

Aristotle: Introduction & Protrepticus



Overview

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Why study philosophy?

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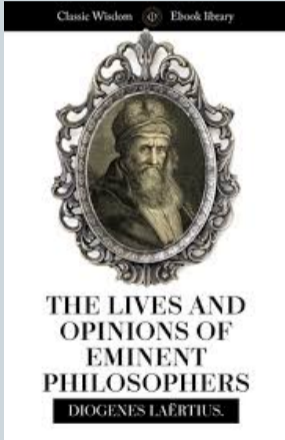
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- main source: Diogenes Laertius, 3rd c. AD (that's a *long* time after Aristotle!!!)
- What kind of person was Aristotle? Difficult to tell. 2 very different traditions:
 - 1 obnoxious, overbearing, condescending, denigrating all the thinkers that came before him (but especially Plato). (Textual evidence: remarks in the *Sophistical Refutations* and some in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.)
 - 2 a very generous man who valued friendship above all else, freed his slaves, was affectionate, grateful, pious, etc.
- Probably neither of these is entirely accurate. What we do know: Aristotle valued learning greatly; was a biologically inclined investigator, and saw beauty in all forms of life.

Who was Aristotle?

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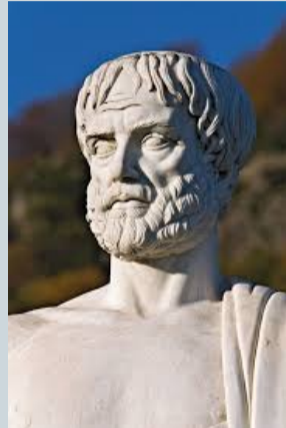
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A (very brief) Biography

- born in Stagira, 384 BC (“the Stagirite”); not an Athenian citizen! (This will be a problem.)
- father: Nicomachus, physician (died when he was quite young).
- To Athens at 17: first in the school of Isocrates, but disillusioned (all they taught was style and dialectics). Then with Plato at the Academy, for 20 years, till Plato’s death.
 - relationship between Plato and Aristotle? – We have evidence for mutual friendship. There are early Platonic writings (now lost); some deep agreements (method of philosophy, etc.), but also some deep disagreements (nature of forms; virtue).



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A (very brief) Biography

- After Plato's death: left Athens (angry? anti-Macedonian sentiment? wanted to do marine biology?); to Assos.
- 3 years later left to Lesbos; joined by his friend, Theophrastus. Lots of marine biological writings; very cutting edge research!
- Summoned home in 343 by Philip of Macedon to serve as tutor of his son, Alexander (later the Great). Was only there for 2-3 years.
- Then??? 5 years blank.



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A (very brief) Biography

- Death of Philip; returns to Athens in 335. Establishes the Lyceum. Most of his extant philosophical writings are from this period.
 - research in literally everything: botany, music, maths, astronomy, medicine, physics, cosmology, ethics, government, the arts, psychology, etc.
 - first systematic library collection; lots of politics, collecting 158 constitutions, etc.!
- Anti-Macedon sentiment in Athens; charged with impiety (cf. Socrates!); leaves again. Dies a year later.



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- extremely difficult to read
- probably 1/3rd of them survives (based on DL's list)
- left to Theophrastus.
- Probably, two lineage: the esoteric ones, these are the ones we have (Aristotle → Andronicus → medieval copies → us); and the exoteric ones, the ones lost (but cf. Protrepticus; Aristotle → Cicero → DL).
 - why did the technical stuff survive and the other didn't?
 - story: it was in someone's basement, and then Andronicus of Rhodes (40 BC) edited them. But: how heavy of an editor was he? What was the material he was working with?
- Edition: Prussian Academy, 1831, Immanuel Bekker. Bekker numbers.

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General methodology:

- identifying the problem (“for those who wish to solve problems, it is helpful to state the problems well” *Meta.* 995a27)
- sorting through the endoxa, the “reputable opinions” of others. This is important, since (1) we don’t want to reinvent the wheel; (2) mistakes can be instructive.
- stating the appearances. These are always very important, and one of the main philosophical questions is exactly how important they are. (They can be overthrown but not easily.)

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The Structure of Aristotelian Knowledge

- 1 Theoretical — seek knowledge
 - metaphysics
 - mathematics
 - natural philosophy (physics, astronomy, biology)
- 2 Pratical — concern goodness in action
 - ethics (individual)
 - economics (household)
 - politics (city/state)
- 3 Productive — aim at beautiful objects
 - arts crafts
- 4 Logic: = tool; organon.

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The *Protrepticus*

- '*protrepticus*' = turning towards; an invitation or an exhortation.
- Allegedly, Aristotle also wrote about the value of mathematics; but here, it's about **philosophy**:
 - philosophy is broader than of today: includes the study of the basic principles of the entire world, from physics to theology, as well as the usual questions about reality, knowledge, ethics, politics.
 - it requires commitment so that being a “wisdom lover” means a way of life.
 - what Aristotle is really praising is wise living, moral wisdom, prudence.
- Cf. Plato's cave! We need to turn around to see reality.

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The *Protrepticus*

- it was lost for a long time; found in the 19th c., in Iamblicus
- the extent of Aristotle's text is somewhat unclear, and so is the structure
- is it a dialogue? – we'll assume it is

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Why Study Philosophy 1: Witness A

STEP 1: We value good condition, not external features

- the good condition of the body = health
- the good condition of the soul = being educated

STEP 2: Learning and searching leads to wisdom

- (Assumption: philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom)
- **Conclusion:** study philosophy

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The Hierarchy argument (p. 5):

Hierarchy of things:

- ① **rational soul**: best; concerns the intellectual; end-in-itself and thus honourable; human
 - ② **irrational soul**: better; concerns the visible; useful; animal
 - ③ **body**: least; concerns the visible; useful; plant
- assumption: being a human *qua* human is the final cause of our being
 - follow-up point (pp. 5–6): intellectual wisdom is the most distinctive of humans; philosophy cultivates that distinctive trait
 - assumption: we should value our most distinctive trait.

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Why Study Philosophy 2: Witness B

The Hierarchy argument + Function argument (cf. also Nic. Ethics I.7):

- if a thing can do many things, “the best of them is always their function, e.g., of the doctor health” (p. 8)
- “And we can name no function of thought, or of the thinking part of our soul, which is better than truth. Truth is therefore the most authoritative function of this part of the soul.” (p. 8)
- we exercise this function by acting with knowledge but also simply by doing philosophy.
- (assumption:) We should do what is best.
- Therefore, study philosophy!

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Week	Topic	Mandatory reading
W1	Introduction	Protrepticus
W2	Natural science	Phys. II (93–110); Meta. V.4 (270–71), VI.1 (278–80)
W3	Scientific explanation	Anal. post. I–II (39–59)
W4	Ontology	Cat. (5–11); Meta. VII.1–9 (284–98)
W5	The unmoved mover	Meta. XII (339–55)
W6	Application: the soul	De an. II.1–7 (165–77)
W7	Thinking	De an. III.3–8 (191–200)
W8	Living well and the virtues	EN I.1–3, 7–8, 13; II.1–2, 5–9
W9	Friendship	EN IX (452–59)
W10	The contemplative life	EN X.6–9 (468–78)

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