

## HERTOG 2021 POLITICAL STUDIES PROGRAM

### ARISTOTLE

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This course focuses on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. Through a close reading of these texts, we will investigate the relations between virtue and happiness and virtue and politics. We devote most of the week to the *Nicomachean Ethics* and its study of the human good before following this study into the *Politics*, particularly its discussion of the kind and quality of regimes.

#### Books:

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (University of Chicago Press, 2012)
- Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (University of Chicago Press, 2013)

#### Resources

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites. These sites are aimed at introducing important thinkers in Western thought, with a particular emphasis on politics and philosophy.

Relevant pages include Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli (on The Great Thinkers), and Leo Strauss and Seth Benardete (on Contemporary Thinkers).

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### Monday, July 19, 2021

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9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. ET

*Nicomachean Ethics*

#### Readings:

- *Ethics*, Book I, Chs. 1–5 and 7–9, 13

#### Reading Questions:

1. Consider the first two sentences of Book I: can you think of an example that casts doubt on Aristotle's sweeping claim about the good?
2. Can you connect the dots from the art of bridle-making to the art of the general?
3. In what sense might "the political art" determine the good at which all things are said to aim? Is that really plausible?
4. At the beginning of Chapter 3, Aristotle warns us not to expect too much precision: why?
5. If you consider yourself to be young, should you not be studying this book?
6. As you read Chapters 4-5, try to track like a hound dog the varying ways people are said to identify *the* good we seek

7. What does the return to the topic of happiness in Chapter 7 add to the earlier discussion? What's new?
8. Reflect on the last sentence of Chapter 8: what two reactions to the problem of happiness does Aristotle there sketch? Can you think of concrete examples?
9. What is the significance of Priam in Chapter 10?

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## Tuesday, July 20, 2021

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9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. ET

*Nicomachean Ethics*

**Readings:**

- *Ethics*, Book II, Chs. 1, 5–7; Book III, Chs. 6–9; Book IV, Ch. 3

**Reading Questions:**

1. What are the differences between the two kinds of virtue?
2. Why is “habit” so important to moral virtue?
3. Consider the difference between the example of the eye and that of the horse in 2.6. Which might be closer to moral virtue?
4. Why is there no “mean” with regard to adultery?
5. Consider the sketch of all the moral virtues on p. 303–04. Can you think of virtues of character that are missing from his list? Any surprising virtues included (or things you think are not properly virtues)?
6. Is sense of shame a virtue according to Aristotle?
7. Why might Aristotle take up courage first?
8. Why is courage choice-worthy? (That’s a somewhat trickier question than it might at first appear.)
9. At 3.8, Aristotle lists five kinds of pseudo-courages, so to speak. Any guess as to why he might do that, something he does not do in the case of any of the other moral virtues?
10. As you read the famous account of the “great souled” (magnanimous) human being, try to get a picture in your mind’s eye of the person. Can you think of a real-world embodiment? Is it even an attractive picture?

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## Wednesday, July 21, 2021

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9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. ET

*Nicomachean Ethics*

**Readings:**

- *Ethics*, Book V, Chs. 1–5, 10; Book X, Chs. 6–9

**Reading Questions:**

1. Sketch a simple diagram of the two meanings of “justice” according to Aristotle, as well as of the subdivisions of the one kind of justice.
2. How does Aristotle first present justice in relation to law? Any reservations about that?
3. Track the description of law as Aristotle proceeds through the chapter.
4. What is “equity,” and what does it add to (or subtract from) the preceding account of justice?

5. The assignment from Book 10 can plausibly claim to be the climax of the whole book. What is revealed here that is far from clear from the rest of the book?
6. What are the main reasons for Aristotle's high praise of intellectual (or contemplative) virtue?

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## Thursday, July 22, 2021

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9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. ET

*Politics*

**Readings:**

- *Politics*, Book I, Chs. 1–7; Book III, Chs. 6–13

**Reading Questions:**

1. Compare the first sentence of the *Politics* with the opening of the *NE*: thoughts?
2. Here we watch the city “grow,” almost literally. Hence Aristotle stresses its natural character, and we of course are famously “political animals”: but how else might somebody then (and even now) conceive of the political community, if not in terms of nature? Where else might it be said to come from?
3. Slavery was and is a controversial, even explosive, question. What in a nutshell is Aristotle's view of the matter? Is he “pro-slavery” or “anti-slavery” or something else?
4. Why is Aristotle so insistent that slave mastery and political rule are two different things?
5. In his famous and difficult analysis of political justice—justice as embodied by different regimes—his discussion quickly becomes a quarrel between oligarchs and democrats. Any guess as to why?
6. What is the standard, or the standards, with a view to which Aristotle adjudicates the competing claims to just rule of the two sides, democratic and oligarchic?
7. If the end of politics is virtue, or the promotion of virtue, and aristocracy can claim to be the party of virtue, so to speak, does Aristotle's argument culminate in affirming the case of aristocracy to be the simply just regime?
8. Note the treatment of law throughout here: anything strike you about it?

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## Friday, July 23, 2020

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10:00 a.m. to Noon ET

*Politics*

**Readings:**

- *Politics*, Book IV; Book VII, Chs. 1–3

**Reading Questions:**

1. Books 4, 5, and 6 are often called the “practical books.” For good reason?
2. Aristotle gives an additional account of the kinds of regimes here. We learn among other things that there is a very great variety of democracies and oligarchies (compare Book 3).
3. What is Aristotle's advice to a tyrant (5.10)?
4. Probably the most famous section here is the “best practicable” regime (4.11). What distinguishes it?

5. Aristotle's discussion of the best way of life, which is necessarily the target of the simply best regime, is subtle and surprisingly difficult. Notice any similarities or differences between it and the discussion of happiness in the *NE*?
6. How does "the god" and "the cosmos" figure into Aristotle's argument here?