

Ancient Greek Philosophy (Prospective Syllabus)

Course Description

The foundations of Western philosophy were laid in Ancient Greece, where thinkers first formulated and inquired into many perennial philosophical problems that still concern us today. These include questions such as the following: What is the ultimate nature of reality? What is the good life? What can we know? What is the relationship between God and morality? As we shall see, although Ancient Greek philosophers were interested in these familiar questions, their investigations and answers often seem quite odd to us today. To that end, we shall situate their thought within its historical and cultural context. The course will begin with the pre-Socratic philosophers, then move to how Socrates and Plato expanded and responded to their predecessors, and end with the systematic philosophy of Aristotle.

Required Texts

Cohen, S. M., Patricia Curd, and Reeve, C. D. C., eds. *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*. 4th ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2011.

Recommended Texts

Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.

Shields, Christopher. *Ancient philosophy: A contemporary introduction*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Assignments and Grading

- 30% Study Questions and Exercises that Accompany Readings
- 40% 4 Short Papers (approximately 2-3 pages each)
- 30% Final Paper (approximately 8-10 pages)

Schedule of Readings [each "*" corresponds to 1-2 class sessions]

Introduction and Socratic Definition

* Euthyphro (135-152)

Unit 1: The Presocratics

The Presocratics

- * The Milesians (10-17)
- * Heraclitus (29-39) and Parmenides (40-46)
- * Zeno of Elea (47-51)
- * The Sophists (104-117)

Paper Prompt

* Analyze and evaluate the argument in fragments 2, 4, and 6-8 of Parmenides' poem "Truth". To analyze his arguments, you should first identify his main conclusion(s), and then outline his reasoning in support of the conclusion(s). To evaluate his arguments, you should raise reasons for doubting his reasoning, namely by questioning either his premises or the inferences he uses to move from the premises to the conclusion(s). After raising such reasons for doubt, explain whether they are strong enough to warrant rejecting Parmenides' arguments.

Unit 2: Socrates and Plato

Socrates

- * Apology
- * Crito, Phaedo 114d-end

Plato's Republic: The Nature of Justice and the Immoralist Challenge

- * 327a-336a; 357a-367e

Plato's Republic: Origins of the Ideal City-State and the Guardians

- * 368c-376c; 412b-421c

Paper Prompt:

- * Analyze and evaluate Plato's argument in *Republic* Book II for the claim that there would be a division of labor in an ideal city state, i.e., that each citizen would specialize in one job for which he/she is best suited.

Plato's Republic: Virtues of the Ideal City-State

- * 427d-434d

Plato's Republic: Virtues of the Soul

- * 434d-449a

Plato: Definitions, the Doctrine of Recollection, and the Immortality of the Soul

- * Meno 70a-86d
- * Phaedo 63e-67c, 72e-77a; Republic 471c-480a
- * Phaedo 99d-107a, Republic 506d, 520a, Timaeus 48e-53a

Paper Prompts:

- * Analyze and evaluate one of Plato's arguments in the *Phaedo* for the immortality of the soul.

Plato's Republic: Philosopher-Kings and the Form of the Good

- * 502c-507a, 513e-521b

Plato's Republic: Comparison of Constitutions

- * 543a-545c

Plato's Republic: Defense of the Philosophical/Just Life

- * 571a-583a, 588b-592b

Unit 3: Aristotle

Aristotle: Happiness, Virtue, and the Function Argument

- * Nicomachean Ethics 1.1-8 (not 1.6), 10.6-9

Paper Prompt:

- * Analyze and evaluate Aristotle's function argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as presented in I.7 up to his full definition of happiness at 1098a21.

Aristotle: Dialectic and Logic

- * Topics 1.1, Sophistical Refutations 1-2

Aristotle: Teleology

- * Physics 2.3, 2.8-9

Aristotle: Generation, Motion, and the Unmoved Mover

* Physics 1.6-8, 3.1-3, 8.6

Aristotle: Knowledge and Psychology

* Posterior Analytics 2.19, Metaphysics 1.1

* De Anima 2.1, 2.5-6, 2.12

Aristotle: Metaphysics

* Categories 1-5, Metaphysics VII.2-4, VII.13

Term Paper Prompts

* Analyze and evaluate Plato's argument in *Republic* Book V 474b-480a for the conclusions that the Forms exist and that they are higher than perceptible things in this world. Begin by explaining what the forms are, then explain the key steps of Plato's argument, and then evaluate the plausibility of Plato's argument.

* Analyze and evaluate Aristotle's arguments in *Physics* 2.8 for the thesis that goals or purposes are explanatory grounds in the realm of physics (in the realm of things with an internal principle of motion or rest).

* Present Plato's argument from the *Republic* that only the just person is happy and that therefore everyone wants to be just. Then present how Aristotle would respond to this argument, making clear what Aristotle does differently and why. Be sure to discuss their views of the soul and its functions, insofar as this is relevant for understanding the main issues at hand in the paper.