

ARISTOTLE

Understanding the Corpus of Aristotle's Work

Empiricism vs. idealism: "discussion of the box itself, while ignoring the contents, was to put the argument the wrong way around...when we have explained everything that is in the box, we have complete knowledge...There is no box."

- The importance of understanding **tautologies**, and their effect on **ontology** and **epistemology**

The importance of "thisness" and a thing's "**telos**" ('end' or 'goal' in Greek)

- Aristotle is a **teleologist**: someone who explains things by reference to their purpose, or design
 - Thus "the purpose of an acorn is to become an oak tree" (IPT 50)
- As the textbook asserts, "If you can grasp Aristotle's teleology you will have the tools to help you unlock both the *Politics* and the text that serves as its prologue, the *Ethics*" (IPT 49)

The **sylogism**, **deductive inference**, and **logic** [all men are mortal → Socrates is a man → Socrates is mortal].

- **Induction** is not true *of necessity* as deduction is. For Aristotle, logic is a superior process to dialectic

The Great Chain of Being (from Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*): "A Great chain of being stretches down from God, through angels, and then humans, animals, plants and all material elements"

- This kind of view leads to a very **determinist** view of the world. What are some of the ramifications of viewing the world this way? How can this kind of view lead to misconceptions?
- "Between the 13th and 18th centuries if you referred to 'the philosopher', everyone knew you were talking about Aristotle." (IPT 47) Why did Aristotle's prominence begin to unravel? And what are some of the things that he got famously wrong?

Aristotelian Ethics

- **Consequentialism** would have us always thinking about the expected outcomes of our actions
- **Deontology** would have us always act according to duty (deontos) rather than consequence
- Aristotelian **virtue ethics** instead follows from his teleological metaphysics, and would have us live in accordance with the purpose or function (telos) of a human being.
 - For Aristotle, this consists of discovering **eudaimonia** (much more than just happiness as mere pleasure, but is instead closer to virtue, or **aretē**) through contemplation of the supreme being, or 'unmoved mover', through perfecting one's actions in various disciplines, and in adhering to the **doctrine of the mean** ('the right emotion in the right degree')
 - How might a modern approach to virtue ethics be more useful than strictly utilitarian and deontological approaches?

Aristotle's *Politics*: by claiming that "**politics is natural to man**", he means that "happiness and moral virtue are to be found in citizenship...in the *polis*" (IPT 48), which he regards as the best form of society.

- How does Aristotle define citizenship? The *polis*? Happiness (eudaimonia)?
- How does Aristotle's discussion on 'good citizenship' in Book 3, part 4 (IPT 5) provide a more nuanced view of ethics and politics than Platonic Idealism?
- Does the argument for slavery in Book 1, part 5 derive from what Aquinas terms the 'great chain of being'?
- What is Aristotle's critique of the *Republic*? (Book 2, part 5) Do you think he's missing the point? Or not?
- What are the six types of government laid out in Book 3, part 7?

Interview with Ronald Sandler: why would environmental ethics be an appropriate domain for value ethics (as opposed to utilitarianism or deontology). Do you agree that "the language of virtue and vice is far more diverse, rich, and nuanced than the languages of duty and consequences?"