Blurb

Aristotle’s *De Anima* addresses topics now placed in the philosophy of mind and epistemology—such as perception, consciousness and thought. The seminar will be a close study of this single short work, giving us the opportunity for the depth appropriate to a senior or graduate seminar. But the *De Anima* also provides the opportunity for a fair amount of breadth, since the work draws on central notions in ancient metaphysics, such as the matter-form and actuality-potentiality distinctions, and is concerned with philosophical issues of continuous interest from Aristotle’s time to today.

Texts

The bookstore has


The secondary literature in the selected bibliography below is either required reading or suggested but not required supplementary reading. The latter are given in brackets; except for those in Nussbaum and Rorty, the former are in the course cubby hole in the department office, HUM 4-115. Nussbaum and Rorty and articles from *Mind, Philosophical Review* and *Phronesis* can be accessed online through the University of Alberta library from a campus computer.

Assessment

The course is a seminar. Participation is crucial both for the seminar to go well and for you to benefit from the course. Preparation through doing the assigned reading before each meeting is, in turn, important for being able to participate. The reading load is average for a seminar, at typically 20-40 pgs. for each meeting.

1. A very short weekly ‘Kelsey’ paper. Each week a 1 page paper, identifying an interpretative problem or question you’ve had on the weekly reading, is due by (preferably) email attachment or in my mailbox in HUM 4-115 by Wednesday at 1PM. The weekly papers are ungraded requirements but will contribute to your participation component of your course grade.

2. A presentation. Each student will choose an author in the secondary reading to give a short 15 minute presentation and thereafter be the seminar’s expert on the topic. A 5 pg. write up of the presentation is due a week after the presentation.

3. A term paper of, for 440, 12-15 pg. and for 540, 15-20 pgs. A shortcoming of assessing a course by a term paper is that it offers little opportunity for improvement and development. I’ll foster improvement by grading both a paper and a revision of the paper. The paper is due by the class meeting of 10th week. I’ll
respond to the paper by our final meeting December 5, and a revision of the paper is due a week after our last seminar meeting, December 12. The paper should be on a topic related to the issues covered in the seminar but not itself directly covered in the seminar; I make a few suggestions below. Please come talk to me about your topic. Late papers (drafts or final revised papers) will not be accepted without a documented medical excuse.

The basis of the course grade is the first version of the paper. Your course grade will be influenced, positively or negatively by a single grade step, by each of the improvement between the draft and the final paper, the presentation and participation. Those who find mathematics fun will notice that the paper is worth 55% of the course grade, while the revision of the paper, the presentation (and write up), and participation are each worth 15% of the course grade.

Prereq’s

The course is not a survey of Aristotle but a close study of a few issues in contemporary Aristotle scholarship. Like any 400-level course, the prerequisite for the course is “successful completion of 6 units of course weight in Philosophy, including a 200-level course.” However, highly recommended background for this course is one of 230, 333 or a 400-level history of philosophy course. I discourage you from taking this course concurrently with 230 or from taking this course this term and then my 333 next term.

Policy

Of course, all work must be your own and all sources must be clearly cited. But plagiarism isn’t just quoting stuff without citation. If the thought expressed by your sentence isn’t your own, you should say who conveyed that thought to you (although you don’t need to cite class discussion). And don’t rely on web sources; most of them suck. Wikipedia, in particular, is currently very weak on many philosophical topics. The Stanford online encyclopedia, at http://plato.stanford.edu, is much better but is limited in its coverage. The University of Alberta asks me to remind you that it “is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.ualberta.ca/secretariat/appeals.htm) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University. Policy about course outlines can be found in § 23.4(2) of the University Calendar.”

Bibliography

Aristotle’s hylomorphism—his views on the priority of form to matter—and, in particular, his definition of the soul as the form of a living body, has struck some as a kind of functionalism. Contemporary functionalism identifies mental states like pains and beliefs with their roles in cognitive systems and not with their material constitutions. Although we’ll cover many issues, assessing the ascription of functionalism to Aristotle will be the focal issue for the seminar. Notice that, since the seminar engages in real research in the history of philosophy, and is not on a facile survey of a historical figure, or overview of a historical period, the secondary readings outweigh the primary literature.

1. We’ll begin with Aristotle’s underlying positions on substance, form, matter, causation and nature by discussing Categories 1-5 and Physics 1.7 and 2.1-3. We’ll also make a first pass through Aristotle’s definition of soul in De Anima 2.1-4. There are several topics in the vicinity that would make good term papers—such as Aristotle’s views on mathematical objects in Physics 2.2 or his discussion of chance in Physics 2.4ff.

2. The ascription of functionalism to Aristotle has centered around the interpretation of his view of perception. Aristotle holds that, in perception, we receive the perceptible form of an object without its matter. There has considerable controversy whether this view entails that the sense organ undergoes physiological change when we perceive. For the background, we’ll discuss:
Aristotle, *De Anima* 2. 5-12

3. To begin to assess whether functionalism can be ascribed to Aristotle, we'll look at contemporary functionalism. [For some background, see also http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/functionalism.]


4. We’ll look at Miles Burnyeat’s influential criticism of the ascription of functionalism to Aristotle and the reception to Burnyeat.

[Cohen, S. M. “Hylomorphism and Functionalism,” in Nussbaum and Rorty]

5. Much of the secondary literature on Aristotle’s alleged functionalism abstracts passages from their context. To better assess the issue, we’ll need to consider the overall purpose of the *De Anima*. We’ll read *De Anima* 1 to discuss Aristotle’s characterization of his predecessor’s views. [For some background reading, see http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ancient-soul/.] Aristotle aims in the *De Anima* to define the soul as the form of living things. The mark of life is that it is a kind of self-motion.

Aristotle, *Physics*, 8

6. Part of the debate over whether Aristotle is a functionalist centers around the question whether awareness is sufficient for certain cognitive activities. In the rest of the seminar we will discuss several of these cognitive activities, beginning with consciousness. There are other activities we will not discuss, such as touch and common sense; one of these would make a good term paper topic.

Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3.1-2

6. Imagination

Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3.3

7. Thought

Aristotle distinguishes between a passive intellect by which the mind may become all things and an active intellect by which we make all things.

Aristotle, *De Anima* 3.4-5.
Kosman “What does the maker mind make?” in Nussbaum and Rorty.

Aristotle uses the notion of separation elsewhere. For example, Aristotle criticizes the Platonists for separating Platonic Ideas from sensible particulars, for example, at Peri Ideon 84.23-4 and De Anima 432a14. There’s a formidable literature on whether nonsubstantial individuals can be found in more than one subject; much of this debate centers on whether nonsubstantial individuals are separable from individual substances. And Aristotle claims at Physics 2.2 that the mathematician studies mathematical objects as if they were separate from physical bodies. One of these topics would make a good term paper topic.

9. Finally, in Metaphysics 12, Aristotle argues for an unmoved mover as the cause of all motion, which is described as a kind of self-contemplation. If there’s time, we’ll discuss divine thought. This would make a good term paper topic.