

PHILOSOPHY 650
Stephen Menn

ARISTOTLE'S METAPHYSICS

FALL 2022
T 11:30-2:30, Leacock 927

This seminar will be devoted to a reading of argument of Aristotle's Metaphysics, starting from questions about the overall aim and argument-structure of the treatise, but then concentrating on Aristotle's account of substance [οὐσία] in Books Z and H, reading the argument of these books in the context of the larger argument of the Metaphysics. We will go back and forth between issues about what metaphysics (what Aristotle calls "wisdom [σοφία]" or "first philosophy") is for Aristotle, about the unity and overall structure of the Metaphysics as a treatise, about the aim and structure of Metaphysics ZH, and about Aristotle's views on particular questions about substance (e.g. are forms substances? does it follow that a universal can be a substance?). These issues are all controversial, and are all connected.

From roughly 1960 to 1990 Metaphysics Z was usually taken as Aristotle's revision of his (probably) earlier theory of substance in the Categories, and was read to see what kinds of things Aristotle now thinks are substances (or are "primary substances"). In the Categories Aristotle seems to think that the primary substances are individuals like an individual human being, and that these substances will be the ultimate subjects of predication, i.e. the things of which everything else is directly or indirectly predicated but which are not themselves predicated of anything else. In Metaphysics Z3 Aristotle says that if we investigate substance this way we will be led to the conclusion that matter is substance, and he argues that this conclusion is unsatisfactory. According to many interpreters, Aristotle now proposes a revised list of criteria for something's being a substance, and comes to a revised conclusion about what kinds of things best meet these criteria. Unfortunately there is no agreement about what his conclusion is. He seems to say that the primary substances are the forms of matter-form composite individuals, but also to say that forms are universals and that no universal is a substance. Much of the scholarship of this time, culminating in Michael Frede and Günther Patzig's German commentary on Metaphysics Z (available also in Italian translation), concentrated on trying to resolve this apparent contradiction. Frede and Patzig took for granted that ZH were mainly concerned with trying to determine what things were primary substances according to some list of criteria. More recent scholarship, notably Myles Burnyeat's Map of Metaphysics Zeta, has called this into question and has examined Aristotle's comments about what he is doing, what we must do next, and so on, in order to determine Aristotle's own conception of his project in ZH and their place in the larger project of the Metaphysics, and there has been reciprocal influence between interpretations of Aristotle's metaphysical project and interpretations of his views on substance.

The issues about Aristotle's conception of metaphysics, and of the relation of ZH to the larger project of the Metaphysics, are connected with issues about the unity or otherwise of the transmitted text of the Metaphysics, about its overall aim if it has one, and about what discipline this treatise purports to be teaching. There is no ancient testimony that anyone other than Aristotle put together the different books of the Metaphysics into a single treatise, but there are incongruities (the fact of two books called alpha; duplications between Metaphysics K1-8 and Metaphysics BΓE, and between the rest of K and some parts of the Physics) which show that there is something peculiar about the history of these particular books. And many readers since at least the middle ages have been troubled by apparent discrepancies between Aristotle's descriptions in different passages of the science he is pursuing in the Metaphysics: as knowledge of the first causes and principles, as a universal science of being and its attributes, as a science of substance, and as a science of divine things or of separately existing eternally unchanging things.

Werner Jaeger in his German book on the Metaphysics from 1912, and in his general book on Aristotle from 1923 (German, but available in English translation) thought that Aristotle had changed his mind from a "theological" to an "ontological" conception of metaphysics, although he thought that Aristotle had tried (unsuccessfully) to unify them in a single treatise. More recent scholars, notably Joseph Owens, Günther Patzig and Michael Frede, have more charitably tried to show how Aristotle could think these different descriptions applied to the same science. But different reconstructions of how this works, and of how Aristotle tries to achieve this knowledge in the Metaphysics, will lead to different views of the aim and function of ZH's investigation of substance. We will try to read these books through different sets of glasses, seeing the different kinds of sense that can be gotten out of particular passages if we approach them with different understandings of Aristotle's overall project. Each interpretation will find some passages easier, others more difficult.

The course will be divided into five units. Their principal readings, central issues, and approximate time-lengths are as follows:

- U1: Metaphysics A-E: Aristotle's metaphysical project (2 weeks)
- U2: Metaphysics Z1-3: the issues about substance, substance as subject (2 weeks)
- U3: Metaphysics Z4-9: substance as essence, and a problem about coming-to-be (3 weeks)
- U4: Metaphysics Z10-16: aporiai about definition, substance as universal, substance as a part of the definition (3 weeks)
- U5: Metaphysics Z17-H6: substance as cause of being, as a principle which is not an element, and a positive account of definition (2 weeks)

I have ordered C.D.C. Reeve's new translation of the Metaphysics at the Word Bookstore on Milton Street. (The Word takes only cash and personal checks, not cards. Ask for the book you want at the counter.) That translation is required, although you may also want to compare other translations into English or into any other language you may read, and students with some knowledge of Greek are strongly encouraged to make as much use of the Greek original as you can. I will also assign some passages in other works of Aristotle, notably the Physics and the logical works (the "Organon"), and you must have a translation of these. There are three widely available collections of Aristotle's works in English, the Basic Works of Aristotle edited by McKeon, the New Aristotle Reader edited by Ackrill, and the Aristotle: Selections edited by Irwin and Fine. Any one of these should be sufficient for most of the assigned readings in Aristotle. You may well already own one of these from a previous course. If not, you should acquire one of them. The McKeon is the most comprehensive of these, and also the cheapest, but its translations (taken from the early 20th-century Oxford translation) are into somewhat old-fashioned English, and sometimes unnecessarily verbose. You can always find any passage (except sometimes from the extant fragments of Aristotle's lost works such as the Protrepticus) in the Complete Works of Aristotle edited by Jonathan Barnes, available electronically in the library: go to <https://mcgill.worldcat.org/>, search "Barnes complete Aristotle" (without the quotation marks), open the e-book, and click on particular titles as many times as you need to get to a particular passage. (Short passages can be copied and pasted to your own document for printout.) The fragments of Aristotle's lost Protrepticus (both in Greek and in English translation) are downloadable from <http://www.protrepticus.info/protr2017x20.pdf>. Some texts will also be assigned from Plato, and I will assume that you have access to translations of his dialogues. The

standard collection in English is Plato: Complete Works, edited by Cooper-Hutchinson, which should be in stock at the Word, but other translations are also acceptable as long as they have the Stephanus page numbers and letters in the margins. Other assigned readings will be made available electronically. All assigned texts, whether in the Metaphysics or not, are equally required, and you must always have each day's readings with you in class, in a bound book or a photocopy or printout, not electronically. The readings are not supplements to help you understand the topic that the course is about: the readings are what the course is about. The aim of the course is to read the Metaphysics intelligently, understanding what Aristotle is doing, overall and in the details of particular arguments.

The course will meet for a single three-hour lecture-discussion session each week, with a break in the middle. Discussions will depend very heavily on details of the reading: you must always have done each week's reading carefully and on time, and have the texts with you in class, so that you are prepared to answer questions about them. These are extremely difficult texts, and you should allow yourself considerable time to do the readings and reflect carefully and critically on what is going on in them. Do not come to class if you have been unable to do the readings.

The prerequisite is Philosophy 355 (Aristotle) at McGill, or equivalent courses elsewhere that cover Aristotle's logic and physics, not just his ethics or politics. (Rachel Parsons' Philosophy 453 from last year is sufficient.) This course is not an introduction to Aristotle, or to his theoretical philosophy. In particular I will take for granted a good knowledge of the Categories and Physics I-II. We will briefly review some other background texts of Aristotle, notably from Posterior Analytics II. I will also assume basic familiarity with Plato's metaphysical texts; students who have not studied the Timaeus should read Timaeus 27a-56b in the first week of the semester. Students must know, or rapidly learn, the Greek alphabet, and must be ready to listen to discussions of the meaning of Greek words, and to temporarily borrow a set of Greek technical terms into English for the duration of the seminar, but no prior knowledge of the Greek language is required, although it would of course be an advantage.

Grades will be based on a 5-7 page paper (20%, due date to be announced in class), a 12-15 page term-paper due on the last day of class (40%), class participation (20%, requiring serious active participation in discussions), and at least two short handout-analyses of the arguments of particular texts (totalling 20%). Alternatively, the short paper and term-paper can be combined in a single 20-25 page research term-paper, again due on the last day of class. (All page-lengths are double-spaced, and all papers should be handed in double-sided.) I will ask each student at least twice during the term, depending on class size, to prepare an analysis of the argument of a particular short assigned text, and to copy it and distribute it in class as an aid to discussion. These handouts should generally be between 2 and 4 single-spaced pages. Students will also have to learn the Greek alphabet by the second meeting if they don't already know it; if necessary, I will test on this, and passing such a test will be necessary condition for passing the course. The papers should be on a text or argument that we have not discussed, or have only touched on, in class: you should design them as if they were additional lectures or discussion-pieces on something in the Metaphysics that the class did not have time to get to—and inevitably we will have had to skip many interesting things. Papers that repeat class lectures and discussions, or rely uncritically on secondary literature, including Reeve's introduction and notes, will fail. The aim of the papers is to show that you have acquired the skills to read and interpret Aristotle's arguments on your own. Reeve is one scholar among others, and his opinions are not evidence. You should consult with me well before the end of term on your proposed topic for the

term-paper. 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.

To receive a passing grade for the course, students must show that they have kept up with the readings and are able to discuss them in class. Students who are unable to do this will be asked to withdraw.

In all papers and class handouts, references to the texts of Aristotle must always be to the Bekker page and line numbers printed in the margins of most editions and translations (e.g. "1042b21") or to book and chapters numbers (e.g. "De Anima II,7"), never to the page numbers in Reeve or any other collection. Similarly, references to the texts of Plato must be to the Stephanus page numbers and letters printed in the margins of most editions and translations, never to the page numbers in Cooper-Hutchinson. Don't worry if your line numbers may be a line or two off. References to books of the Metaphysics should be not by numbers but by Greek letter names, A = I, α ("alpha elatton") = II, B = III, Γ = IV, Δ = V, E = VI, Z = VII, H = VIII, Θ = IX, Iota = X, K = XI, Λ = XII, M = XIII, N = XIV. You will have to get very familiar with the letter-names for these books: when someone says "Zeta" or "Theta" or "Lambda," that should immediately mean something to you about the content of the book. (See the handout on the books of the Metaphysics.)

Students should be aware that there are sometimes serious difficulties, and disagreements among different scholars, not only about how to grammatically construe and translate Aristotle's sentences, but also about what words Aristotle wrote. As with any classical text, different manuscripts often have different texts: usually the differences are slight, but sometimes they are important. Our earliest manuscripts of the Metaphysics are from about 1200 years after Aristotle wrote it. I will sometimes disagree with Reeve on these issues. Also, different translators will give different English equivalents for Aristotle's technical terms. We will discuss these issues in class; you will have to get used to them.

For those who want to read the text in Greek, there are three main options. The most convenient and up-to-date edition of the Metaphysics is Werner Jaeger's Oxford Classical Text of 1957, available on Amazon for \$5) US. A fuller edition, with more critical apparatus and a useful commentary, is W.D. Ross' edition of 1924 (2 volumes). There have been several reprints (some incorporating Ross' later revisions), but all are expensive. Both Ross and Jaeger are adventurous in emending the text. Probably still the safest edition (although it lacks access to one important manuscript) is Hermann Bonitz' edition and commentary of 1848-9. This is in the public domain and can be downloaded from, for instance, <https://archive.org/details/aristotelismeta00bonigoog>, which contains both volumes. If you use Bonitz, please download and print at least all of volume 1 (the edition); volume 2, the commentary (in Latin), is also very useful.

McGill requires me to add the following paragraph: "McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest> for more information)."

Classes may not be recorded under any circumstances. Remote participation will be possible only under extraordinary circumstances; asynchronous participation will never be possible.

My office is Leacock 921 (phone 398-7452); I will be available there Mondays from 4:00 to 6:00 except when there is a philosophy department meeting (which is normally the first Monday

of each month, second Monday of September), in which case I should still be there from 5:00 to 6:00.

Three minor points and one major point to bear in mind in the readings from Reeve:

(i) the word he translates as "starting-point" is ἀρχή, more usually translated as "principle"; in class we will either say "principle" or use the Greek word ἀρχή (plural ἀρχαί).

(ii) the word he translates as "natural science" (φυσική) is often translated as "physics": it is the science of natural things, including what we would call biology as well as physics

(iii) the word he translates as "theoretical" (θεωρητική) comes from θεωρία, "contemplation" or "observation," referring originally to a kind of looking desired for its own sake rather than for any practical use, especially attendance at religious spectacles, including the Olympic games

(iv) the major point: at Metaphysics E1 1026a14, where Reeve translates "natural science is concerned with things that are inseparable but not immovable," when he says "inseparable," he is translating ἀχώριστα. That is what the manuscripts have here, but the majority of scholars, including me, think (for complicated reasons, which we may be able to discuss in class sometime, but not on Thursday) that Aristotle actually wrote χωριστά, "separable" or "separate," so that the clause would say "natural science is concerned with things that are separable but not immovable." If Aristotle wrote "inseparable," he meant that physics deals with things that are inseparable from matter. If he wrote "separate," he meant that physics deals with things that exist separately, as substances, rather than being attributes of something else or parasitic on something else for their existence. (The latter is what Aristotle usually means by "separate"; by contrast, late ancient and medieval Aristotelians usually use "separate" to mean "separate from matter.") Depending on which Aristotle wrote, his threefold contrast between mathematics, physics and theology will look rather different.