

PHIL 301 Ancient Philosophy – Fall 2021

Syllabus – keep handy for reference

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Office hours: M 10-11, TR 11-12, or by appointment

Texts:

Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. by John Cooper (Hackett Publishing)

Aristotle, *Selections*, ed. by Irwin and Fine (Hackett Publishing)

Overview and objectives:

In this class we will devote ourselves to the study of ancient Greek philosophy, in particular the ancient Greek philosophers Plato (427-347 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE). One objective of the course will be to see *why* we continue to bother doing this. Answers include “there’s enduring wisdom therein” and “their influence shaped the development of western philosophy and is still felt today” – we shall see whether or to what extent these are true claims. More specifically, the main objective of this course is to give the intermediate or advanced philosophy student a firm command of the basic ideas and arguments of Plato and Aristotle, and where possible, Socrates (470-399 BCE), who wrote nothing, but of whom we have many first-hand reports and who was very influential on the development of Plato’s thought and, in ways we will see, all subsequent philosophy through 529 CE.

We will devote almost exactly half the semester to Plato and half to Aristotle. In the first half, we will begin with Plato’s relationship to Socrates, and read some dialogues concerned with the very nature of philosophy and its relation to religion, literature, custom, and so on. We will then look very closely at the *Republic*, which is a comprehensive work dealing with justice, epistemology, ontology, psychology, and art. We will then read some of Plato’s writings on love, sex, and friendship. If time allows we will also consider some excerpts from dialogues concerning truth, relativism, knowledge, reasoning, and cosmology. In the second half of the semester, we will begin with some of Aristotle’s writings on the nature of thought and reason, and consider ways in which his methodology differs from that of Plato. We will examine his theories on motion, change, causality, ontology, teleology, psychology, and cosmology. Then we will read his *Nicomachean Ethics*, which deals with happiness, virtue and vice, and friendship. We will supplement that with his observations about social living, and we will conclude with a look at his theory of art. I may post additional readings online from time to time, or distribute a handout.

Requirements:

Your grade will be comprised of 2 papers, each 7-8 pages in length (45 points each), plus active participation in class (10 points). Fair warning: Plagiarism of any form on written assignments is not tolerated. You will receive an F in the course, and could even be expelled. “Active participation” implies that regular attendance is itself also a requirement of the class. This is a reflection of the fact that the primary vehicle for learning the material is the class itself, of which

you should see yourself as a part. Obviously there is such a thing as a good reason to miss class, but please be sure you limit your absences to such occasions. Absences in excess of three will result in reduction of your grade. Excessive lateness will count as absence. You are expected to have done the readings and be prepared to comment on them in class. If you do have to miss class, it is your responsibility to get the notes, and any announcements or additional assignments, from a classmate.

Adjustments to your grade will be made for both constructive participation in discussions and disruptive behavior, as well as for excessive absences. What is “constructive participation,” and how is it different from “disruptive behavior”? Consider how arguments in a courtroom or legislature take place. Vigorous and passionate disagreement is expressed, but in an atmosphere of civility, courtesy, mutual respect. Decorum matters in those contexts, because that is what enables the coexistence of dispute and civility. There is a difference between philosophical argument (which is cooperative and constructive) and belligerent bickering. You should feel free to ask questions of me and of your classmates, and to agree or disagree as you see fit, but you must strive to maintain an atmosphere of civil discourse, meaning, mainly, distinguishing between attacks on an idea and attacks on a person. You are not to use your phone, laptop, or tablet during class.

Outline:

The basic (tentative) outline for the course will be as follows, subject to change as necessary.

Sept. 2 **Introduction** – why study this material? Socrates-Plato-Aristotle: bios, context
Sept. 7-9 **Plato**: *Apology/Euthyphro/Crito/Phaedo* (nature of philosophy, religion, custom, law, etc.)

Sept. 14-16 *Republic* – justice (and lots more)

Sept. 21-23 *Republic* (w/ excerpts from *Meno*)

Sept. 28-30 *Republic* (w/ excerpts from *Statesman*)

Oct 5-7 Finish *Rep.*, begin *Symposium/Phaedrus/Lysis* (love, friendship, sex)

Oct. 12-14 cont. from 10/7; then excerpts from *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*

Oct. 19-21 begin **Aristotle** *Categories, Topics* (thinking and reasoning)

1st paper due 10/25, 9:00am

Oct. 26-28 *Physics, Metaphysics* (motion, causation, change, actual/potential, realism)

Nov. 2-4 *De Anima* (the nature of the human soul or psyche; teleology)

Nov. 9 (no class 11/11) Begin *Nicomachean Ethics* (happiness, virtue and vice)

Nov. 16-18 Continuing *Nic. Ethics* (friendship, the good life)

Nov. 23 (no class 11/25) Finish *Ethics*

Nov 30-Dec 2 *Politics*

Dec. 7 *Poetics*: Aristotle’s theory of art (12/9=Reading Day)

Dec. 14: 2nd paper due 10:00am