Aristotle’s Theoretical Philosophy: 
*Physics, On the Soul, Metaphysics*

I. *Physics II*

A. What is nature? (Ch. 1)

1. How does Aristotle distinguish those that exist due to nature from those which are the outcome of art?
2. What can be said for the claim that it is the matter of a thing which is its nature?
3. What can be said for the claim that it is the form of a thing which is its nature?

B. Causes of change in nature (Chs. 3-7)

1. What are the four ways in which Aristotle says we can answer the question “on account of what” is a thing the way that it is? (Ch. 3)
2. In what way can we speak of chance or luck as a cause in nature? In what sorts of cases does Aristotle think it appropriate to speak of chance as a cause? (Chs. 4-6)
3. In what way do three of Aristotle’s four causes (ways of answering the question, “on account of what” is a thing the way that it is) often coincide in the form of a thing? (Ch. 7)

C. Does nature act for a purpose? (Chs. 8-9)

1. Why does Aristotle conclude that nature cannot be explained by appealing to luck or chance? (Ch. 8)
2. How does Aristotle distinguish two senses of necessity: simple necessity and necessity “on some hypothesis”? Why does he conclude that nature cannot be explained by appeal to simple necessity, like the necessity of heavy things to sink down? (Ch. 9)
3. How does Aristotle’s exclusion of chance and simple necessity as natural causes lead him to the conclusion that things in nature come to be and change as they do for some purpose?

II. *On the Soul II* (Chs. 1-5 & 12) and *III* (Chs. 4-5)

A. What is the Soul? (II, Ch. 1)

1. In what way does Aristotle believe we can speak of the matter of a thing as the thing’s “potentiality” and the form of a thing as its “actuality”?
2. Why does Aristotle believe we must think of the soul (what accounts for why a living body is alive) as the form of a living body rather than its matter?
3. Does Aristotle believe the soul of a living being is something apart from its body? What is the significance of Aristotle’s comparison of the relation between body and soul in a living being and the wax and the impression made in the wax (presumably in a seal of some sort made of wax)?
B. The Soul as the First Actuality of a Living Body (II, Chs. 2-4)

1. In what way is the soul of a living being which makes a body with life potentially in it actually alive itself a potentiality for other activities?

2. What are some of the potentialities of the soul of a living being, the characteristics of life?

C. Perception (II, Chs. 5 & 12)

1. What does Aristotle mean when he says that to perceive a thing is to receive the form of the thing without its matter, in the way a wax impression takes the imprint (form) of a ring without its matter (the gold or silver which makes up the ring)?

D. Knowledge (III, Chs. 4-5)

1. What is knowledge, for Aristotle? How does it involve receiving the form of a thing without any matter at all? (196)

III. Metaphysics (Bks I, IV (chs. 1-2), VII (chs. 1-3) and Bk XII (Chs. 1 & 6-7))

A. What is Wisdom? (Bk. I)

1. How does Aristotle understand knowledge? How does he distinguish knowledge/art from sensation and experience?

2. In what way does experience concern particulars while the knowledge the arts provide concern universals?

3. What does Aristotle mean when he defines wisdom as a knowledge of the “first causes and principles of things”?

4. In Ch. 2 Aristotle discusses some of the characteristics commonly attributed to wisdom? What are they? (These are important as we can Aristotle will seek to model his eventual account of what wisdom consists in against this traditional standard.)

B. The Science of Being (Bk. II)

1. What does Aristotle mean by a “discipline which studies that which is qua thing that is”? 

2. In what way may “that which is ... be so called in several ways, but with reference to one thing?” How does Aristotle’s example of “health” exemplify how something can be spoken of in very different senses but not completely different as all the various senses refer back to some one primary sense?

C. Substance (Bk. VII)

1. Why does Aristotle believe the primary sense in which something can be said to be is as a substance? (Ch. 1)

2. Why does Aristotle believe the form of a thing has the best claim on what is most substantial in any substance that is a composite of matter and form? Why not the matter?
Why not the composite, matter and form taken together? (Ch. 3)

D. The Unmoved Mover (Bk. XII, Chs. 1 & 6-7)

1. What is Aristotle’s argument for the existence of an unmoved mover as the first cause of motion? (Chs. 6-7)

   a. Why must the cause of eternal motion be pure actuality with no potentiality? (Note: the “eternal motion” Aristotle takes for granted in this argument is the motion of the stars in the sky which, in repeating the same movement again and again in the same way, moved the Greeks to understand it as eternal motion.)

   b. Why must the cause of eternal motion be understood as “a mover which moves without being moved”? How can something move something else without itself being moved? What example does Aristotle give of such an unmoved mover?

   c. Why does Aristotle believe the life of this unmoved mover to be pure, divine thought?