness?
I.7 By what general parameters does Aristotle suggest identifying the good? Why does Aristotle turn his attention to the “function” of humans? What is the function of a human?
I.8 What are “external goods” and what is their role in the happy life, on Aristotle’s account?
I.9 What does Aristotle mean by saying that happiness “needs a complete life”? Who was Priam, and was he a happy man?
I.13 What “parts” of the human “soul” does Aristotle identify? What basic distinction among virtues does he draw?

II.1 How are character and thought virtues developed? What is the importance of “breeding”, for Aristotle?
II.2 What are “excess” and “deficiency”, where virtue is concerned? How does Aristotle come to this view? What does Aristotle mean by saying that virtue is “preserved by the mean”?
II.3 What further conditions does Aristotle make on being virtuous?
II.4 How does Aristotle respond to the puzzle concerning the relative priority of virtue and virtuous action?
II.5 What kind of thing is virtue, according to Aristotle?
II.6 What is Aristotle’s final definition of virtue?