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Spring 2-1-2001

PHIL 463.01: Aristototele

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SYLLABUS

Philosophy 463 is a first course in Aristotle intended for the mature student who has had a one-year history of philosophy course, an introductory logic course and, preferably, an introductory course in ethics. At a minimum, students should have completed a general course in the history of ancient philosophy comparable to UM's PHIL 251.

TEXTS:

Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941).

W.D. (Sir David) Ross, *Aristotle*, 6th edn. (London: Routledge, 1995).

various works on library reserve.

REQUIREMENTS:

As always, the first requirement of the course will be to read the assigned material thoroughly and carefully prior to its being treated in class. It will be expected that students strike out on their own beyond the assigned reading, both in the Aristotelian texts and in the secondary material.

Each student will prepare a commentary on a small section of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Portions of the commentary will be distributed to class members, other portions will be read to the class for discussion, and the entire commentary will be placed on reserve for other class members to read. (See *On Commentaries* for an explanation of the commentary format.)

Each student will write at least two brief, occasional papers (500-1000 words). These will treat problems raised by the texts and will be fundamentally exegetical in substance. Three such assignments will be made: all students will do the first paper and either of the other two; you may do both of the others, in which case the three best marks will be counted for the course grade.

There will be a final examination, cumulative in character, including both "objective" and essay questions. A study guide will be provided. There will be no mid-term examinations.

READINGS:

<u>Text</u>	<u>Week</u>
1. McKeon, "Introduction"	I
2. <i>History of Animals</i> (M. 631-640)	I
3. <i>On the Parts of Animals</i> (M. 641-661)	II
4. <i>On the Generation of Animals</i> (M. 663-680)	II,III
5. <i>On the Soul</i> , I.1,2; II, III	III,IV
6. <i>Categories</i> (all)	IV,V
7. <i>On Interpretation</i> , 1-9	V,VI
8. G.E.M. Anscombe, "Aristotle and the Sea Battle"	VI
9. <i>Prior Analytics</i> , I.1; <i>Posterior Analytics</i> , I.1-6, II.19	VI
10. <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (all)	VII-X
11. <i>Politics</i> , I	X
12. <i>Physics</i> , I, II	XI
13. <i>Metaphysics</i> , I, II, IV, VII, XII	XI-XV

FINAL EXAM: 10-12, Fri., May 18

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ON COMMENTARIES

A student commentary represents a serious confrontation with a small portion of an important philosophical text. The commentary is an exercise in textual exegesis intended to assist its author in learning the art of reading great philosophical works, and dealing responsibly and fruitfully with important philosophical issues. Commentaries are also meant to be an aid to other students seeking to understand the passage on which the commentary is written, and to master these same arts.

There are three main parts in a commentary: A) a **SUMMARY** of the passage of text which is the commentary's subject, consisting of i) an outline, or Warnier-Orr diagram of the text, and ii) a *precis*, or prose summary of the text; B) an **EXPLICATION** of difficult points in the text; and C) an **EVALUATION** of something of special philosophical interest in the text.

An explanation of each of these parts follows.

SUMMARY:

The summary falls into two entirely separate parts; the first will exhibit the structure of the passage, and the second will be an abstract of the passage.

The first part will then best be done as a Warnier-Orr diagram, though a traditional outline will also be acceptable. In either case an effort should be made to build the document from complete sentences in abbreviated form, expressing the substance of the text, rather than from vague, allusive phrases which merely indicate something about the text. Remember that the purpose of this schematism, whatever its form, is to exhibit the structure of the text, not just to refer to it.

The *precis*, or prose abstract, should fit onto one typewritten page; i.e., it should not exceed 200 words in length.

EXPLICATION:

In the explication section of a commentary one simply goes through the text explaining difficult points one by one. The explication is not intended to be an essay. The only integrity it should have should be that supplied by the order of the points requiring explanation. What requires explanation? References which are not explained by an editor, metaphors and similies, special terminology, and most of all, difficult arguments. Imagine yourself to be writing for a

reader who is having a hard time with the work under study. Better yet, perhaps, consider the things you had to puzzle out in order to understand the passage. In deciding how much to cover in your explication keep in mind that your task is not to recapitulate the entire passage; in fact, it is not recapitulation, at all.

You will identify the passages you are explicating by the standard reference device for the text, if one has been adopted, and the quotation of the first few words and last few words of the passage. For authors for whom there is no standard location scheme, number the paragraphs.

EVALUATION:

The last section of the commentary requires you to pass judgment something from your text. You may choose some segment of it that you feel to be mistaken and subject it to criticism; or you may choose some facet of the passage you think to be importantly correct, and show why it is correct and important, drawing out the implications you think the passage has. In the first case, your evaluation will take the form of a *critique*, in the second, the form of a *development*.

Commentaries prepared by graduate students should have a strong evaluation section; those prepared by undergraduates should emphasize the summary and explication.

PROCEDURES:

Commentaries are due in penultimate form the day before they are scheduled to be presented. A complete rough draft should be brought to me about a week before that. You should begin composing your commentary by attempting a schematic representation of the passage (a Warnier-Orr diagram or an outline) and discussing it with me.

A Note on Being the Right Size:

The portion of text chosen as the subject of a commentary should have intrinsic philosophical merit, yet be brief enough to provide a manageable task for a commentator. Texts will always be chosen in consultation with me. The commentary itself will ordinarily be 8-12 typewritten pages in length. It should be presented in good form, suitable for reproduction and distribution.

[comment.doc 01/29/96]