



McKenzie Study Center, an Institute of Gutenberg College

## Handout 5

### The Bible and the History of Ideas

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## Aristotle

### A. Aristotle (384–321 BC) was the tutor of Alexander the Great.

1. Socrates taught Plato who taught Aristotle who taught Alexander the Great.
2. We know Aristotle’s writings from a compilation of student notes of his lectures by Andronicus of Rhodes (approximately 60-50 BC).

### B. Aristotle vis à vis Plato

1. Aristotle was a student of Plato.
  - a. Philosophies overlap a great deal, especially in metaphysics and cosmology and in “religious” matters. (With respect to the “religious” side of philosophy, Aristotle was a “rational mystic” like Plato.)
2. Difference in emphasis:
  - a. Plato was a rationalist and a mathematician.
  - b. Aristotle was a commonsense (rational) empiricist and a natural scientist (a biologist).
    - i. *Aristotle had a view of reason largely similar to that of the biblical worldview.*
3. Aristotle had some technical criticisms of Plato’s philosophical doctrines.
4. Aristotle was expansive in his systematic treatment of a large number of different topics. (We have no systematic treatment of anything by Plato. But note: we have Aristotle’s lecture notes; Plato’s lecture notes are lost to us.)
5. History of influence of Plato versus Aristotle on Christian thought.
  - a. Not much (if anything) in Aristotle corrects or significantly counteracts the most influential of Platonic ideas on the history of ideas (especially the Platonic influence on Christianity and Christian theology).
  - b. Aristotle adds some of his own unique influences.

### C. Aristotelian logic

1. “Aristotelian logic is outmoded”! — true or false??
  - a. Technically speaking, Aristotelian logic is Syllogistic logic.

- i. *Syllogism: major premise, minor premise, conclusion.*
    - (A) Four legal statement forms: All A is B, No A is B, Some A is B, Some A is not B. [256 “legal” syllogisms / only a few are valid argument forms.]
  - ii. *Examples of syllogisms:*
    - (A) First figure:
      - All M is P
      - All S is M
      - Therefore, All S is P.
      - Every animal is a substance.
      - Every man is an animal.
      - Therefore, every man is a substance.
    - (B) Second figure:
      - All P is M
      - No S is M
      - Therefore, No S is P.
      - Every man is risible.
      - No horse is risible.
      - Therefore, no horse is man.
    - (C) Third figure:
      - All M is P
      - All M is S
      - Therefore, Some S is P.
      - Every man is risible.
      - Every man is an animal.
      - Therefore, some animals are risible.
  - iii. *Notion of a “proof” in Aristotelian logic—namely: does it have the form of a valid syllogism?*
- b. Broadly speaking, Aristotelian logic is commonsense rationality.
- 2. Formal logic = the rational structure of reality.**
    - a. Aristotle—in a similar vein to Plato—maintains a correlation between thought and reality: how we talk about, describe, and reason about reality is how reality is.
    - b. Pillar under-girding rationalism: whatever would be rational for reality to be is the way reality must be. But Aristotle himself is less of a rationalist than others.
  - 3. Aristotle engages in a thorough, systematic analysis and description of the elements and principles of logic and reason.**
    - a. He was the first, most important logician in the history of ideas.
    - b. Formal logic has been improved in a variety of ways since Aristotle, but very little has been supplanted or rejected.

## **D. Important doctrines or concepts in Aristotle's Metaphysics and Physics**

### **1. Wisdom = True Philosophy = true knowledge of ultimate reality and the ultimate cause of reality.**

### **2. Concepts of substance, attribute, and matter**

a. Substance = an individual, particular instance of being.

b. Kinds of substance

i. *Primary substances (Non-sensible, immaterial, eternal, unchanging, motionless)*

(A) God

(B) Intelligences of the spheres

(C) Intellect in man

ii. *Sensible but eternal substances*

(A) Heavenly bodies

iii. *Sensible and perishable substances*

(A) Substance = Matter + Form.

(1) A "Form" is a secondary substance, not strictly speaking a substance itself (that is, it is not itself an individual, particular existing thing; for it must exist only in a particular object [substance] or a mind).

(a) *Forms are eternal; but not eternal substances.*

(2) Matter = pure potentiality = "pregnant nothingness."

(a) *Principle of individuation; that which makes particulars*

(3) Attribute = something that can be predicated of a substance.  
(Presumably, attributes are eternal as well.)

(B) Each substance is in one of the following states with respect to any attribute, condition, or relation:

(1) Actualization

(2) Privation

(3) Potentiality

### **3. Four causes**

a. Material cause

b. Efficient cause

c. Formal cause

d. Final cause

e. Change happens because of external efficient cause, internal formal cause, and/or final cause.

#### 4. Unmoved Mover

- a. Pure actuality, fully actual, existing necessarily
- b. One of a kind (immaterial)
- c. Eternal source of all movement (change)
  - i. *Final cause which moves all—by being object of desire*
  - ii. *Source of change without itself being changed*
- d. Good, no defect, badness, or perversion
- e. First mover (otherwise infinite regress of causes)
- f. Forms the world
- g. Thought about Thought = an eternal act of intuition and self-consciousness.

### E. Ethics

#### 1. End of life = eudaimonia.

#### 2. But what brings eudaimonia?

- a. The activity of that which is distinctive of and peculiar to human beings—namely, the activity of reason itself or activity which is in accordance with reason.
  - i. *Activity in accordance with moral virtues = activity in accordance with reason.*
    - (A) But not to the complete exclusion of ordinary notions of happiness, for example, a certain amount of pleasure and prosperity.
  - ii. *Intellectual virtues = the activity of reason itself.*
    - (A) Contemplation of the highest objects of Metaphysics is the highest virtue—that which brings about perfect *eudaimonia*.

#### 3. Goodness of character

- a. We begin by having a capacity for it.
- b. Must be developed by practicing virtue.
  - i. *We do virtuous acts; in time we form a habit and realize that the virtue is right.*
  - ii. *We begin by doing virtuous acts which create a good disposition; in the end we do virtuous acts which flow from a good disposition.*
- c. The theory of the golden mean:
  - i. *Virtue is always some sort of mean between the vice of two extremes.*  
extreme of deficiency of a thing X = a particular bad trait A  
mean between bad trait A and bad trait B = good / virtue  
extreme of excess of a thing X = a particular bad trait B
    - (A) Courage is mean between cowardice and recklessness.
- d. Moral action must be a free action; one is not responsible for an action which is not free. (Ignorance is a limit on freedom and exculpatory.)

## **F. Aesthetics**

### **1. Most famous for work on tragedy in the Poetics.**

- a. Theory of catharsis: Tragedy should elicit pity and fear in order to purge these emotions.

## **G. Politics**

MONARCHY	DEMOCRACY
ARISTOCRACY	OLIGARCHY
<i>POLITY</i>	TYRRANY