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PHIL 401-01, Aristotle and Whitehead, Fall 2006

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Authors	Shade, Patrick A.
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FALL 2006

PHIL 401: ARISTOTLE AND WHITEHEAD

Pat Shade
Clough 402

Official Office Hours: 11:00-11:50 WF; 2-3 TR & by appt.
Unofficial Office Hours: I'm usually available 3-4 MW

Office: 3935; Home: 272-0401
Email: Shade@Rhodes.edu

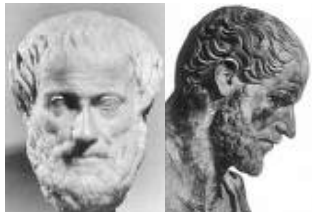
I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS: This class is largely an exploration of two great metaphysical systems, the substance metaphysics of Aristotle and A.N. Whitehead's process metaphysics. Each philosopher offers a systematic vision of the whole of reality. Each articulates specific categories whose interconnection is designed to exhaustively describe and explain the diverse phenomena of our experience. While many of you are likely familiar with metaphysical issues concerning the mind/body relationship, this is not the focal point of either system we will study. Instead, the issues Aristotle and Whitehead address are more akin to those raised by the preSocratics: Is the world one, many, or both one and many (albeit in different respects)? Which is more real, being (or permanence) or becoming (or change)? Which is more prevalent?

Though they differ in many regards, each of our two systems seeks to account for the following (in no particular order):

- the status of *permanence* and *change*, or of *being* and *becoming*;
- what *is*, truly, in the fullest sense;
- the status of *relations*, especially whether they affect the nature of the things related;
- the nature and relations of *organisms* (both of these systems emphasize organic over mechanistic nature);
- the role of *causation* in the genesis and activity of real beings;
- grounds for distinguishing between what is *lower* in quality &/or complexity and what is *higher*;
- the nature(s) and ground(s) of *order* of nature &/or the world;
- the difference and possible connections between the *oneness* (or unity) of the universe and its *many-ness* (or diversity);
- the relation between the *world* and *God*.

Given the level of the class and its general nature, the class will be held as a seminar. This means you are expected to be mature, equal participants in this study of metaphysical systems, freed from any vestiges of self-incurred tutelage. It's important to be mindful of the challenges of studying systematic thinkers. Chief among these is the need to navigate constantly the distance between specific details and superstructure. Consistent, dedicated work is vital in meeting this challenge (i.e., falling behind or reading in a cursory manner because you expect things to make sense after class discussion are probably deadly moves).

Our readings will be fairly long and so we won't be able to cover all the material you read and might have questions about. Hence, our work will likely be enhanced if we take a selective, representative approach. What does this mean? It means that while you should read the entire assignment and seek to understand all that you read, our class discussion will focus on a couple of passages of significance. What we do in class, then, should be a representative example of the kind of work you do as you read Aristotle and Whitehead.



II. COURSE OUTLINE

A. Substance Metaphysics: Aristotle

1. The basics: selections from *Categories*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Physics*
2. The system as presented in *Metaphysics*

B. Process Metaphysics: Whitehead

1. The system as presented in *Process and Reality*

Required Books:

- Richard McKeon *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (Modern Library)
- A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (Free Press)

Recommended Book:

- Donald Sherburne, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality*

III. COURSE WORK:

Required Course Work:

- 10% Preparation/Discussion Participation
- 20% (2@10%) EFC Guides
- 70% 4 Papers

A. Preparation/Participation (10%): Since this is a seminar, *careful* preparation and *high quality* participation are vital to your learning and expected throughout the semester.

[1] **Preparation:** Mastering terminology will be important to mastering both philosophers, especially Whitehead. I recommend keeping a running “dictionary” of terms in which you note different definitions (since it’s not necessarily the case that each philosopher consistently uses terms). Also recommended are charts, especially when working with Aristotle (who tends to work methodically through logical possibilities). Diagrams will be helpful with Whitehead. I will offer samples handouts of these, and I encourage you to generate your own. Finally, an ongoing journal of questions and insights will likely help you piece together the diverse components of these complicated systems. Occasionally, I will ask you to complete charts or handouts. While these will not be graded, I will offer comments on them and also take note of whether you complete them or not. These will be factored into your grade if your final grade is borderline (e.g., an 89%). Faithful and thoughtful completion of these assignments can help boost your grade over the borderline.

NOTE: You are welcome to solicit commentary and feedback on any of this preparatory work.

[2] **Discussion Participation:** Discussion participation involves (i) carefully listening to, questioning, and responding to the views of others, and also (ii) contributing your own views, questions, and reactions to the readings and class discussion. I take note of the “ripple effect” of your comments; i.e., I consider whether your comments help advance our discussion. It’s valuable when your contribution responds to that of others or when it elicits feedback from your classmates.

When determining your discussion participation grade, I look at the *quality* and *pattern* of your participation over the course of the semester. The *quality* of your work is gauged in terms of its (i) **clarity**, (ii) **insight**, and (iii) **sophistication**. In assessing the *pattern* of your work, I look at (i) **consistency**, (ii) **effort**, and (iii) **improvement** and **progress** (or regress) you make in critically discussing materials throughout the semester.

Attendance: You are expected to attend all classes. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for all material covered and assignments distributed or collected. Since I consider attendance a factor of participation, I don’t distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. (If you’re not present, you can’t contribute.) If you have more than 2 absences (which is the equivalent of a week), your

prep/participation grade will drop 1/3 letter grade per additional day missed. Also, you are expected to contact me so we can discuss your attendance.

B. EFC Guides (2@10%): These items function roughly the same as prompts (or sherpas), with which most of you are familiar. Each of you will be responsible for guiding or directing class discussion *twice* during the semester.

Each guide should have *four* main parts.

(1) **Overview/Explication and Passages:** The goal here is to present the main issue(s) from the reading in a clear manner that captures the heart of the reading. Your overview should highlight the most important points, moves, or issues Aristotle or Whitehead considers in the reading. Your goal here will be to articulate key points clearly and accurately. (You will also want to define key ideas related to those points in this section.) Also, select a couple of passages that are central and/or that you wish us to discuss.

(2) **Significance:** Explore the significance of the ideas discussed in part 1 by substantively working with and through them. This is the most substantive part of the guide, and it will likely be one of the following:

- **Excavators:** these explore experience. Consider an experience or type of experience that corroborates the idea(s) discussed in part 1, *and* one that complicates the same idea(s). Then offer an assessment in which you explain where the balance likely lies (i.e., for or against the idea).
- **Flyers:** following philosophy's flight. Explain what implications the idea(s) from part 1 has for other substantive philosophical issues or ideas (e.g., in epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, social & political philosophy, or a metaphysical idea not directly addressed in our readings [e.g., the mind-body problem]) *or* philosophers
- **Creators:** creating your own style of guide. If you wish to pursue this route, the main stipulation is that you discuss it with me at least two calendar days before you present it.

(3) **Key ideas or terms** that are introduced and (hopefully) defined (or redefined) in the day's reading. I recommend listing these in the order in which they appear, though this isn't necessary. It is necessary to identify the page(s) on which the term is explained or defined. If a term receives an important redefinition in the day's reading, include it as well.

(4) One or two substantive **questions** you have (these need not be restricted to the day's topics) or items with which you need help. Present your question(s) clearly and with enough context and detail so that we can see what the problem is.

Your guides should be well-written, proofed, and no more than two pages long (single spaced, roughly 700-800 words). Email your prompt to the class (17413@rhodes.edu, + Ben Lyon lyobm1@rhodes.edu) no later than 9 a.m. on the day that you present. I hope everyone will be able to read the guide prior to class, but you don't need to print it out; I will make copies for the class.

Follow-up Assessment: After presenting your guide, reflect on it to determine how your understanding of the material has changed or deepened. Then write a follow-up assessment in which you:

- (i) Summarize class discussion of your guide, noting the main comments and questions made in response to it. Indicate clearly how you did (or now would) respond to these.
- (ii) Explore how your view has changed (or deepened) as a result of discussion and further study. (By "further study" I mean to include the other readings we do by that author. This gives you the opportunity to consider your prompt in a larger context.) It's likely that you will spend most time addressing parts 2 & 4.

Your assessment is *due no later than* (you can hand it in sooner) *the 1st class meeting* after we complete the relevant author.

Grading criteria: Guides (and the follow up) will be graded on the basis of **clarity, organization, insight, and sophistication**. The latter two criteria will most likely be tied to your ability to (a) select vitally important passages – attending to detail without losing the overarching point(s) – and (b) offer a penetrating (and helpful) assessment of the reading’s significance. Asking good questions (in part 4) will also reveal the quality of your treatment of the material. Finally, your follow-up is an excellent opportunity to deepen your understanding of the material, so be sure to treat it thoughtfully (vs generally and superficially). Some students treat follow-ups as after-thoughts and so throw away a valuable opportunity for growth.

C. Papers (70%):

<i>Aristotle:</i>	shorter paper 15%	<i>Whitehead:</i>	shorter paper 15%
	longer paper 20%		longer paper 20%

There will be 4 papers, two per philosopher. The first of each pair of papers will be shorter and more focused on explication, while the second will be longer and more global in its scope and aspirations. The shorter papers will be worth 15% each, and the longer will be worth 20% each. The general expectation is that you will generate individualized topics that interest you, though we can work together on that. At least one paper must include substantive work with secondary literature. This does not mean that such a paper must be a “research” paper, but it must work with the views of other authors. (You might draw on such literature to explain a complicated idea or defend a controversial interpretation. Or you might critique one author’s view and show how it is mistaken.) Individual assignments will be distributed in advance; see the calendar for tentative due dates.

The late penalty for papers will be 1/3 letter grade per calendar day late.

IV. MISCELLANEOUS:

• **Film Viewing:** We may view one or more films related to course content. One possibility is an episode of Disney’s Chip n’ Dale. More information will be provided later.

• **Grading Criteria:** See “Grading Criteria for Written Work” handout for specifics.

A	94 and up	B+	87-89	C+	77-79
A-	90-93	B	84-86	C	74-76
		B-	80-83	C-	70-73 etc.

• **Successful Classroom:** In our class everyone has a right to express a genuine observation, curiosity or criticism, but no one has a right to put one down. Respect towards all members of the class and to course content is the key. I work hard to generate a setting in which we can be honest and critical, but my efforts are futile without your individual contributions. Impediments to a successful classroom include tardiness, lethargy, excessive absences, and leaving the classroom before the end of the hour. We are biological creatures, but since we also have a certain mastery over our bodies, please take care of your biological needs before class.

• **Computer Component:** You are responsible for any notes, assignments, etc. that I send out via e-mail. In addition, you will be expected to check documents left on the Academic Volume. I will announce new documents which need to be read; if you are absent, you are responsible for reading these. If you’re unfamiliar with computer use, please check with one of the computer staff; they’ll be happy to help you.

• **Honor Code:** The Honor Code stipulates that *all* the work you submit is to be your own. You are encouraged to discuss topics and assignments with your colleagues, but the work you hand in must be

your own, i.e., it must be formulated and written in your own words and style reflecting your own thoughtful treatment. If you have any questions about the Honor Code, please ask me.

*****This syllabus is subject to revision (but don't worry; I'll discuss any changes with the class before I make them).*****

CALENDAR

Tuesday	Thursday
	R 8/24 Intro issues <i>Categories 1-5</i>
T 8/29 <i>Categories 6-15</i>	R 8/31 <i>Post Anal I. 1-10, 31, 33</i>
T 9/5 <i>Post Anal II. 1-10, 19</i>	R 9/7 Physics II (all); III. 1-3
T 9/12 <i>Metaphysics I</i>	R 9/14 <i>Meta II-III</i>
T 9/19 <i>Meta IV</i>	R 9/21 <i>Meta V</i>
T 9/26 <i>Meta VI-VIIa</i> <i>Paper 1 due</i>	R 9/28 <i>Meta VIIb</i>
T 10/3 <i>Meta VIII</i>	R 10/5 <i>Meta IX</i>
T 10/10 <i>Meta X</i>	R 10/12 <i>Meta XI</i>
T 10/17 FALL BREAK	R 10/19 <i>Meta XII</i>
T 10/24 <i>Process & Reality I. 1; V. 1-2</i>	R 10/26 <i>PR I. 2-3, II. 10</i> <i>Paper 2 due</i>
T 10/31 <i>PR II. 1</i>	R 11/2 <i>PR II. 2; IV. 1</i>
T 11/7 <i>PR III. 1-2</i>	R 11/9 <i>PR III. 3-4</i>
T 11/14 <i>PR III. 5</i>	R 11/16 <i>PR II. 3</i>
T 11/21 <i>PR II. 4</i> <i>Paper 3 due</i>	R 11/23 THANKSGIVING BREAK
T 11/27 <i>PR II.5-7</i>	R 11/30 <i>PR II. 8-9</i>
T 12/5 <i>PR V. 2</i>	<i>Paper 4 due during finals</i>