Reading Questions for Oct. 1-3

These questions are intended to orient you in the reading. You do not need to have definite answers to them, but you should think about them.

As you know from reading Aristotle for class on Sept. 26, his books are difficult. Don’t worry if you don’t understand everything. Read the whole assignment quickly, to get a sense of what it contains, and then return to the specific questions below. You may find the glossary (pp. 327-356) helpful in explaining some of Aristotle’s technical terms.

Tues. 10/1: Aristotle’s physics and the Greek cosmos
Read: Aristotle, 36-75, 187-194 (selections from Physics; Generation and Corruption; Metaphysics, book 12).

Physics

1. Read p. 36. Aristotle says that knowledge proceeds by moving from universals to particulars, because universals are closer to perception than particulars. Compare this passage with p. 19 (from last week’s readings), where Aristotle writes that “what is most universal is furthest from perception.” Can you figure out how to reconcile these two passages? Keep in mind that Aristotle’s works were probably lecture notes, so they are concise and sometimes cryptic.

2. Read pp. 37-42. Are you confused? You should be. Aristotle is trying to explain how something can come to be from its opposite or its absence. How can knowledge of music come to be from its opposite, being ignorant of music? Aristotle says that his predecessors were confused about this problem because they didn’t realize that any kind of change also involves something else that does not change—e.g. a person who is unmusical can become musical, but the person doesn’t change otherwise. Aristotle will develop this idea in the rest of the Physics.

3. Read Book 2, chapter 1 (pp. 42-45). According to Aristotle, what is the difference between something natural (for example, wood) and something that is not natural (for example, a bed)? How is nature like the material, and how is it like the shape or form of something? Why is the latter more important (p. 45)?

4. Read pp. 45-47. According to Aristotle, how does mathematics differ from the study of nature? How are they connected?

5. Read pp. 48-49. What are the four types of causes that Aristotle identifies? Take the example of a silver bowl (Aristotle uses this example in the second paragraph). What are its four causes?

6. Read Book 2, chapter 7 (pp. 56-57). Notice that Aristotle repeats, in summary, the four kinds of causes. Make sure you understand them. Why is it that “things that initiate motion without being in motion are outside the scope of the study of nature”?

7. Read Book 2, chapter 8 (pp. 57-60). In this passage, Aristotle argues that natural things exist for some purpose, just like the crafts are practiced for some purpose. At the end he says, “If what something is for is present in craft, it is also present in nature. This is clearest when a doctor applies medical treatment to himself—that is what nature is like.” What does Aristotle mean by using this analogy between nature and a doctor who heals himself?

8. Read Book 8, chapters 5-6 (pp. 64-67). Why did Aristotle think that there had to be an unmoved mover (something that caused motion but did not itself move)? Remember that for Aristotle “motion” means not only local motion but any kind of change.
**Generation and Corruption**

9. Read pp. 69-70. Aristotle distinguishes “coming to be” (generation) and “perishing” (corruption) from other forms of change: growth or decay, locomotion, and alteration. What is the difference?

**Metaphysics**

10. Read Book 12 (pp. 187-194). Here Aristotle returns to the question of the unmoved mover (see question 8, above). Aristotle identifies a number of problems with his predecessors’ views; don’t worry about them. Why does Aristotle claim that the unmoved mover must be “an object of understanding or of desire” (p. 189)? Read Aristotle’s claim that the divine understanding “must understand itself, so that its understanding is an understanding of understanding” (p. 192). What might Aristotle mean by this? What kind of unmoved mover is this, and does it make any sense to you?

Now that you’ve worked your way through these passages from Aristotle, reward yourself with a pat on the back and something fun. If you think that working through Aristotle was fun, you should think about adding a minor in history or philosophy!

**Thurs. 10/3: Aristotle’s biology and psychology**

Read: Aristotle, 76-114 (selections from De Anima, Parts of Animals).

**De Anima (On the Soul)**

Aristotle’s concept of the soul is not the religious concept of the immortal soul that survives death. What is it? These questions will help you figure that out.

1. Read pp. 78-79. What are the affections of the soul, and why do they require a body?

2. Read pp. 80-84. What distinguishes a living body from a dead body? The soul. Why does a soul require a body? Can the soul exist apart from the body?

3. Read p. 81. What are the main potentialities of the soul? Which ones do plants possess? Which ones do all animals possess? Which ones do only some animals possess? Which ones do human beings only possess?

4. Based on your answer to question 3, do inanimate objects like rocks possess a soul?

5. Read the rest of De anima on understanding, desire, and action quickly. How does Aristotle explain the connection between action and desire? Now think back to question 10 for yesterday. If the unmoved mover moves the moved movers by being an object of desire, do the moved movers have to have souls?

**Parts of Animals**

6. Read Book 1, chapter 1 (pp. 104-112). Why does Aristotle think that “the primary cause [to investigate when studying animals] is apparently the one that we say is for something” (that is, the reason why or the “final cause”) (p. 105)?

7. At 642a1-15 (from the middle to the bottom of p. 111), Aristotle says that the student of animals must consider two kinds of causes: “what something is for and what is of necessity.” What are some examples of each kind of cause?

8. Read Book 1, chapter 5 (pp. 112-114). What objection against studying animals does Aristotle mention? How does he respond to this objection?