

Omar Fakhri

Ancient Philosophy

Course Description:

This is an introductory course in ancient philosophy. The bulk of the course will focus on three main ancient philosophers: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. We will discuss the so-called pre-Socratic philosophers at the beginning of the course, but the majority of the time will be spent on the three major figures. History will be an important component of this class, but this class is a *philosophy* class first and foremost. It is designed to introduce students to philosophy through primary texts written by important ancient philosophers from the western tradition. As such, there are no required prerequisites.

We will begin the course by drawing a contrast between the way the ancient poets and the philosophers explained reality. The ancient poets claimed that finite humans could not come to learn ultimate truths about the cosmos on their own. How can we come to know what happened at the beginning of the cosmos if we weren't there? The poets claim that we need to learn these truths from the testimony of the gods who were there from the beginning, and who have been around long enough to understand the mysteries of the cosmos. By contrast, the philosophers sought to explain the world around them not through the traditions and the testimony of the gods, although they had things to say about those things, but through naturalistic means. They begin to develop views that aim to answer two questions: (1) what is the basic stuff? And (2) what explains change? In the first part of the course, we will look at the answers that ancient philosophers gave to these two questions, and the reasoning for their answers.

Plato and Aristotle had a lot to say about questions (1) and (2), and we'll look at what they had to say, but they also had a lot to say about more practical questions. During the second half of the course, we will read big sections of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. These two important and very influential texts paint a picture of the good life and why it should be pursued.

The aim of this class is twofold. The first is for you to learn ancient philosophy. The second is for you to take your first step as a philosopher. In our daily lives, it is okay to be like the poets: accepting things on testimony or tradition. But when we enter the philosophy classroom, we want to think hard about our assumptions and why we accept the views that we accept. We want to approach the world like ancient philosophers did.

Learning Goals:

- Be able to clearly and concisely exposit arguments in premise-conclusion form.
- Be able to critically assess arguments by either objecting directly or indirectly to a specific premise(s), or by showing that the argument is fallacious.
- Be able to understand, state, and describe the main historical problems and positions discussed in the reading and in lecture.
- Be able to write a well-developed philosophy paper that explains the key moves in a given argument and critically evaluate it.
- Be able to articulate and provide reasons for one's own position or lack thereof.

Required Text:

Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle, 4th Edition. S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, C. D. C. Reeve (Eds.)

Course Requirements:

- Section Grade 10% – Section attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections (and class) having done all the assigned reading.
- Two Papers 20% each – These papers will typically be on a specific part of the reading. The prompt will ask you to exposit an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. Each paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
- Précis 15% – A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 500 words and no longer than 600 words* double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose.
- Final Paper 35% - The final paper will function as your final for the class. It will ask you to compare and contrast the views or arguments for two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

*LATE ASSIGNMENTS: There is a 1/3 letter grade penalty for every *class*-day a paper is late (e.g. suppose a paper is due on Friday and you turn it in the following Wednesday and the paper receives a B+, then because it is late it will receive a 2/3 letter grade deduction, which means that the paper will receive a B-).

Tentative Schedule:

* = hangout

Week	Readings and Assignments due
1	<p><u>Cosmogony according to the poets</u> Hesiod’s Theogony, (selections)* Homer’s Illiad, (selections)*</p> <p><u>The birth of philosophy and the Milesians</u> Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes (10-17)</p> <p><u>Change</u> Heraclitus (29-39) Parmenides (40-46). Zeno (47-51).</p> <p><u>Atomism</u> Leucippus and Democritus (80-92).</p> <p><u>The Sophists</u> Protagoras and Gorgias (104-107)</p> <p><u>What is piety?</u> Euthyphro (135-152)</p>
2	<p><u>Socrates’ trail</u> Apology (153-178). <u>Should Socrates escape?</u></p>

	<p>Crito (179-191) <u>Paradox of learning</u> Meno (241-266) <u>Immortality of the soul</u> Phaedo (267-319)</p>
3	<p>Précis is due <u>Justice is the advantage of the stronger</u> Republic I (369-397) <u>Why be moral?</u> Republic II (398-423) <u>Building the good city and the parts of the soul</u> Republic III-IV (424-482).</p>
4	<p>First Paper is due <u>The philosopher kings and the cave</u> Republic V, and selections from VII (483-514, 542-550) <u>Kinds of being</u> Categories 1-5 (694-700) <u>Knowledge of demonstration</u> Posterior Analytics (714-731) <u>Causes and Explanation</u> Physics II (745-754) <u>The principle of life</u> De Anima I 1, 4, and II 1-3 (847-856)</p>
5	<p>Second Paper is due <u>The human good</u> Nicomachean Ethics I and X (870-878, 919-929) <u>Virtue</u> Nicomachean Ethics II (881-890) <u>Moral responsibility</u> Nicomachean Ethics III (890-901) <u>Actions and intellectual virtue</u> Nicomachean Ethics VI (905-913)</p>
6	<p>Final Paper is due <u>Incontinence</u> Nicomachean Ethics VII (913-919) <u>The definition and structure of the state</u> Politics I (930-933) <u>Criticism of the ideal societies</u> Politics II (933-937) <u>Classification of constitutions</u> Politics III (937-951) <u>The best state</u> Politics VII (951-960)</p>