

# Aristotelian Metaphysics

## CEU Philosophy Graduate Seminar

### Instructors:

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**Credits:** 4 US/8 ECTS

**Semester:** Fall 2022

**Meeting time:** Tuesdays 10:50 am–12:30 pm and Wednesdays 5:40–7:20 pm

**Prerequisites:** Some prior background in ancient philosophy and metaphysics will be helpful, but it is not essential. (Knowledge of Greek is not presupposed, there will be some discussion of the relevant Aristotelian terminology.)

**Course level:** PhD and MA

**Course Description:** This course will survey central topics in Aristotle’s metaphysics and contemporary neo-Aristotelian metaphysics. Ancient readings will be drawn from Aristotle’s *Categories*, *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Politics* and *The Parts of Animals*. These primary readings will be supplemented by secondary readings. Contemporary readings will include works by Baker, Crane, Evnine, Fine, Koslicki, Lowe, Passinsky, Quine, Schaffer, and Witt. Topics to be covered include ontology, ontological dependence, essence and modality, real definition, hylomorphism, artifacts and organisms, and social ontology.

**Learning Outcomes:** Upon completing the course, students will gain an understanding of some central aspects of Aristotle’s metaphysics. Students will also gain familiarity with recent work in the neo-Aristotelian metaphysical tradition, and they will be able to situate this contemporary work in relation to Aristotle’s own ideas.

**Course Format:** The course will be run as a seminar, with a significant amount of class time devoted to discussion. During some sessions, authors of papers may join our class discussion via Zoom. Students will be expected to come to class having completed the assigned reading, and they will be expected to actively participate in class discussion.

### Recommended Background Readings:

- Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, Cambridge University Press, 1988. (An excellent general introduction to Aristotle’s thought. Chapter 6 gives a helpful introduction to Aristotle’s metaphysics.)
- Jonathan Barnes, “Aristotle’s Life and Work” and “Aristotle’s Metaphysics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, Cambridge University Press, 1999. (A brief introduction to Aristotle’s life and work, and the main themes of his metaphysics.)

**Schedule of Topics and Readings** (subject to change): Please complete the required readings before class. All readings will be posted on the course website.

**Topic 1: Contemporary Ontology (3 sessions: Sep 20, Sep 21, Sep 27)**

*Description:* Contemporary views on the task and method of ontology, and on existence.

*Required reading:*

- W.V.O. Quine, "On What There Is"
- Jonathan Schaffer, "On What Grounds What"
- Tim Crane, "Existence and Quantification Reconsidered"

**Topic 2: The Possibility of Ontology (2 sessions: Sep 28, Oct 4)**

*Description:* Aristotle's different takes on the possibility of a general ontology, and the different dependence relations between entities these imply.

*Required reading:*

- Aristotle, *Categories* 1-5, *Metaphysics* Γ.1-2 and Z.1
- Alan Code, "Aristotle and Existence"
- Marko Malink, "Essence: Ancient"

*Optional reading:*

- Alan Code, "Aristotle: Essence and Accident"

**Topic 3: Essence, Modality, and Real Definition (3 sessions: Oct 5, Oct 11, Oct 12)**

*Description:* Contemporary work on the notion of essence and its relation to modality and real definition.

*Required reading:*

- Kit Fine, "Essence and Modality"
- E.J. Lowe, "Metaphysics as the Science of Essence"
- Kathrin Koslicki, "Essence, Necessity, and Explanation"
- Kit Fine, "Unified Foundations for Essence and Ground"

*Optional reading:*

- Gideon Rosen, "Real Definition"

**Topic 4: Knowing Substance Scientifically (3 sessions: Oct 18, Oct 19, Oct 25)**

*Description:* Setting out a framework for change, leading to the investigation of the nature of entities.

*Required reading:*

- Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.1-4, *Metaphysics* Z.10-11, *Physics* I.6-7, II.1
- Robert Bolton, "Science and Scientific Inquiry in Aristotle"
- Mary Louise Gill, "Aristotle's Metaphysics Reconsidered"
- David Charles, "Definition and Explanation in the *Posterior Analytics* and *Metaphysics*"
- David Charles, "*Physics* I.7"

*Optional reading:*

- Alan Code, "*Physics* I.6"
- Jim Lennox, "*Bios* and Explanatory Unity in Aristotle's Biology"

**Topic 5: Contemporary Hylomorphism (2 sessions: Oct 26 or Nov 1 TBD, Nov 2)**

*Description:* Contemporary hylomorphic theories of objects.

*Required reading:*

- Kit Fine, "Acts, Events, and Things"

- Kit Fine, “Things and Their Parts”
- Kathrin Koslicki, *The Structure of Objects*, Chapter 7: Objects as Structured Wholes
- Howard Robinson, “Modern Hylomorphism and the Reality and Causal Power of Structure: A Skeptical Investigation”

*Optional reading:*

- Mark Johnston, “Hylomorphism”

### **Topic 6: Forms, Functions, and Goals (2 sessions: Nov 8, Nov 9)**

*Description:* Aristotle on forms, functions, and goals.

*Required reading:*

- Aristotle, *Physics* II.6-9, *De Partibus Animalium* I.1
- John Cooper, “Hypothetical Necessity”
- David Charles, “Teleological Causation”
- Jim Lennox, “The Complexity of Aristotle’s Study of Animals”

### **Topic 7: Artifacts and Organisms (2 sessions: Nov 15, Nov 16)**

*Description:* Contemporary neo-Aristotelian theories of artifacts and organisms.

*Required reading:*

- Simon Evnine, *Making Objects and Events*, excerpts from Chapter 3: Artifacts: The Basic Metaphysics
- Lynne Rudder Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life*, Chapter 3: Artifacts
- Simon Evnine, *Making Objects and Events*, excerpts from Chapter 5: Organisms

### **Topic 8: Human Nature and the Political (2 sessions: Nov 22, Nov 23)**

*Description:* Aristotle’s account of the relationship between human nature and the political.

*Required reading:*

- Aristotle, *Politics* I.1-7 and I.12-13
- Pierre Pellegrin, “Natural Slavery”
- John Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship”
- Fred Miller, “Nature and Politics”

*Optional reading:*

- Malcolm Schofield, “Ideology and Philosophy in Aristotle’s Theory of Slavery”

*Suggested reading:*

- Moses Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*

### **Topic 9: Social Ontology (2 sessions: Nov 29, Nov 30)**

*Description:* Contemporary neo-Aristotelian theories of social individuals and social objects.

*Required reading:*

- Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, Chapter 3: Human Organisms, Social Individuals, and Persons
- Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, Chapter 4: The Argument for Gender Essentialism
- Asya Passinsky, “Norm and Object: A Normative Hylomorphic Theory of Social Objects”

*Optional reading:*

- Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, Chapter 1: Two Notions of Essence
- Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, Chapter 2: Gender and Social Normativity

**Topic 10: Catch up and Student Presentations (2 sessions: Dec 6, Dec 7)**

*Description:* Catch up session (if needed) and student presentations of final papers.

*Required reading:* none

**Course Assessment:**

*For students taking the course for a Grade:*

- In-class presentation, approximately 10-15 minutes in length: 10%. During week 12, students will give a presentation on their final paper. The presentation should summarize the main thesis and argument of the paper.
- Perusall comments on course readings: 15%. Students must submit at least 2 comments per class meeting. For meetings with visiting speakers, one of the comments should be a question for the speaker. The deadline for submission of Perusall comments is noon on Mondays and noon on Wednesdays.
- Final paper, 4000 words in length: 75%. The final paper will be due on the first day of the Winter term. Students will be required to submit a 1-page paper proposal in week 9.
- Excellent class participation will boost the final grade in borderline cases.

*For students taking the course for an Audit:*

- Regular class attendance and participation.