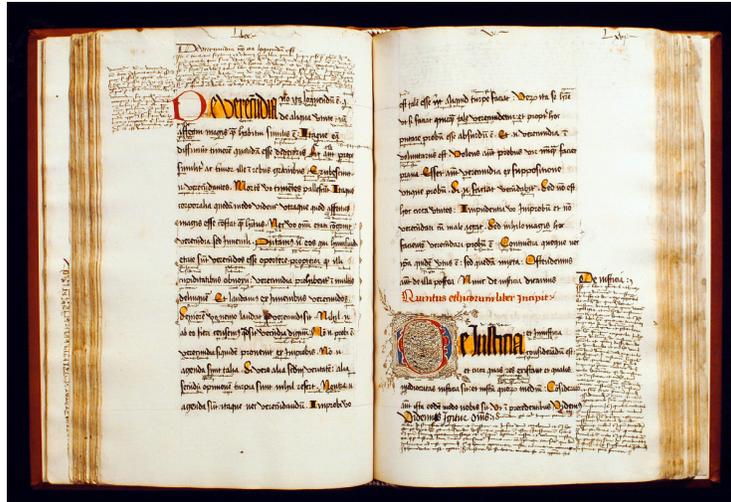


Nicomachean Ethics

A Study Group



Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

at

George Mason University

Fall, 2009 – Spring 2010

Bob Lawshe, Facilitator

Since, then, the present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are inquiring not in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use), we must examine the nature of actions, namely how we ought to do them...

NE 1103b26-31

It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good. But most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way,

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Goal

Our goal in this class to read and study Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* over the course of the Fall 2009 and Winter and Spring 2010 terms. Class members are expected to have their own copy of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, recommended text below, and to read assigned portions of the

work prior to classes. Since there are 10 “books” in the *Ethics*, we will try to cover each book over two class sessions, but this may not work out in practice, so we will have to be flexible. During classes we will discuss that week’s reading and try to figure out just what is going on. There will be no rushing; if a particular section takes a bit longer to get through we will spend the necessary time on it. Our goal is to try and understand what Aristotle is intending and to have fun doing it.

Because we are using the Study Group format, class members will be expected to volunteer to do research and to take a leading role in weekly discussions. This is particularly important as I will be unable to attend every session.

The class represents a serious year long commitment to studying this work. But if you miss some, so be it, after all I’ll have to miss some as well! New class members can join the discussion at any point during the class and attendance in the fall term isn’t a prerequisite for the winter or spring terms, etc.

Introduction

Aristotle conceives of ethical theory as a field distinct from the theoretical sciences. Its methodology must match its subject matter—good action—and must respect the fact that in this field many generalizations hold only for the most part. We study ethics in order to improve our lives, and therefore its principal concern is the nature of human well-being. Aristotle follows Socrates and Plato in taking the virtues to be central to a well-lived life. Like Plato, he regards the ethical virtues (justice, courage, temperance and so on) as complex rational, emotional and social skills. But he rejects Plato's idea that a training in the sciences and metaphysics is a necessary prerequisite for a full understanding of our good. What we need, in order to live well, is a proper appreciation of the way in which such goods as friendship, pleasure, virtue, honor and wealth fit together as a whole. In order to apply that general understanding to particular cases, we must acquire, through proper upbringing and habits, the ability to see, on each occasion, which course of action is best supported by reasons. Therefore practical wisdom, as he conceives it, cannot be acquired solely by learning general rules. We also must also acquire, through practice, those deliberative, emotional, and social skills that enable us to put our general understanding of well-being into practice in ways that are suitable to each occasion...

*Although Aristotle is deeply indebted to Plato's moral philosophy, particularly Plato's central insight that moral thinking must be integrated with our emotions and appetites, and that the preparation for such unity of character should begin with childhood education, the systematic character of Aristotle's discussion of these themes was a remarkable innovation. No one had written ethical treatises before Aristotle. Plato's *Republic*, for example, does not treat ethics as a distinct subject matter; nor does it offer a systematic examination of the nature of happiness, virtue, voluntariness, pleasure, or friendship. To be sure, we can find in Plato's works important discussions of these phenomena, but they are not brought together and unified as they are in Aristotle's ethical writings.*¹

¹ From The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/>

Structure of the Nicomachean Ethics

Sir David Ross, one of the greatest ever Aristotle scholars, used the following headings in his translation of the Nicomachean Ethics. They are not found in the “original” Aristotle text. Ostwald uses different headings, which are also not found in the “original” but they are similar to Ross’. Since I could not find Ostwald’s headings on the web I have used Ross’. In a way it is the least we can do for not using Ross’ translation. Which is the one found virtually universally on the internet.

BOOK I. THE GOOD FOR MAN

A. SUBJECT OF OUR INQUIRY.

1. All human activities aim at some good: some goods subordinate to others.
2. The science of the good for man is politics.

B. NATURE OF THE SCIENCE.

3. We must not expect more precision than the subject-matter admits. The student should have reached years of discretion.

C. WHAT IS THE GOOD FOR MAN?

4. It is generally agreed to be happiness, but there are various views as to what happiness is. What is required at the start is an unreasoned conviction about the facts, such as is produced by a good upbringing.
5. Discussion of the popular views that the good is pleasure, honour, wealth; a fourth kind of life, that of contemplation, deferred for future discussion.
6. Discussion of the philosophical view that there is an Idea of good.
7. The good must be something final and self-sufficient. Definition of happiness reached by considering the characteristic function of man.
8. This definition is confirmed by current beliefs about happiness.
9. Is happiness acquired by learning or habituation, or sent by God or by chance?
10. Should no man be called happy while he lives?
11. Do the fortunes of the living affect the dead?
12. Virtue is praiseworthy, but happiness is above praise.

D. KINDS OF VIRTUE.

13. Division of the faculties, and resultant division of virtue into intellectual and moral.

BOOKS II-V. MORAL VIRTUE

BOOK II. 1 -- III. 5. GENERAL ACCOUNT

A. MORAL VIRTUE, HOW PRODUCED, IN WHAT MATERIALS AND IN WHAT MANNER EXHIBITED.

1. It, like the arts, is acquired by repetition of the corresponding acts.

2. These acts cannot be prescribed exactly, but must avoid excess and defect.
3. Pleasure in doing virtuous acts is a sign that the virtuous disposition has been acquired: a variety of considerations show the essential connexion of moral virtue with pleasure and pain.
4. The actions that produce moral virtue are not good in the same sense as those that flow from it: the latter must fulfil certain conditions not necessary in the case of the arts.

B. DEFINITION OF MORAL VIRTUE.

5. Its genus: it is a state of character, not a passion nor a faculty.
6. Its differentia: it is a disposition to choose the mean.
7. This proposition illustrated by reference to the particular virtues.

C. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXTREME AND MEAN STATES: PRACTICAL COROLLARIES.

8. The extremes are opposed to each other and the mean.
9. The mean is hard to attain, and is grasped by perception, not by reasoning.

BOOK III.

D. INNER SIDE OF MORAL VIRTUE: CONDITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTION.

1. Praise and blame attach to voluntary actions, i. e. actions done (1) not under compulsion, and (2) with knowledge of the circumstances.
2. Moral virtue implies that the action is done (3) by choice; the object of choice is the result of previous deliberation.
3. The nature of deliberation and its objects: choice is the deliberate desire of things in our own power.
4. The object of rational wish is the end, i. e. the good or the apparent good.
5. We are responsible for bad as well as for good actions.

BOOK III. 6 -- V. 2. THE VIRTUES AND VICES

A. COURAGE.

6. Courage concerned with the feelings of fear and confidence -- strictly speaking, with the fear of death in battle.
7. The motive of courage is the sense of honour: characteristics of the opposite vices, cowardice and rashness.
8. Five kinds of courage improperly so called.
9. Relation of courage to pain and pleasure.

B. TEMPERANCE.

10. Temperance is limited to certain pleasures of touch.

11. Characteristics of temperance and its opposites, self-indulgence and 'insensibility'.
12. Self-indulgence more voluntary than cowardice: comparison of the self-indulgent man to the spoilt child.

BOOK IV.

C. VIRTUES CONCERNED WITH MONEY.

1. Liberality, prodigality, meanness.
2. Magnificence, vulgarity, niggardliness.

D. VIRTUES CONCERNED WITH HONOUR.

3. Pride, vanity, humility.
4. Ambition, unambitiousness, and the mean between them.

E. THE VIRTUE CONCERNED WITH ANGER.

5. Good temper, irascibility, inirascibility.

F. VIRTUES OF SOCIAL INTERCOURSE.

6. Friendliness, obsequiousness, churlishness.
7. Truthfulness, boastfulness, mock-modesty.
8. Ready wit, buffoonery, boorishness.

G. A QUASI-VIRTUE.

9. Shame, bashfulness, shamelessness.

BOOK V.

H. JUSTICE.

I. Its sphere and outer nature: in what sense it is a mean.

1. The just as the lawful (universal justice) and the just as the fair and equal (particular justice): the former considered.
2. The latter considered: divided into distributive and rectificatory justice.
3. Distributive justice, in accordance with geometrical proportion.
4. Rectificatory justice, in accordance with arithmetical progression.
5. Justice in exchange, reciprocity in accordance with proportion.
6. Political justice and analogous kinds of justice.
7. Natural and legal justice.

II. Its inner nature as involving choice.

8. The scale of degrees of wrongdoing.

9. Can a man be voluntarily treated unjustly? Is it the distributor or the recipient that is guilty of injustice in distribution? Justice not so easy as it might seem, because it is not a way of acting but an inner disposition.
10. Equity, a corrective of legal justice.
11. Can a man treat himself unjustly?

BOOK VI. INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE

A. INTRODUCTION.

1. Reasons for studying intellectual virtue: intellect divided into the contemplative and the calculative.
2. The object of the former is truth, that of the latter truth corresponding with right desire.

B. THE CHIEF INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES.

3. Science -- demonstrative knowledge of the necessary and eternal.
4. Art -- knowledge of how to make things.
5. Practical wisdom -- knowledge of how to secure the ends of human life.
6. Intuitive reason -- knowledge of the principles from which science proceeds.
7. Philosophic wisdom -- the union of intuitive reason and science.
8. Relations between practical wisdom and political science.

C. MINOR INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES CONCERNED WITH CONDUCT.

9. Goodness in deliberation, how related to practical wisdom.
10. Understanding -- the critical quality answering to the imperative quality practical wisdom.
11. Judgement -- right discrimination of the equitable: the place of intuition in morals.

D. RELATION OF PHILOSOPHIC TO PRACTICAL WISDOM.

12. What is the use of philosophic and of practical wisdom? Philosophic wisdom is the formal cause of happiness; practical wisdom is what ensures the taking of proper means to the proper ends desired by moral virtue.
13. Relation of practical wisdom to natural virtue, moral virtue, and the right rule.

BOOK VII. CONTINENCE AND INCONTINENCE; PLEASURE

A. CONTINENCE AND INCONTINENCE.

1. Six varieties of character: method of treatment: current opinions.
2. Contradictions involved in these opinions.
3. Solution of the problem, in what sense the incontinent man acts against knowledge.
4. Solution of the problem, what is the sphere of incontinence: its proper and its extended sense distinguished.

5. Incontinence in its extended sense includes a brutish and a morbid form.
6. Incontinence in respect of anger less disgraceful than incontinence proper.
7. Softness and endurance: two forms of incontinence -- weakness and impetuosity.
8. Self-indulgence worse than incontinence.
9. Relation of continence to obstinacy, incontinence, 'insensibility', temperance.
10. Practical wisdom is not compatible with incontinence, but cleverness is.

B. PLEASURE.

11. Three views hostile to pleasure, and the arguments for them.
12. Discussion of the view that pleasure is not a good.
13. Discussion of the view that pleasure is not the chief good.
14. Discussion of the view that most pleasures are bad, and of the tendency to identify bodily pleasures with pleasure in general.

BOOKS VIII, IX. FRIENDSHIP

BOOK VIII.

A. KINDS OF FRIENDSHIP.

1. Friendship both necessary and noble: main questions about it.
2. Three objects of love: implications of friendship.
3. Three corresponding kinds of friendship: superiority of friendship whose motive is the good.
4. Contrast between the best and the inferior kinds.
5. The state of friendship distinguished from the activity of friendship and from the feeling of friendliness.
6. Various relations between the three kinds.

B. RECIPROCITY OF FRIENDSHIP

7. In unequal friendships a proportion must be maintained.
8. Loving is more of the essence of friendship than being loved.

C. RELATION OF RECIPROCITY IN FRIENDSHIP TO THAT INVOLVED IN OTHER FORMS OF COMMUNITY.

9. Parallelism of friendship and justice: the state comprehends all lesser communities.
10. Classification of constitutions: analogies with family relations.
11. Corresponding forms of friendship, and of justice.
12. Various forms of friendship between relations.

D. CASUISTRY OF FRIENDSHIP.

13. Principles of interchange of services (a) in friendship between equals.
14. (b) In friendship between unequals.

BOOK IX.

1. (c) In friendship in which the motives on the two sides are different.
2. Conflict of obligations.
3. Occasions of breaking off friendship.

E. INTERNAL NATURE OF FRIENDSHIP.

4. Friendship is based on self-love.
5. Relation of friendship to goodwill.
6. Relation of friendship to unanimity.
7. The pleasure of beneficence.
8. The nature of true self-love.

F. THE NEED OF FRIENDSHIP.

9. Why does the happy man need friends?
10. The limit to the number of friends.
11. Are friends more needed in good or in bad fortune?
12. The essence of friendship is living together.

BOOK X. PLEASURE; HAPPINESS

A. PLEASURE.

1. Two opposed views about pleasure.
2. Discussion of the view that pleasure is the good.
3. Discussion of the view that pleasure is wholly bad.
4. Definition of pleasure.
5. Pleasures differ with the activities which they accompany and complete: criterion of the value of pleasures.

B. HAPPINESS.

6. Happiness is a good activity, not amusement.
7. Happiness in the highest sense is the contemplative life.
8. Superiority of the contemplative life further considered.
9. Legislation is needed if the end is to be attained: transition to *Politics*.

Text and Further Reading

Text

Ostwald, Martin, Library of Liberal Arts, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1999.

This translation was recommended by Dr. Rose Cherubin of the GMU Philosophy Dept. Any good translation, as W. D Ross will work. Mark sure it has the Bekker numbers in the margins so we can find places easily

For Commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* you can try:

Hughes, Gerard J., *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle on Ethics*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001.

Pakaluk, Michael, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics an Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005.

Broadie, Sarah, *Ethics with Aristotle*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1991.

Websites

There are lots of web sites on the Nicomachean Ethics. Here are just a few.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy – <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>

The Perseus Project for complete translations – <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>

A site on the history, nature, and institutions, and a lot more on Greece – <http://www.stoa.org>

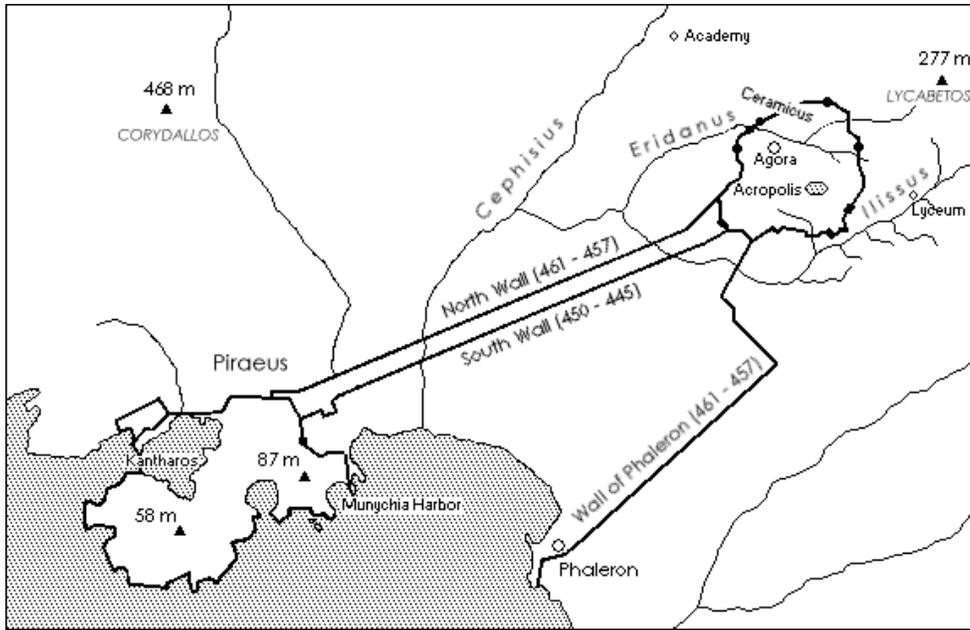
Dr. Cherbin's website – <http://www.gmu.edu/courses/phil/ancient/index.htm>

And you can always try:

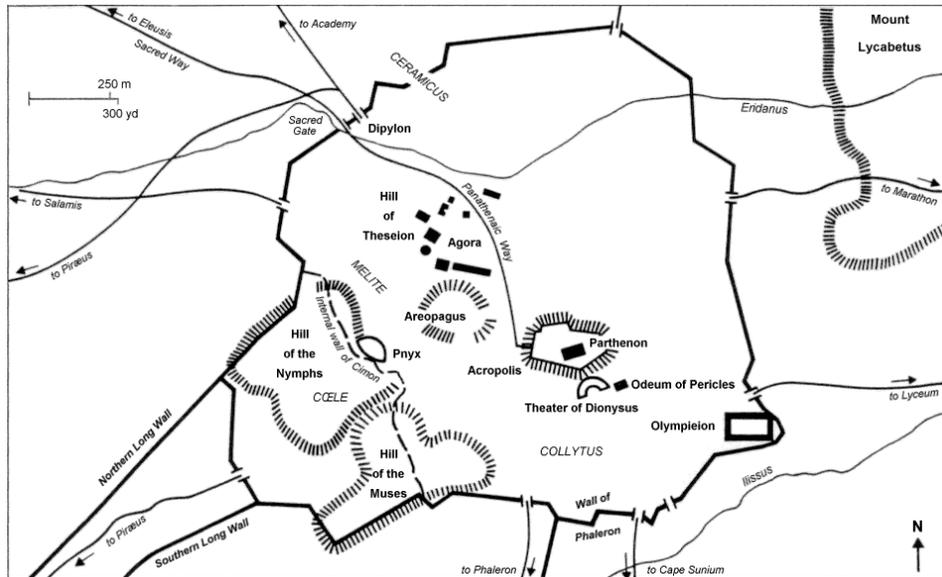
Cliffs Notes – http://education.yahoo.com/homework_help/cliffsnotes/

Spark Notes – <http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/>

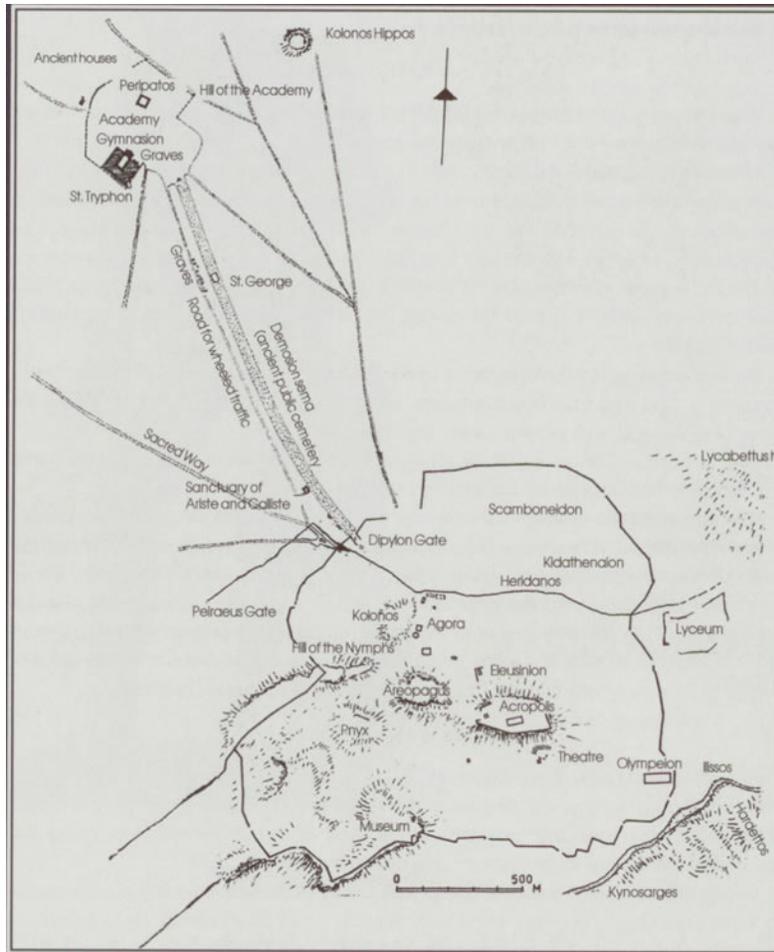
Location of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum



Overview of Athens and the Piraeus



Downtown Athens



Academy, and Lyceum, in relation to downtown Athens

Timeline

Timeline		
BCE		
	First Olympic Games	776
	Greek colonies established in Southern Italy & Sicily Invention of Greek alphabet Homer(750-700)	750
	Earliest Lyric Poets	650
	Thales (625-545) born in Miletos	625
	Pythagoras (ca. 569-475) born in Samos	569
	Solon replaces the Draconian law	594
	Pisistratos becomes tyrant of Athens	546
	Pisistratos Dies. His sons become tyrants of Athens	527
	Red-figure pottery developed in Athens	525

Alcmaeonid family and Spartans free Athens from tyranny. Introduction of Democracy in Athens	510
Kleisthenes begins reforming Athenian code of laws, and establishes a democratic constitution	508
Ionian revolt	499
Ionian revolt defeated by Persians	494
Darius defeated at Marathon	490
Aeschylus 525?-456 (fl. , playwright)	485
Silver mines discovered near Athens. Athens begins building naval fleet	483
Xerxes invades Greece Athens destroyed Battles of Thermopylae & Salamis	480
Battle of Plataea	479
Delian league lead by Athens	477
Helot revolt against Sparta in Messenia	465
Peloponnesian Wars: "First Peloponnesian War"	461-445
Perikles & Athens "Golden Era" (ca. 460-429)	460
Aeschylus produces "the Oresteia" trilogy of tragedies (Agamemnon, Libation Barers, Eumenides) in Athens	458
Law: both parents Athenian, for a child to be citizen (repealed in 429, reenacted in 403).	451
Sophist Protagoras visits Athens	450
Acropolis and other major building projects begin in Athens Construction of Parthenon (449-432) Sophocles produces "Ajax"	449
Thirty-year peace treaty signed between Athens and Sparta in winter 446/445	446
Sophocles produces "Antigone" in Athens 430-429	441
Peloponnesian War (431-404) resumes Euripides produces "Medea" in Athens	431
Plague epidemic in Athens	430
Plato born	426/427
Death of Perikles	429
Peace of Nicias	421
Construction of Temple of Athena Nike (420-410)	420
Athenians resume hostilities Spartans defeat Athens at Mantinea	418
Athens expedition to Syracuse Alcibiades defects to Sparta	415
Syracuse defeats Athens	413
Aristophanes produces "Lysistrata"	411
Action of the Republic	c. 410

Amyntas III of Macedonia (fl. , king)	409
Sophocles and Euripides die.	406
Athens surrenders to Sparta Thirty tyrants rule Athens	404
Democracy restored in Athens	403
Pella is made capital of Macedonia.	400?
Trial and execution of Socrates	399
Plato establishes the Athens Academy	388
Aristotle is born.	384
Nicomachus, Aristotle's father, dies	374
Republic written	370
Sparta defeated in Leuctra	371
Amyntas III of Macedonia dies.	369
368-365 Ptolemy ruler of Macedonia.	368-365
Aristotle enrolls in the Academy.	367
Thebes defeats Sparta at Mantinea	362
Philip II, becomes King of Macedonia	359
The Social war, Athens against its allies.	357-353
Stagira conquered by Philip II.	348
In spring, anti-Macedonians gain the power in Athens.	347
Plato dies in May, Speusippus leads the Academy.	347
Aristotle and Xenocrates travel to Atarneus and Assos.	347
347/6(?) Aristotle marries Pythias.	347/6
Athens makes treaty with Philip II of Macedonia.	346
Aristotle travels to Lesbos, works with Theophrastus.	345/4
Aristotle and Theophrastus travel to Stagira?	344?
Aristotle travels to Mieza, to be Alexander's tutor.	343/2
Philip II of Macedonia (fl. , king)	342
Hermias is killed by the Persians.	341/0
Aristotle's tutorship of Alexander ends? But some say 8 years of tutoring.	340? 335?
Philip is at war, Alexander is king in his absence.	340/339
Speusippus dies.	339
Philip II defeats the Greeks, Hellenic League is formed.	338
Xenocrates is voted to lead the Academy.	338
Greek war on Persia is declared.	337
Philip II is killed, Alexander III (the Great) is king.	336
Athens and other cities fail a revolt against Alexander.	335
335 Aristotle travels to Athens and opens the Lyceum.	335
Theophrastus 370-286 (fl. , Lyceum)	330
Alexander marries Bactrian princess Roxane.	327
Callisthenes executed by order of Alexander.	327
Hephaestion is made second-in-command.	324
Alexander marries Darius' daughter Barsine.	324
Hephaestion (357?-324), Alexander's companion, dies.	324

Alexander the Great dies in June.	323
Aristotle travels to Chalkis (no later than spring 322).	323/2
Aristotle dies, Theophrastus leads the Lyceum.	322
Xenocrates dies, Polemo leads the Academy.	314
Menander 342-291 (fl. , playwright)	
Theophrastus dies.	286
Strato becomes head of the Lyceum.	286
Strato dies.	268
Rome conquers Macedonia.	197
Rome conquers Greece.	146
Rome sacks Athens.	86
CE	
Plutarch 45?-125? (Fl. , priest, writer)	85
Emperor Justinian closes the pagan schools.	527