

Aristotle—Matter and Temporality
PHL 415.101 (#41114)
Th. 3-6:15 pm
2352 N. Clifton, Rm 150.33

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Topic

In his *Physics*, Aristotle famously defines time as “a number of motion in accordance with the before and after (τοῦτο...έστιν ὁ χρόνος, ἀριθμὸς κινήσεως κατὰ τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον)” (*Phys.* IV.219b1-2). In undertaking to interpret this definition, scholars almost invariably begin by approaching Aristotle’s discussion of time in *Physics* IV.10-14 as a more or less independent treatise or essay on time, abstracting it from its context in the *Physics* or even from Aristotle’s philosophy as a whole. We will do very much the opposite. Indeed, we will begin with Aristotle’s discussion of (what is often referred to as) the “unmoved mover,” in *Physics* VIII and *Metaphysics* Λ and take up the mode of being proper to this entity as not subject to time, because not subject to movement, and not subject to movement because not composed of matter. We will allow this fundamental contrast to guide our reading of Aristotle on time, i.e. the contrast between the unmoved mover’s immaterial mode of being and the materiality of natural or sublunar things, which is to say, between the pure *energeia* or ‘actualization, being-at-work’ of the unmoved mover and the actualization or being-at-work of *dunamis* or ‘potency’ that is the manner in which natural things accomplish their being. And we will then trace Aristotle’s analysis of natural moveable being through the three conceptual vocabularies he sets out in the *Physics*, namely the opposites and *hupokeimenon* or ‘underlying thing’ of Bk. I, the fourfold causation of Bk. II, and finally the *energeia* of *dunamis* of Book III. Only then will we approach Aristotle’s definition of time in Book IV.

What we will find, I believe, is that, contrary to many readings that focus on the punctuated temporality some find indicated in Aristotle’s discussion of the ‘now’ moment, Aristotle is not a thinker constrained by the metaphysics of presence. Rather, the mode of being that belongs natural, material things is a certain way of being stretched out beyond their present into their past and future. In being what they are, natural things are potentially in time, a potency that is only actualized when their movement or rest is counted by an experiencing rational soul. At the very end of the quarter, we will turn to Aristotle’s discussion of *genesis* and *phthora*, or ‘coming-to-be’ and ‘passing-away’ (in the work named for those terms), and we will think together about how that discussion relates to what we have come to understand concerning natural, moveable, material being in the *Physics*. This is the arch we will trace over these ten weeks.

Required Reading (text in translation):

Aristotle. *Physics: A Guided Study*. Tr. J. Sachs. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995

Aristotle. *Metaphysics* Λ. Tr. J. Sachs. Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion Press, 1999. (Only Book Λ, pdf will be distributed)

Aristotle. *De generatione et corruptione*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982. (Out of print, pdf will be distributed)

For Consultation (Greek text, line numbers, and commentary):

Aristotle. *Physics*. Ed. W.D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936.

Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Vol. II. Ed. W.D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924.

Aristotle. *On Coming-to-Be and Passing-Away (De generatione et corruptione)*. Ed. H.J. Joachim. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2926.

Schedule (subject to change)

9.8 : Introduction to Course (*Physics* IV.10-14)

10.13 : *Physics* III

9.15 : *Physics* VIII

10.20 : *Physics* IV

9.22 : *Metaphysics* Λ

10.27 : *Physics* IV

9.29 : *Physics* I

11.3: *De gen. et cor.* I

10.6 : *Physics* II

11.10: *De gen. et cor.* II

Grade

Class Presentation

20%

Paper (12 pages)

60% **(DUE Friday 11.17, No Late Submissions)**

Attendance and Participation

20% = 100%

If any student has any condition or encounters circumstances that interfere with his or her timely completion of the assignments, please do let me know and we will endeavor to make arrangements.