Aristotle’s Theory of Justice

We will study and discuss Aristotle’s theory of justice as he presents it in Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (which has also come down to us as Book IV of the *Eudemian Ethics*). We will try to resolve the main interpretive issues that Aristotle’s text raises so as to reconstruct his theory of justice; and we will evaluate the philosophical theory that emerges from our reconstruction. In the introductory meeting I will place *NE V* in the context of Aristotle’s ethical and political writings. After that, we will focus on *NE V* itself, bringing in other texts only when doing so seems needed for making sense of details in *NE V*. Knowledge of ancient Greek is not a requirement for taking the course, but will be helpful. The course will provide students with opportunities for in-seminar presentations, and Philosophy students may get units by passing an examination on the seminar’s subject matter.

**Syllabus**

Meeting 1 (9/15). Introduction: Aristotle’s *NE* and *EE*; Aristotle’s theory of character-virtue

Meeting 2 (9/22). *NE V* 1: Aristotle’s introduction to the topic; the conception of general justice

Meeting 3 (9/29). *NE V* 2: general justice and special justice

Meeting 4 (10/6). *NE V* 3: The distributive kind of special justice

(10/13) No meeting

Meeting 5 (10/20). *NE V* 4: The rectificatory kind of special justice

Meeting 6 (10/27). *NE V* 5: Justice in exchange (the need for currency) - economic theory

Fall recess

Meeting 7 (11/10). *NE V* 6: Political justice

Meeting 8 (11/17). *NE V* 7: Natural justice and justice by law

Thanksgiving recess

Meeting 9 (12/1). *NE V* 8: Justice, injustice, and the voluntary
Meeting 10 (12/8). NE V 9: Puzzles. Is it possible to suffer injustice voluntarily? Can one do injustice to oneself?

Meeting 11 (12/15). NE V 10: “Decency”

Meeting 12 (to be determined). NE V 11: Return to puzzles. Can one do injustice to oneself?

Bibliography

Primary text

Bywater’s Oxford Classical Text (1894)

Translation


Commentary


Articles, monographs