This course aims to give students an overview of Aristotle’s *Physics*, its philosophical aims and methods, and to analyze in detail the argument of *Physics* Book VIII, a crucial text in the history of philosophy. *Physics* VIII is usually taken to be Aristotle’s cosmological argument: a long and intricate argument for the existence of a Prime Mover. Indeed, in *Summa contra Gentiles* I.13, Aquinas describes the argument in *Physics* VIII as a proof (*demonstratio*) that God exists. The book draws liberally upon earlier books of the *Physics* and the sheer range of topics covered has led to its being described as ‘a bridge between physics, cosmology, metaphysics, and theology’ (Graham, xvi).

Philosophical questions concerning Aristotle’s philosophy of nature that will be studied include:

(i) The nature of proof in Aristotle’s physical science and the status of the argument in *Physics* VIII;
(ii) The status and analysis of self-movers (esp. VIII 2 and 6);
(iii) The argument for the first unmoved mover (VIII 5);
(iv) Different types of priority (VIII 7);
(v) Zeno’s paradoxes of motion and their solution, according to Aristotle (VIII 8)

Detailed syllabus:

(1) January 30th: Introduction to Aristotle’s theory of science and natural science in particular; and introduction to the *Physics*;
(2) February 6th: Motion is eternal (VIII 1);
(3) February 13th: VIII 1 (continued); objections, including from animal self-motion (VIII 2);
(4) February 20th: New enquiry: why some things are sometimes in movement and sometimes at rest (VIII 3);
(5) February 27th: Whatever is in motion is moved by something else (VIII 4);
(6) March 6th: The necessity of a first unmoved mover (VIII 5);
(7) March 20th: VIII 5 continued;
(8) March 27th: Arguments that there is one eternal first mover (VIII 6);
(9) April 3rd: The primacy of locomotion over other types of change (VIII 7);
(10) April 10th: Only circular motion is genuinely continuous (VIII 8);
(11) April 17th: The primacy of circular motion over other types of locomotion (VIII 9);
(12) April 24th: The location and nature of the first mover (VIII 10).

Bibliography

Greek Text

Ross, W.D., Aristotle’s Physics, a revised text with introduction and commentary (Oxford, 1936)

English Translation


Commentaries

Ross (see above)
Selected Secondary Literature

Furley, D., ‘Self-Movers’, in Gill and Lennox (eds.), 3-14
Judson, L., ‘Heavenly Motion and the Unmoved Mover’, in Gill and Lennox (eds.), 155-174
Odzuck, S., The Priority of Locomotion in Aristotle’s Physics (Hypomnemata 196; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2014)