



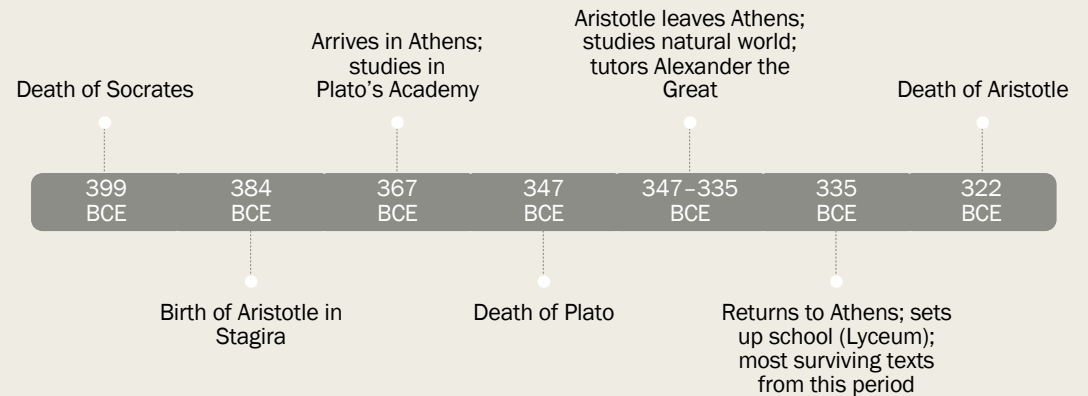
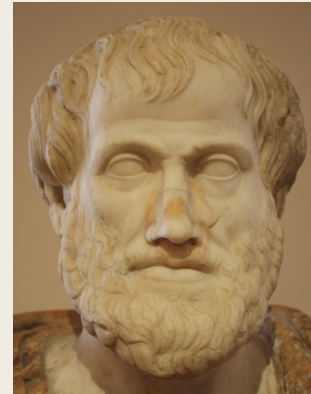
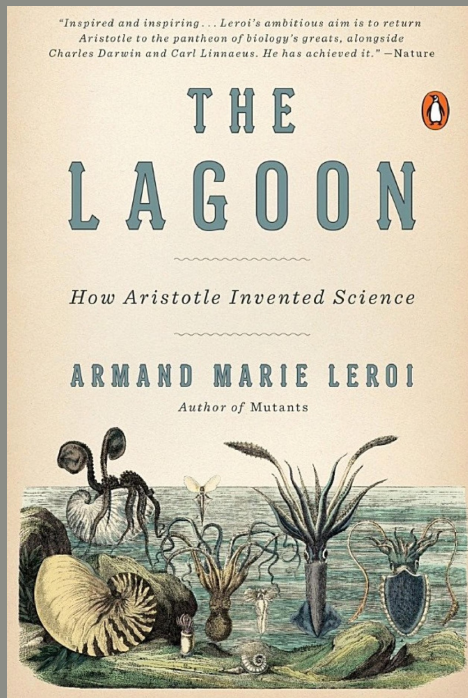
Aristotle on the Human Good

PHIL 210, class 11

OVERVIEW

- Historical background
- A Primer on Greco-Roman ethics
- Aristotle contra Plato
- Aristotle on the pursuit of happiness
- The function argument (*NE* I.7)
- The role of virtue in human happiness

Aristotle in his Time and Place



Greco-Roman Ethics



- Clarify the nature of the good life
- Not: moral laws and principles
- Determine ethical action from the inside out

Living Well ≠ Living Ethically



The Commandments

- I
Thou shalt have no other
gods before me
- II
Thou shalt not make unto
thee any graven image
- III
Thou shalt not take the name
of the LORD thy God in vain
- IV
Remember the sabbath day
to keep it holy
- V
Honour thy father
and thy mother

Ten

- VI
Thou shalt not kill
- VII
Thou shalt not
commit adultery
- VIII
Thou shalt not steal
- IX
Thou shalt not bear false
witness against thy neighbour
- X
Thou shalt not covet

Living Well = Living Ethically



- “virtue” = *aretē*
 - courage
 - generosity
 - integrity
 - justice
 - moderation
 - etc.
- also: “excellence”

Living Well = Living Ethically



- Plato
 - good life = life of justice
- Stoics
 - virtue is the only good
- Epicureans
 - life of pleasure requires virtue

Moral Psychology



- What motivates us?
 - in moral matters
 - in non-moral matters



Plato on the Form of the Good

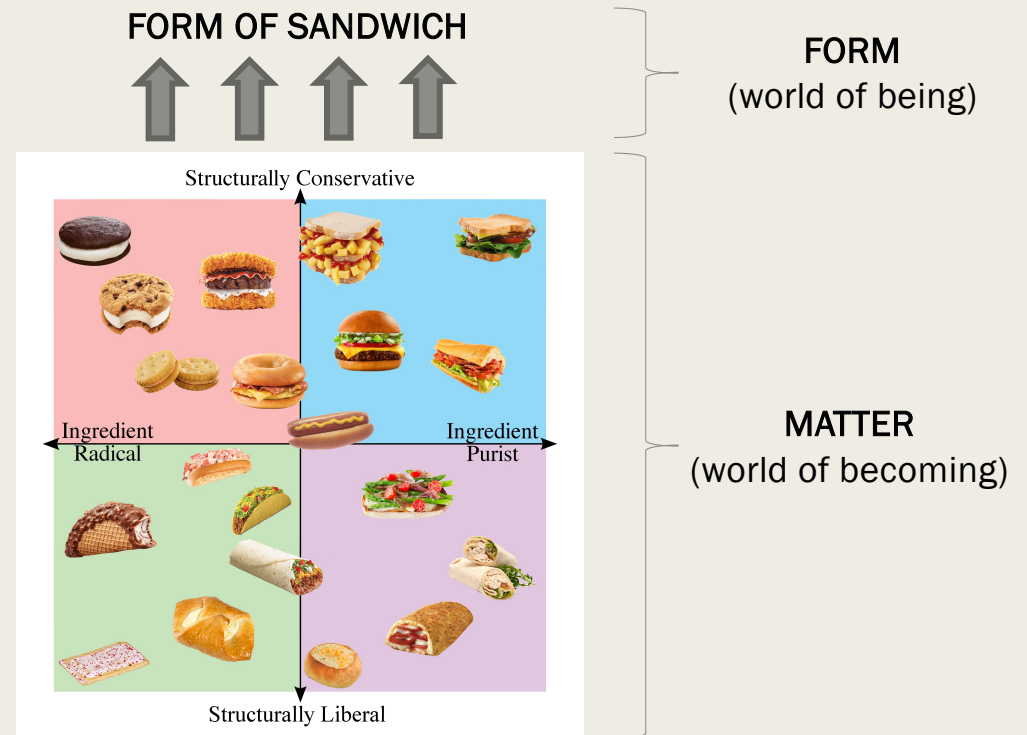


“... that which gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower is the form of the good. And though it is the cause of knowledge and truth, it is also an object of knowledge. Both knowledge and truth are beautiful things, but the good is other and more beautiful than they.”

– *Republic* 508d-509e

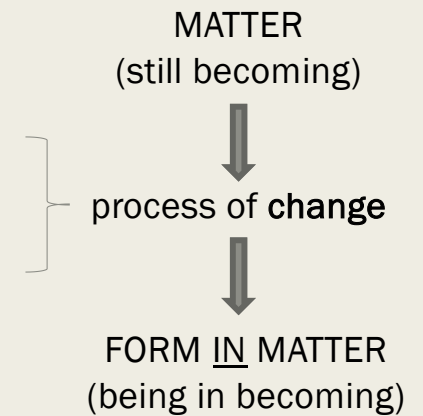
Some Metaphysics

- Plato: matter vs. form
 - form is independent of and (logically) prior to matter
 - forms are timeless
 - we access forms through reasoning rather than sense experience
 - material things are explained by their relationship to the forms in which they participate



Some Metaphysics

- Plato: matter vs. form
- Aristotle: matter and form
 - hylomorphism
 - from Greek *hylē* + *morphē*
- Matter and form represent different paradigms in understanding the world
 - matter represents potentially what the form represents actually



Matter : Form :: Potentiality : Actuality

From Metaphysics to the Good Life

most potential



most actual



MATTER
(still becoming)



process of **change**



FORM IN MATTER
(being in becoming)

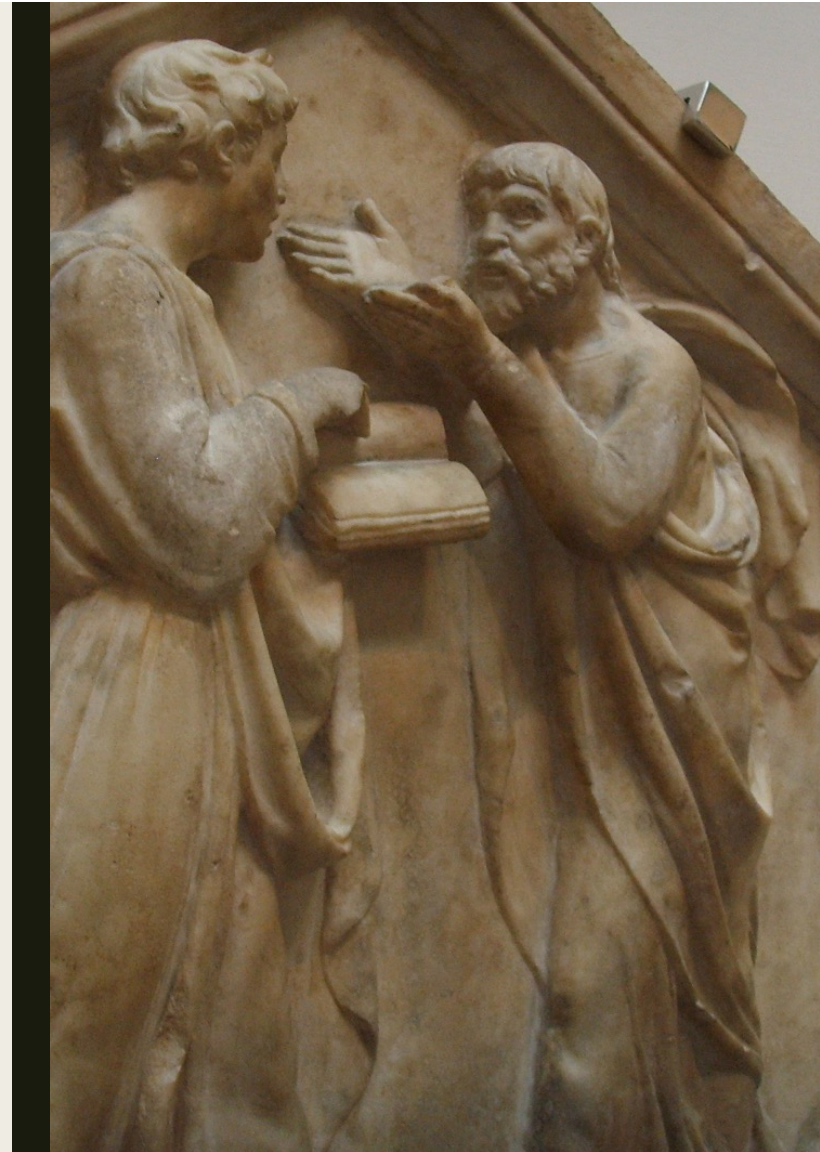


PERFECTION OF FORM
(final end)

Aristotle's Response to Plato

Against a "Form of the Good" (*NE* I.6)

- there's no "form of the good," only the human good
- to understand the human good, study the form of life (*psuchē*; also: "soul") that's distinctive of human living
- figure out how to perfect this form of life
- this is the project of the *Nicomachean Ethics*



A Sketch of the Human Good



- What's the final end (ultimate goal) of a human life?
 - to live well (*eu zēn*); to do well (*eu prattein*)
- But what does living well mean for us?
 - an end (*telos*; also: goal/purpose) of an activity is always some good
 - something regarded as beneficial for us to do/obtain
 - simple answer to living well in trees: one set of goods
 - but for humans, there are lots of goods (recall desire maps)
 - Aristotle is looking for a chief good: an end justifying all our activities
 - and the same end for every human being!

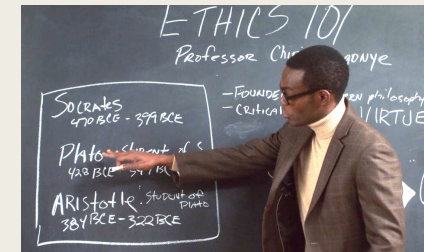
- Consider, e.g., the general's chief good

➡ victory ➡ political status ➡ power ➡ final end = ?

Problem: how can there be just one final end for all human lives?

A Sketch of the Human Good

good life / final end



“About its name, most people are pretty much agreed, since both ordinary people and sophisticated ones say it is ‘happiness’ (eudaimonia) and suppose that living well (eu zēn) and doing well (eu prattein) are the same as being happy (eudaimonein).” (NE I.4)

“Happiness (*eudaimonia*) seems to be most like this, since it we always choose because of itself and never because of something else.” (NE I.7)

Happiness as the Final End

Happiness for us

- a subjective sense
- feeling of well-being
- cheery disposition



Happiness as *eudaimonia*

- an assessment of one's life
- state of well-being
- “human flourishing”

Feeling Happy vs. Being Happy



feeling happy
~~eudaimonia~~




~~eudaimonia~~
feeling happy

“I was happy, I just didn’t realize I was.”

– Mickey in *Hannah and Her Sisters*

The Pursuit of (Aristotelian) Happiness

- Possible candidates for the human good (*NE* I.5)
 - the life of pleasure
 - the life of politics
 - the life of moneymaking
 - the life of contemplation
- 

🌐 When poll is active, respond at pollev.com/tirani111

📱 Text **TIRANI111** to **37607** once to join



In your view, which of the following comes closest to living a good life?

life of pleasure

life of politics

life of moneymaking

life of contemplation

none of the above

The Pursuit of (Aristotelian) Happiness

- Possible candidates for the human good (*NE* I.5)

- ~~the life of pleasure~~ → “characteristic of grazing cattle”



- ~~the life of politics/honor~~
 - ~~the life of moneymaking~~

“seems to be in the hands of the honorers more than of the honoree”



- the life of contemplation

“wealth is clearly not the good we are looking for, since it is useful and for the sake of something else”



maybe? (see *NE* X.6–8) 🤔

The Pursuit of (Aristotelian) Happiness

- What the human good is not (NE I.5)
 - ~~the life of pleasure~~
 - ~~the life of politics/honor~~
 - ~~the life of moneymaking~~
- What the human good is:

HAPPINESS
(*eudaimonia*)

distinctively human

something that we achieve

an end we pursue always
and only for its own sake

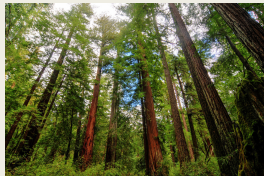
requires activity

“But to say that happiness is the best good is perhaps to say something that is apparently commonplace, and we still need a clearer statement of what it is. Maybe, then, this would come about if the function of a human being were grasped.” (NE I.7)

The Function Argument (*NE* I.7)

1. The good of something lies in its distinctive function (*ergon*; also: “work”)
2. The highest good of something lies in it performing its function well
3. There is such a thing as the human function
4. The good of a human being lies in the human function (from 1 & 3)
 - What is the human function?

~~growth and nutrition~~



~~sense perception~~



reason



5. The human function lies in rational activity

Therefore: The highest human good lies in rational activity performed well (from 2, 4, 5)

HAPPINESS
(*eudaimonia*)

↳ in accordance with virtue (*aretē*)

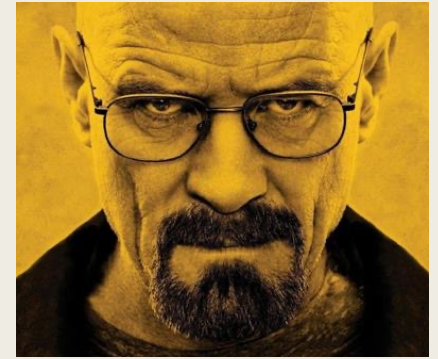
Reason and Virtue

Aristotle's account of happiness (*eudaimonia*):

rational activity performed well

? ←

↳ in accordance with virtue?



Reason and Virtue

Aristotle's account of happiness (*eudaimonia*):

rational activity performed well



↳ in accordance with virtue?

- connected with our status as political animals
 - animals whose lives, beliefs, and values are informed by our activities in societies
 - animals who engage with one another in shared pursuits and commitments
 - animals whose social activity is shaped by the roles we take on in our lives
- “Virtues are social skills. To possess a virtue is to have extended and refined one’s abilities to perceive morally relevant information so that one is fully responsive to the local sociomoral context.”
(Haidt and Joseph, “The Moral Mind,” 2008)



- Recap
- Next breakout (Wednesday)
 - discuss function argument further
 - rest of Book I of *Nicomachean Ethics*
 - relationship between happiness, self-sufficiency, and death
 - influence of Aristotle in contemporary ethics
- Classics Open House this Thursday, Oct. 14