

PHIL 304: History of Ancient Philosophy

Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30–12:45, Mundelein Room 403

Instructor: Joshua Mendelsohn <jmendelsohn@luc.edu>.

Instructor's office hours: Crown Center 367, directly after class or by appointment.

In this course, we will trace the development of Greek philosophy from the earliest thinkers of record until Aristotle. Our guiding thread will be the relationship of Greek philosophy to the two major cultural practices it had to work to distinguish itself from: Sophistry and myth. We will see how the earliest Greek philosophers appropriated the conventions of epic myth but challenged traditional theism and showed a new interest in the origin of the universe and the natural world. We will examine how Plato and Socrates undertook to define a new kind of argumentative practice—*philosophy*—which was to provide an alternative to the argumentative practices of the sophists. Finally, we will turn to Aristotle, and look at his pioneering study of nature and his transformation of Plato's ideas.

As well as studying the history of Greek philosophy, we will explore its relevance to our own lives and our political situation. Reflecting on the life of Socrates and on Plato's ideal city, we will ask questions such as: Why did the Athenians really kill Socrates? Are there circumstances under which you could be persuaded to put someone like Socrates to death? Can censorship be justified for good political ends? And what are we to make of the commitments of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle's endorsement of slavery, that are rightfully repugnant to us today?

Course goals and rationale

Texts in Ancient Greek Philosophy are likely to be challenging in ways that you may not have experienced before, even if you have read a fair amount of philosophy. First, the texts we will read sometimes presuppose knowledge of a specific cultural and historical milieu. Second, many of the texts we will read are written as dialogues, and some even as poetry. Your previous studies in philosophy may not have prepared you to approach this sort of writing. Third, the texts we will read are seldom direct and generally contain a great deal of ambiguity. The first objective of this course is to teach you to read texts that present these special challenges.

To help you overcome the first difficulty, this course will give you some background to appreciate these ideas in their historical context. For the second, we will practice separating form from content: You will learn to extract claims and reasons from all of these types of writing, while also coming to appreciate the reasons why an author might have chosen a certain format and its importance as a vehicle for philosophical content. For the third, you will learn to identify interpretive issues, and, in the case of Plato, pay attention to the role of the dramatic context.

The second objective of the course is for you to make up your own mind about the enduring relevance and value of Greek Philosophy, if any. I mean that seriously: Perhaps you will decide that Greek philosophy ought to be “cancelled”, and that is okay: But I expect you to be able to give an argument! To this end, we will periodically step back and consider a context where what we are reading bears on live philosophical and political issues. With the help of our friends at the *Good in Theory* podcast, we will think about the relevance of Socrates’s trial to issues of censorship that are urgent today. At the end of the course, we will read an exchange concerning the value of studying Greek philosophy today, and decide what we think after having spent some time with the texts.

Books

The only book required for this course is:

Cooper, J. M. & Hutchinson, D. S. (eds.). *Plato: Complete Works*. Hackett 1997.

This book can be purchased from the Loyola bookstore. All other readings will be available on Sakai. However, there are two further books you may wish to purchase if you wish to save your printer some ink. These are:

McKirahan, R.D. *Philosophy Before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary*. Second Edition. Hackett 2010.

Barnes, J. (ed.). *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Two volumes. Princeton University Press 1984.

Assessment

1. This class will require sustained reading and reflection on Greek philosophical texts. To that end you should keep a **reading journal** on Sakai, containing summaries of what you read and any reflections and questions that occur to you in your reading. You should keep your journal up to date on Sakai at all times. This is a hurdle requirement and those who submit a complete journal will automatically receive a full **15% of the grade**. Your journal is considered complete if there is at least one relevant short paragraph on each reading.
2. In this class, I think of us as a team working together to understand the beautiful but often baffling texts of Plato, Aristotle and other Greek philosophers. My lectures are intended mainly to give historical background and context. I may draw your attention to certain questions, but I do not pretend know the answers to all of them. I hope to learn something from you, and that you will also work cooperatively to help each other learn. To that end, I will be asking you to give a **short oral presentation** on a specified passage based on your reading journal. Your presentation should last five or ten minutes and you should do three things. 1. Tell us what the passage you were assigned is about: What happens in it and what claims are made? 2. Make an observation: Is there anything surprising or noteworthy about this reading? 3. Ask a question about your assigned passage. You will be assigned the passage one or two classes before your presentation and you may opt to give your presentation in a pair. This is a low-stakes assessment that will be graded generously for anyone who demonstrates that they have read the passage thoughtfully. Your presentation is worth **10% of the grade**.
3. After the first two modules of the course, you will have read a series of dialogues depicting the life of Socrates, and you will have considered one argument for the enduring importance

of these texts today. In order to distil your thinking about these issues, you will be asked to compose your own **fictional Socratic dialogue**. This will be worth **30% of the grade**.

4. The final assessment will be a paper on a topic related to the course, discussed with me in advance. The **final paper** will bring together the skills you have been developing in the course: You will need to identify a philosophical question at issue in one of our texts, extract relevant claims from the text, and go beyond the text by thinking on your own about reasons for and against these claims. You will be required to team up with your peers to submit a **draft** of the paper and **comment** on your peer's paper. Your paper, and your performance in giving comments, will be awarded up to **35% of the grade**.
5. The final **10% of the grade** is awarded on the basis of **in-class participation**. As usual, showing up is necessary but not sufficient for this grade. You can ensure you have full points in this grade by regularly participating in class discussions in good faith. Don't be afraid to ask questions—if you are confused, other people usually are too!

Attendance

This is a regular, in-person class. You are **required** to be present in person at the scheduled course time. In addition to the assessment listed above, sufficient attendance is a hurdle requirement. Students who miss more than three sessions without prior notice and/or sufficient cause will **not be able to pass the course**.

Academic honesty

All work you submit in this class is presumed to be your own. Cheating and plagiarism will incur very serious consequences. At a minimum, the student will fail the relevant assignment. More serious or repeat offenders may fail the course or face expulsion. Review the definition of plagiarism and the consequences at <https://www.luc.edu/cas/advising/academicintegritystatement/>.

Student accommodations

The university is committed to supporting students who require special accommodations to participate fully, and I'll be glad to work with you to make any reasonable accommodations as hassle free as possible. The standard procedure is (i) register with the Student Accessibility Center (<http://www.luc.edu/sswd>), (ii) present your accommodation letter to the instructor during the first two weeks of class, and (iii) notify the SAC of any upcoming exams two weeks in advance (step (iii) only applies to students with accommodations related to testing). If this seems overwhelming, just talk to me and I'll guide you through what needs to happen.

Course schedule

Introduction

Tues. **Why study Ancient Greek phi-** —
30 Aug. **losophy?**

Part I: Early Greek Philosophy, myth and authority

Thurs. **The world of epic myth** McKirahan, ch. 2 (pay special attention to the
1 Sept. quotation from Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 116–134).
Homer, *Iliad*, Book V.

Tues. 6 **The earliest Greek Philosophers** Selections from McKirahan, chs. 7 and 9.
Sept. (and scientists?)

Thurs. **More challenges to epic cos-** Selections from McKirahan, chs. 10 and 11.
8 Sept. **mogony**

Part II: Argument for argument's sake? Socrates and the value of philosophy

Tues. **Socrates and the mythmakers** Plato, *Ion* (all).
13 Sept.

Thurs. **Socrates and the sophists** Plato, *Gorgias* start–466A.
15 Sept. Plato, *Protagoras* start–314C.

Tues. **Oratory, tyranny and power** Plato, *Gorgias* 466A–481B.
20 Sept.

Thurs. **The conviction of Socrates** Plato, *Euthyphro* (all).
22 Sept.

Tues. **The trial of Socrates** Plato, *Apology* (all).
27 Sept.

Thurs. **Application module: Philoso-** Good in Theory, ep. 3–5 (audio).
29 Sept. **phy, politics and censorship.**

Part III: Plato's transformation of Socrates

Tues. 4 **Knowledge and reality.** Plato, *Phaedo* start–85B.
Oct.

Thurs. **The death of Socrates.** Plato, *Phaedo*, 85B–end.
6 Oct.

Tues. 11 **MID-SEMESTER BREAK** —
Oct.

Thurs. **The definition of virtue** Plato, *Meno*, 70A–86C.
13 Oct.

Tues. **Recollection, knowledge and be-** Plato, *Meno* 86C–100B.
18 Oct. **lief** **Dialogue due.**

Thurs. **The nature of justice and the** Plato, *Republic* II start–376E.
20 Oct. **ideal city**

Tues. **Censorship in the city. Justice** Plato, *Republic* II 376E–III 389C, IV 433B–end.
25 Oct. **in the soul.**

Thurs. **The knowledge of the guardians** Plato, *Republic* V 473A–end, VI 503B–VII
27 Oct. 525E.

Tues. 1 **The proper object of love** Plato, *Symposium* start–201C.
Nov.

Thurs. **INAUGURATION DAY**
3 Nov.

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Tues. 8 **Myth, love and science**
Nov.

Plato, *Symposium* 201C–end.

Plato, *Timaeus* 27A–31B. Read further if you have time.

Part IV: Footnotes to Plato: Aristotle on living well and knowing well

Thurs. **Virtue of character and the goal**
10 Nov. **of life**

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I and II (all).

Tues. **Intellectual virtue and friend-**
15 Nov. **ship**

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.1–7, 12–13, VIII.1–13, X.6–8.

Thurs. **The principles of change. The**
17 Nov. **four causes**

Physics I (all), II.3, 7.

Tues. **Knowledge, perception and the**
22 Nov. **Forms**

Posterior Analytics I.2–3, 10–11, 13, II.1–2, 19.
Metaphysics I.1, 6.

Thurs. **THANKSGIVING BREAK**
24 Nov.

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Tues. **Metaphysics: The science of**
29 Nov. **substance**

Categories 1–5.

Metaphysics IV.1–2 1003b21, VII.1–3.

Thurs. **Form, matter and actuality**
1 Dec.

Metaphysics VII.17, VIII (all).

Tues. 6 **Aristotle's applications of his**
Dec. **metaphysics: The soul**

De Anima I.1, II (all), III.3–5.

Thurs. Aristotle's applications of his *Physics* VIII.3–6.
8 Dec. metaphysics: God *Metaphysics* XI.7, XII.6–10.

Final paper due **Monday 12 December**, by midnight, on Sakai. If you have technical difficulties with Sakai, email the paper to me (exceptions will not be made on account of technical difficulties). There is no final exam.

Intellectual property

This syllabus, as well as all course materials including lecture slides and exams, are intellectual property of the instructor, Joshua Mendelsohn. They may not be shared during or after the course without the written permission of the instructor.