

PHIL 395: Seminar in Ancient Philosophy

Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:00–4:15pm, Online

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

Instructor's office hours: By appointment.

In this course, we will trace the development of philosophy in Greece 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. The first part of the course tracks the early development of Greek philosophy in its dialogue with epic poetry. 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. The second and third parts of the course focus on Socrates and Plato respectively. We will encounter them both through Plato's dialogues, and see how Socrates and Plato each challenged, and appropriated, sophistry and Greek myth. Readings from *Ion*, *Gorgias*, *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Phaedo* will supply a sketch of Socrates' life and his fate as a subversive figure, while readings from *Phaedo*, *Meno*, *Republic* and *Timaeus* will show how Plato extends and transforms Socrates' ethical project into a metaphysical-epistemological program and a political philosophy. Finally, we will turn to Aristotle, and examine how he pioneers the study of nature and develops and transforms Plato's ideas about the good life, the ideal city, the soul and the nature of reality.

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 repugnant to us today?

Course goals and rationale

After taking this course, you should have an overview of some of the main currents and achievements of Ancient Greek Philosophy, and you should have developed considered views about its contemporary relevance and value. This requires learning how to *read* texts in Ancient Greek Philosophy, which are challenging for at least three reasons. 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 writing. Third, the texts we will read are seldom direct and generally contain a great deal of ambiguity. 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 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 now be purchased from the Loyola bookstore (they will ship it to you!). All other readings will be available on Sakai.

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 **15% of the grade**. Your journal will be 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 passage? 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 (in that case both students receive one grade for their joint performance). 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 **45% of the grade**.

Attendance

This is an online course that meets in real time at the assigned course times. You are **required** to be present for the video conference session 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. In order to receive the accommodations you require, you *must* (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). Accommodations cannot be provided without all steps being taken.

Use of Zoom and recordings

Meetings for this class will take place in real time over Zoom. It is your responsibility to have a working Zoom setup. By default, these sessions will not be recorded, but they may be if a legitimate student need requires us to do so (e.g, if a student is sick and cannot attend). These recordings will not be made available beyond students enrolled in this class, and all recordings will become unavailable to students in the class when the course has concluded. Whether or not the class is being recorded, students will be required to turn on their cameras at the start of class. Students who have a need to participate via audio only must reach out to me to request audio participation only without the video camera enabled. The use of all video recordings will be in keeping with the University Privacy Statement shown below.

University privacy statement

Assuring privacy among faculty and students engaged in online and face-to-face instructional activities helps promote open and robust conversations and mitigates concerns that comments made within the context of the class will be shared beyond the classroom. As such, recordings of

instructional activities occurring in online or face-to-face classes may be used solely for internal class purposes by the faculty member and students registered for the course, and only during the period in which the course is offered. Students will be informed of such recordings by a statement in the syllabus for the course in which they will be recorded. Instructors who wish to make subsequent use of recordings that include student activity may do so only with informed written consent of the students involved or if all student activity is removed from the recording. Recordings including student activity that have been initiated by the instructor may be retained by the instructor only for individual use.

Course schedule

Prologue

Tues. 25 Aug.	Why study Ancient Greek philosophy?	OPTIONAL: Michael Frede, 'Introduction: The Study of Ancient Philosophy'.
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Part I: Early Greek Philosophy, myth and authority

Thurs. 27 Aug.	The world of epic myth	Homer, <i>Iliad</i> , Book V. McKirahan, ch. 2 (pay special attention to the quotation from Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i> , lines 116–134).
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Tues. 1 Sept.	The earliest Greek Philosophers (and scientists?)	Selections from McKirahan, chs. 7 and 9.
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Thurs. 3 Sept.	More challenges to epic cosmogony	Selections from McKirahan, chs. 10 and 11.
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Part II: Argument for argument's sake? Socrates and the value of philosophy

Tues. 8 Sept.	Socrates and the mythmakers	Plato, <i>Ion</i> (all).
Thurs. 10 Sept.	Socrates and the sophists	Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> start–466A. Plato, <i>Protagoras</i> start–314C.
Tues. 15 Sept.	Oratory, tyranny and power	Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> 466A–481B.
Thurs. 17 Sept.	The conviction of Socrates	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (all).
Tues. 22 Sept.	The trial of Socrates	Plato, <i>Apology</i> (all).
Thurs. 24 Sept.	Application module: Philosophy, politics and censorship.	Good in Theory, ep. 1–2 (audio). Selections from Aristophanes, <i>Clouds</i> .
Tues. 29 Sept.	Application module cont.	Good in Theory, ep. 3–5 (audio).

Part III: Plato's transformation of Socrates

Thurs. 1 Oct.	Knowledge and reality.	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> start–85B.
Tues. 6 Oct.	The death of Socrates.	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> , 85B–end.
Thurs. 8 Oct.	The definition of virtue	Plato, <i>Meno</i> , 70A–86C.
Tues. 13 Oct.	Recollection, knowledge and belief	Plato, <i>Meno</i> 86C–100B. Dialogue due.

Thurs. 15 Oct.	The good of justice and the ideal city	Plato, <i>Republic</i> II start–376E.
Tues. 20 Oct.	Censorship in the ideal city	Plato, <i>Republic</i> II 376E– <i>Republic</i> III 398B, <i>Republic</i> X 595A–607D.
Thurs. 22 Oct.	Justice in the soul	Plato, <i>Republic</i> IV (all), V 473A–end.
Tues. 27 Oct.	Ideal cities and ideal forms.	Plato, <i>Republic</i> VI 504D– <i>Republic</i> VII (all). Plato, <i>Symposium</i> 201C–212C.
Thurs. 29 Oct.	Myth and science	Plato, <i>Timaeus</i> start–44C. Read further if you have time.

Part IV: Footnotes to Plato: Aristotle and Beyond

Tues. 3 Nov.	Aristotle on causes and first philosophy	Aristotle, <i>Physics</i> II.7. Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> I (focus on chapters 1–2 and 9).
Thurs. 5 Nov.	Perceptible substance	Aristotle, <i>Categories</i> I.1–5. Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> VII.1–3, VIII.1.
Tues. 10 Nov.	Aristotle’s god	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> XI.7, XII.6–10.
Thurs. 12 Nov.	Aristotle on the soul	Aristotle, <i>De Anima</i> II.1–5, III.3–5.
Tues 17 Nov.	Virtue and the good life	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> I (all), X.6–9.

Thurs. 19 Nov.	Aristotle on the good city.	Selections from <i>Politics</i> books I–III.
Tues. 24 Nov.	THANKSGIVING BREAK	—
Tues. 26 Nov.	THANKSGIVING BREAK	—
Tues. 1 Dec.	Application module: The value of Greek Philosophy today	Christopher Frey, ‘Aristotle’s Irredeemable Ableism’. Paper draft for peer review due.
Thurs. 3 Dec.	Paper workshop session	<i>Read your partner’s paper and prepare comments.</i>

Final paper due **Monday 7 December**, 5pm on Sakai. If you have technical difficulties with Sakai, email the paper to me (exceptions will not be made on account of technical difficulties).

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.