

PHIL 2140-01: History of Greek and Roman Philosophy

F15

Instructor: John Russon, Mackinnon 338

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:30-1:30 or by appointment.

Course Meets: Wednesdays, 7:00-9:50 pm, THRN 1307

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Ancient Athens produced the two philosophical thinkers that tower over all who came before and all who came after: Plato (c.427-c.347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC). These thinkers, from the period of the flourishing of ancient Greek culture, effectively invented the practice of philosophy that has shaped and transformed Western culture and, indeed, world-culture. The Greek philosophers were especially concerned with describing accurately the nature of reality, and then trying to understand the place of the human being within reality. We will read major texts by Plato and Aristotle on the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge, ethics and politics, contextualized by other writings by Greek and Roman authors.

We will begin with a short introduction to the philosophy of Pythagoras (c.570-c.490 BC), a somewhat mysterious figure who was nonetheless of profound importance for the entire subsequent tradition of Greek (and, indeed, Western) philosophy. We will consider Pythagorean insights in *mathematical and musical form*. We will then turn to the figure of Socrates (c.469-399 BC), another profoundly significant figure who left no writings of his own, but whose *distinctive philosophical practice* was the subject of substantial writings by his near-contemporaries, most importantly Xenophon (430-354 BC) and Plato. Though Plato's Socratic dialogues (i.e., dramatic portrayals of conversations Socrates had with others) will be our primary focus here, we will begin with a short selection from Xenophon's Memoirs of Socrates, and contrast the portrayals of Socrates in Xenophon and Plato. From Plato, we will read substantial portions of two large dialogues, the Phaedo and the Phaedrus, in which Socrates investigates the distinctive characteristics of human beings; specifically, we will focus on the nature of the *mind* (nous) and of *sexuality* (erōs). We will then turn to Aristotle for the more technical study of the human soul, focusing especially on the basic concept of *nature* (phusis) and on the distinctive characteristics of *human nature*, especially *learning* and *politics*. Socrates, Xenophon, Plato and Aristotle are all Athenian writers, writing around the time of the Peloponnesian War—the civil war in Greece that brought about the end of the system of Greek “city-states” (*poleis*). After our study of these figures, we will conclude the course by reading Cicero (106-43 BC), a Roman writer highly influenced by Plato and Aristotle whose writings about *ethics* and *politics* are framed by the rise and the assassination of Julius Caesar, and the very different world of the emerging Roman Empire.

- Nov 4 Aristotle, On the Soul II.12, III.1-5; Posterior Analytics II.19; Metaphysics A, 1-2
--Learning I: perception (aisthēsis) and insight (noēsis)
- Nov 11 Aristotle, Poetics Ch 4; On the Soul III.8; Politics VIII; Nicomachean Ethics II.1
--Learning II: imitation (mimēsis), art and education
- Nov 18 Aristotle, Politics, I.1-2, IV.3-11
--Politics
- Cicero**
- Nov 25 Cicero, On Obligations, Part I, selections.
paragraphs 11-26, 50-57, 61-65, 72, 85-89, 152-161 (pp 6-11, 19-21, 22-24, 26, 30-31, 51-54)
--Virtue
NB: Short critical essay due
- Dec 2 Cicero, On Obligations, Parts II and III, selections.
II, paragraphs 21-29 (pp 61-64)
III, paragraphs 18-28, 50-69, 81-85 (pp 90-93, 101-107, 111-113)
--Economics and Politics

Dec 9: FINAL EXAMINATION, 8:30-10:30 AM.

Assignments:

In addition to doing the assigned readings in advance of class, and coming to class prepared to discuss them, you are required to complete the following assignments.

1. In-class test on Pythagoras, Xenophon and Plato, October 14: 25%
The test will include essay questions, primarily focused on issues of philosophical method, mathematical knowledge and mind.
2. Short critical essay on Plato, due October 28: 25%
This will be a paper, about 5 pages in length, on the nature of the human soul as that is studied in the Phaedo and the Phaedrus.
3. Short critical essay on Aristotle, due November 25: 25%
This will be a paper, about 5 pages in length, reflecting critically on the discussion in Aristotle's texts of the human soul, especially in relation to learning and politics.
4. Final Examination, December 9: 25%
This will be a comprehensive examination, that is, it will include questions on all of the material from the course.

Course Objectives:

1. The single most important objective of this class is to get each of you individually to take your own lives seriously, and to reflect with care, subtlety and insight on how you are shaping your life and on what you can do to make for yourself a fulfilling present and future. These writers are not presenting you with dry facts about the external world, but are calling upon you to participate in reflection on your own experience and, through that reflection, to engage actively and self-critically in shaping *how* you exist.
2. In addition to offering profound and subtle reflections on how we make meaningful lives for ourselves, the writers we are studying this term are also some of the most rigorous and sophisticated thinkers our culture has ever produced. Engaging with their thoughts should teach you to be much more discerning and articulate in your understanding of many aspects of reality, and should make you a better thinker generally.
3. You should become familiar with the specific insights and ideas of these philosophers about what *nature* is, about the distinctive nature of *human* life, about *knowledge*, about *virtue*, about *happiness*, about *art*, about *sexuality* and more.
4. Finally, these are some of the most formative thinkers in the history of human culture. Studying these figures is also helping you to become cognizant of the nature of the world you live in, and how it came to develop the form that it has.

8 Standard Statements of the College of Arts

Fall 2015

E-mail Communication

As per University regulations, all students are required to check their **uoguelph.ca** e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the university and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, ID#, and e-mail contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-ac.shtml>

Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester **Fall 2015** courses, without academic penalty, is **November 6, 2015**. For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-drop.shtml>

Copies of out-of-class assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Each student at the University of Guelph has rights which carry commensurate responsibilities which, broadly, being a civil and respectful member of the University community. The Rights and Responsibilities are detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c14/c14-strightsrespon.shtml>

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and enjoins all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml>

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

Resources

The Undergraduate Calendar is the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate programs. It can be found at:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/>

If you find yourself in difficulty, contact the undergraduate advisor in your program, or the BA Counseling Office: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/baco/contact.shtml>