

PHIL 210-1: History of Philosophy – Ancients (Summer 2023)

Instructor: Susan Bencomo
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Tu/Th: 3:00p-6p (In-Person), Kresge 2-331
Office Hours: Scheduled as requested

Description: Early and classical Greek philosophical thought distinguishes itself from the mythopoetic tradition by a willingness to speculate about the natural world and the human condition based upon evidence and argument, demonstrating a commitment to rationality. This thinking also exhibits a commitment to the view that the entire universe, or cosmos, can be systematically explained without reference to anything beyond itself. In such thinking we see an emphasis on the primacy of theoretical knowledge about the nature of reality. Finally, for these thinkers, philosophy was seen as a way a life, telling us how we ought to live in order to produce a happy life. In this compressed course on ancient Greek philosophy, we'll briefly sketch the early Greek philosophical tradition of the Presocratics, and then go on to examine the thought and arguments of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle with an emphasis on the following questions: what is the nature of knowledge? What are the fundamental constituents of reality? Is moral knowledge possible? What is virtue and its relation to our choices and our happiness? What is place of friendship in a good life?

Course Learning Objectives: This course will foster the development of the following skills, relevant in both the humanities and in wider application:

- reading a text closely and critically
- writing clearly
- constructing a well-defended argument
- productive group discussion.

Since this class is a course in the history of philosophy, there will be both *historical* and *philosophical* objectives.

As *historians* of philosophy we will learn to read texts closely, interpret texts charitably, and be mindful of the historical context in which they were produced. This will help us to develop an understanding of what these authors could be saying and why, and who their interlocutors are.

Our *philosophical* objective will be to uncover the main problems and questions that philosophers of this time period were concerned with, becoming familiar with the domains of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics in ancient Greek thought. We will identify, analyze, and reconstruct arguments and views put forth in these texts with the aim of understanding the authors' positions and reasons for proposing them. We will assess and evaluate these positions for their coherence and plausibility.

Required Texts:

- *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle* (5th Edition) (eds. S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, C.D.C. Reeve)

- *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Other required texts will be provided on the Canvas course website.

Where to get the textbooks: A physical copy of the book should be available for purchase at the Northwestern University bookstore in Norris. However, you can also usually order an **ebook** from one of the following services: Redshelf.com, Vitalsource.com, or Chegg.com or Amazon. You will need the **ISBN:** 978-1-62466-532-5 (*Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy*) and 978-1107612235 (*Nicomachean Ethics*).

I have chosen the least expensive option that would have as much of our readings as possible in one place. This textbook is not ideal, however, if you intend to be a serious student of philosophy. *If you think you will pursue philosophy further, please feel free to talk to me and I can make recommendations of individual translations of Plato and Aristotle.*

N.B.: The primary texts we will be reading were originally written in Ancient Greek, but *no knowledge of this language is required for this course.* We will be reading these texts in translation, and I will only use terms in the original language (and explain what they mean) when it is pertinent.

Contact: For administrative questions, the best way to contact me is through my email. For substantive questions about readings and or lecture, please try to schedule an appointment with me in my office hours. I will try to answer email within 24 hours within normal business hours, or 48 hours on weekends.

Course Requirements

Participation: Missing class will diminish your learning experience and that of others who can learn from you. Unexcused absences will therefore negatively affect your participation grade, which is a significant part of your total grade.

Writing:

Essays (70% of your grade)

You will write 2 short essays, the first about 2 pages, and the second about 4 pages. These essays are designed to help you focus your reading of the texts. The longer essay is designed to help you develop your critical skills in evaluating positions and arguments. The due dates for the Essays are as follows:

July 2: 2-page (500-600 words) essay due

July 22: 4-page (900-1000 words) essay due

Reflection Papers (15% of your grade)

There are 5 very short “reflection papers” due throughout the course (due dates on course schedule below). These are *very low-stakes* reflections of *only* 200-250 words (that’s all!) in which I just want you to briefly discuss a problem or argument from the reading, or a question you had about the reading. You will not be graded for their quality, but you must turn each one in to get credit for them. *If there is class interest, I may eliminate 1 response paper and replace it with an in-class writing workshop.*

Evaluation Method and Grades:

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Essay 1 (35%)

Essays 2 (35%)

Reflection Papers: (15%)

Participation (including attendance) (15%)

Grading Scale: This course will use the standard Weinberg College grading scale, where grades ending in 7-9 receive the “plus” designation and grades ending in 0-3 receive the “minus” designation. Thus, for example, a grade of 87 is a “B+,” and a grade of 93 is an “A-.” Final grades ending in .5 or higher will be rounded up to the next whole number.

Writing Resources

Here is the most helpful set of [guidelines for writing a philosophy paper](http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html) that I have found for beginners. (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>)

Policies and Academic Integrity: Extensions for papers are not available in this course except in extraordinary circumstances (contact me *ahead of time* should you think that your circumstances fit this description). Late papers are penalized 1/2 a grade for every 24-hour delay. Electronic copies of every paper need to be submitted to the Canvas website.

Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be treated as such in this course. Suspected violations of academic integrity will be reported to the Dean’s Office. For more information on Northwestern’s academic integrity policies, please see <https://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/courses-registration-grades/integrity/>.

All student work in this class may be analyzed electronically for violations of the University’s academic integrity policy and may also be included in a database for the purpose of testing for plagiarized content.

Accessibility Needs: Students with a disability are entitled to reasonable accommodations. Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. Accessible NU may be reached at accessiblenu@northwestern.edu or 847-467-5530. Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Student Support: Students can find useful resources for safety and security, academic support, and mental and physical health and well-being at the NUhelp website and app. Visit <https://www.northwestern.edu/nuhelp/>.

Course Schedule

*All reading assignments will be from the course textbook, *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle* (5th Edition) unless specified in the reading assignment. Additional readings will be posted on the Files in the Canvas course site and will be noted in the course schedule.

Day	Assignment and Course Topic
Tues., 6/20	<p>Introduction Why study ancient philosophy?; The Presocratics and Sophists.</p> <p>SOCRATES Begin unit on Socrates: Socrates and the Method of the Elenchus. Reading Assignment: Plato's <i>Euthyphro</i> 2a -12d</p>
Thurs., 6/22	<p>Socrates on Method and Definitions. (<i>Euthyphro</i> reading as above). Socrates on Virtue and Motivation. Reading Assignment: Plato's <i>Apology</i> 25c-26a (very short), Plato's <i>Meno</i> [70a-90e, long].</p> <p>Essay #1 Assigned - Due Sunday 7/2</p>
Tues., 6/27	<p>Socrates and Intellectualism (continued, if necessary), Socrates and Paradox of Inquiry, Recollection, (<i>Meno</i> 79a-90e)</p> <p>PLATO Begin transition to Plato: Plato's <i>Republic</i>. The Ring of Gyges & Glaucon's Challenge. Reading Assignment: Plato, <i>Republic</i>, Book II (long) Discussion Questions</p>
Thurs., 6/29	<p>Finish discussion Book II, begin <i>Republic</i>, Book IV Plato: Justice and the City/Soul Analogy; the Tripartite soul and motivation Reading Assignment: Plato <i>Republic</i> Book IV (long) Discussion Questions</p> <p>Reminder: Essay #1 Due Sunday 7/2 MIDNIGHT</p>
Thurs., 7/6 (no class July 4)	<p>Plato: Finish up Book IV on Justice Begin Plato on Knowledge and Opinion; Being and Becoming Reading Assignment: all <i>Republic</i> Book VI, and Book VII up to 520d5 (long) Discussion Questions</p>
Tues., 7/11	Plato: The Forms

	<p>Reading Assignment: Plato <i>Phaedo</i> (excerpts A & B, posted on Canvas 'Files'), <i>Symposium</i> (210a-211d, in your textbook); Aristotle: <i>Peri Ideon</i> (available in Canvas 'Files'. These fragments are difficult. Do your best.)</p> <p>Discussion Questions</p> <p><i>Essay # 2 Assigned – Due July 22</i></p> <p>Work on reconstruction in-class</p>
Thurs., 7/13	<p>ARISTOTLE</p> <p>Aristotle on Forms and Substances, & Knowledge</p> <p>Reading Assignment: Aristotle, <i>Categories</i> 1-5</p> <p>Discussion Questions</p>
Tues., 7/18	<p>Aristotle on Knowledge</p> <p>Reading Assignment: Aristotle <i>Metaphysics</i> A.1, <i>Posterior Analytics</i> II.19</p> <p>Discussion Questions</p>
Thurs., 7/20	<p>Aristotelian Ethics: The Goal of Human Life and the Function of Man</p> <p>Reading Assignment: Aristotle <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>, Book I</p> <p><i>Reminder: Essay #2 Due SATURDAY July 22</i></p> <p>Discussion Question</p>
Tues., 7/25	<p>Aristotelian Ethics: Virtues (and Vices) of Character</p> <p>Reading Assignment: Aristotle <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>, Book II</p> <p>Discussion Question</p>
Thurs., 7/27	<p>Aristotelian Ethics: Akrasia, Self-Control, Virtue, and Vice</p> <p>Reading Assignment: Aristotle <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> VII.1-3</p> <p>Discussion Question</p> <p>Wrapping up</p>
ALT. Thurs. 7/27	<p>Alternative Aristotelian Ethics readings: Aristotle on Friendship</p> <p>Reading Assignment: Aristotle <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>, Book VIII, up to 1157b5, plus read chapter 7; Book IX read chapters 4, 8, 9</p> <p>Discussion Questions on Tom Hurka's criticisms of Aristotle's Ethics</p>