

COURSE OUTLINE/ PHIL 651 Seminar in Ancient Philosophy

Topic: Transmission of soul in Aristotle's Biology

Fall term 2017: M 11:45 – 13:45

Leacock 927

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This course is concerned with Aristotle's account of the transmission of soul from animal parents to offspring in the process of generation and embryological development. The question is how the soul, which is the form of an animal, is imposed on matter in such a way that an animal which resembles its parents is generated. We will begin by looking at the problem: how can an immaterial substance (soul) be transmitted through a physical process (sexual reproduction)? We will then examine the context and background of Aristotle's theory: his assessment of his predecessors attempts to explain the continuity of form from parent to offspring, his account of soul as a set of faculties or capacities, and his theory of hylomorphism according to which an animal is constituted from matter and form. We will then move on to Aristotle's account of conception and embryological development in the *Generation of Animals*: the process of concoction, the "fertile residues" produced by male and female and their potentialities for soul, the actualization of form and the successive development of parts. We will consider the mechanisms Aristotle identifies as shaping and forming (i.e. imposing form) on the matter: heat and movements. Finally, we will consider two difficult issues: (i) imperfect transmission and the occurrence of natural deformities and (ii) the transmission of rational soul.

The emphasis of the course will be on understanding Aristotle's aims in his account of the transmission of soul: how does he conceive of the problem of transmission, and how do the different elements of his account address or resolve that problem?

Prerequisites: Students in this course should have taken PHIL 355 or some other course on Aristotle.

Texts: *Aristotle: Generation of Animals*, trans. Peck (Harvard) is available from the Word Bookstore, 469 Milton Street. Other readings will be made available on MyCourses.

Course Requirements: participation in class discussions (10%); one presentation to the class (10%); a write-up of the presentation (30%); one term paper (50%). All work must be submitted in hard copy. Students are advised to save electronic versions of all their work. You are expected to have read the assigned material before each class (consult the syllabus for weekly readings).

Grading criteria: To do excellent work in this course, you need to be able to do more than reiterate the readings or what was said in class. An "A" indicates that you not only understand the material, but that you have also thought critically about it, grasping at least some of its subtleties and implications. A "B" reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; "B" work does not capture the complexity of the issues. A "C" suggests a struggle with the material that results in basic comprehension but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A "D" indicates only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. An "F" indicates no understanding either of the assignment or of the material.

Policy on extensions:

No extensions will be granted without an appropriate medical note. Late work will be penalized at the rate of a third of a grade per calendar day past the due date. For example, a paper that is

evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a grade of B-; the same paper, if two days late, would receive a C+.

Required syllabus statements:

McGill University values academic integrity. All students must, therefore, understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.