Aristotle’s Practical Philosophy:  
*Nichomachean Ethics & Politics*

I. *Nichomachean Ethics* (Bks. I, II, III (Chs. 1-5), VI, X)

A. What is the Good for a Human Being? (Bk. I)

1. Why has the good “rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim?” (Ch. 1)

2. What are the characteristics Aristotle gives of “the chief good”? (Ch. 2)

3. Happiness as the chief good (Chs. 4-13)
   a. Why does Aristotle believe “happiness” is the chief or highest of all goods? (Ch. 4)
   b. What candidates does he consider for the happy life and what does he have to say about their plausibility as the chief good for a human being? (Ch. 5)
   c. How does Aristotle argue that happiness lives up to the characteristics of the chief good of human life established in Ch. 2? (Ch. 7)
   d. How does Aristotle argue that reason is the natural function of a human being and what does this have to do with his attempt to specify what happiness, the chief good for a human being, consists in? (Ch. 7)
   e. How does Aristotle distinguish three dimensions of the soul, depending on the degree to which it shares (or does not share) in reason? How does this lead him to distinguish two different sorts of “excellence” in life, intellectual and moral? (Ch. 13)

B. Moral Excellence (Bk II & III (Chs. 1-5))

1. What is the role of habit in the acquisition of moral excellence? (Ch. 1)

2. In what way is moral excellence a “mean” between excess and defect? How does he illustrate this with the examples of courage and temperance? (Ch. 2)

3. In what way does moral excellence concern pleasure and pain? (Ch. 3)

4. What does Aristotle mean in calling moral excellence a state of the soul? Why is it not a passion or a faculty? (Ch. 5)

5. What does Aristotle mean in defining moral excellence as a “state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it”? (Ch. 6)

6. What does it mean to say that moral excellence is concerned with choice? (Bk. III, Chs. 1-5)
   a. How does Aristotle understand the distinction between acts which are voluntary and those which are involuntary? (Ch. 1)
b. Why is choice voluntary but not identical to the voluntary or why are all chosen acts voluntary acts but not all voluntary acts chosen acts? (Ch. 2)

c. Choice and deliberation (Chs. 3-5)

(1) How does Aristotle understand choice as “deliberate desire” (394)?

(2) What sorts of things do we deliberate about?

C. Intellectual Excellence (Bk VI)

1. How does Aristotle distinguish what he calls the scientific from the calculative part of our intellect? (Ch. 1)

2. How does Aristotle understand art? (Ch. 4)

3. What does Aristotle understand by practical wisdom? (Chs. 5-11)

   a. What is the connection between practical wisdom and “particulars”? What is the significance of Aristotle’s little story about people who know that “light meats are digestible and wholesome” as opposed to people who know that “chicken is wholesome” (423)

   b. How does Aristotle distinguish between excellence in deliberation in a qualified and an unqualified sense? (Ch. 9)

   c. Why is experience important to practical wisdom?

D. Happiness and Pleasure (Bk. X)

1. Pleasure (Chs. 1-6)

   a. Why does Aristotle believe pleasure to be a good, but not the (chief) good in human life? (Chs. 1-3)

   b. How is pleasure, for Aristotle, unlike what he calls a “movement”? (Ch. 4)

   c. Why does Aristotle think the question of whether we pursue life for the sake of pleasure or pleasure for the sake of life may be dismissed? (Ch. 4)

   d. How does Aristotle distinguish good from bad pleasures? (Ch. 5)

   e. Why does Aristotle believe that happiness cannot lie in what he characterizes as “pleasant amusements”? (Ch. 6)

2. In what way does Aristotle believe we may identify happiness or the chief good of human life with contemplation? In what way does he believe we cannot? (Chs. 7-8)

3. What is the role of political legislation in bringing about excellence in people? (Ch. 9)

II. Politics (Bks. I, VII (Chs. 13-15), VIII)
A. Humans as Political Animals (Bk I)

1. Why does Aristotle believe that the state or political associations aim at the highest good in life? (Ch. 1)

2. How does the state emerge on the basis of pre-political modes of association which precede it such as that between male and female, master and slave, the household and the village? (Ch. 2)

3. The State (Ch. 2)
   a. In what way is the state the most self-sufficient association?
   b. In what way are human beings “by nature” political animals?
   c. In what way does a political association involve a common perception of good and evil? In what way is speech important for this?
   d. How does the state have “priority” over the individual?

4. What is Aristotle’s conception of the household and the relationship of master and slave within the household? How does Aristotle justify slavery? (Chs. 3-7)

B. Political Education (Bk. VII (Chs. 13-15) & VIII)

1. How do we make people good? (Bk. VII (Chs. 13-15))
   a. What are the roles of fortune, habit and reason in making people good? (Ch. 13)
   b. Why does Aristotle believe work is done for the sake of leisure? (Ch. 14)

2. The need and goal of public education? (Bk.VIII)
   a. Why does education need to be a public concern? (Ch. 1)
   b. Why does Aristotle conceive the prime goal of education as the preparation for a life of leisure? (Chs. 2-3)