

Philosophy 4410*01: Major Texts in Philosophy

University of Guelph, W14

Instructor: John Russon, Mackinnon 338; Office Hours: Wednesday 5-6 or by appt.
Course Meets W 7:00-9:50, Mackinnon 119

Plato and Hegel are two of the most brilliant, and the most comprehensive, thinkers our world has ever produced. We will spend the first half of the semester reading Plato's masterpiece, the Republic, in which the nature of human society is analyzed in detail. We will especially focus on the profound role that art plays in the formation of society. In the second half of the semester, we will read Hegel's brilliantly crafted Lectures on Fine Art, which similarly investigate, in detail, the formative and transformative power of art in human civilization. These are both difficult and demanding works that require from the reader both a cultivated attunement to the rich social and existential dimensions of human life and a willingness to be rigorous and disciplined in dealing with the subtleties and specificities of a philosophical text.

Tentative Schedule of Readings:

Come to each meeting prepared to discuss in detail the reading specified for that meeting.

Jan	8	<u>Republic I</u> -comparison with <u>Apology</u> -contextualization by Greek history and literature
	15	<u>Republic II</u>
	22	<u>Republic III</u>
	29	<u>Republic IV</u>
Feb	5	<u>Republic VI</u> , (from V.472a to VII.521a)
	12	<u>Republic VIII</u>
	19	--Reading Week: no class meeting.
	26	<u>Aesthetics I</u> . Pt I: Introduction, pp [91-]94-105; Chapter 3, pp 153-174
Mar	5	<u>Aesthetics I</u> . 303-322, 362-364, 371-373, 421-426
	12	<u>Aesthetics I</u> . 427-442, 502-516
	19	<u>Aesthetics I</u> . 517-529, 593-611
	26	<u>Aesthetics II</u> . 613-629
Apr	2	<u>Aesthetics I</u> . 25-55, 69-90

Course Texts:

Required:

Plato, The Republic, translated by Allan Bloom. (Basic Books), 2nd Edition.

Hegel, Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Volume I, translated by T.M. Knox, (Oxford).

Recommended:

Hegel, Aesthetics, Volume II.

Four Texts on Socrates, Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West (eds), (Cornell).

Aristotle and Xenophon on Democracy and Oligarchy, J.M. Moore (trans), (U.California)

Greek Tragedies, Volume I, David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (eds), (Chicago).

Greek Tragedies, Volume III, David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (eds), (Chicago).

The Random House Handbook, Frederick Crews (out of print).

Objectives:

This is an advanced course—the highest level of course you can take in undergraduate study—so participating in it successfully presumes that you have already made a lot of progress in your education. To succeed in this course, you need already to have developed good study habits, good skills at reading and writing, and a good background in philosophical thinking—the skills of critical analysis, a broad familiarity with the discipline and its history, and a cultivated insight into philosophical issues. The overall goal of this course is to further cultivate and refine these abilities, but especially to use these abilities to advance to a higher level of philosophical work than you otherwise have. There are also more specific goals:

--I want you to learn how to read Plato. Plato is basically the first author in the tradition of work that we now call “philosophy.” Unlike 21st Century authors, he did not have 2500 years of this kind of writing to contextualize his work; on the contrary, he invented a new genre of human self-expression. You must learn not to treat his works the way you treat contemporary essays by philosophy professors, but instead to appreciate on its own terms the unique ways in which his writings communicate and teach. Probably their most striking feature in comparison to other works of “philosophy” is that Plato at no point presents his own view: in the Republic (and in almost all of his writings) we are instead presented with a conversation between others (here entirely narrated by a single character, Socrates). Grappling with the philosophical import of this text requires that you grapple with the significance of this form of presentation, and especially that you grapple with complexities of interpersonal dialogue. In many ways, reading Plato has as much in common with reading works of history or drama as it does with reading other works of philosophy.

--I want you to learn how to think along with Hegel. Hegel’s major works—the Phenomenology of Spirit and the Science of Logic—are notoriously dense in both their writing and their thought, and much of the challenge of studying them comes from the difficulty in “deciphering” Hegel’s compact and cryptic presentation. Hegel’s Aesthetics, on the other hand, is written very clearly, and it is filled with the discussion of very concrete, empirical material, which makes it much easier to read and understand than these other works. This book can be read by anyone, but it will be especially valuable to those of you who already have developed some background in Hegel.

--More than anything else, from both authors I want you to learn profound truths about the nature of politics, history and art, and, indeed, about human life in general. Most obviously, these texts by Plato and Hegel are filled with detailed discussion of particular artistic genres and particular political formations. These two books offer some of the best education into art and history that you could find anywhere. These books are also full of profound and insightful reflections on the nature of the soul, the nature of education, the nature of justice and, indeed, the nature of reality itself. If you study these works seriously, they should have a transformative effect on how you see the world.

--Finally, I want you to develop the skills of collection philosophical study through participating in and contributing to an informed, collegial classroom discussion.

Assignments:

1. Read.
2. Speak.
3. Write.

1. The primary reason for taking this course is to read these texts. I will do my best to make the few hours we spend together interesting, but **the books themselves are the teachers**. If you study the books you will learn. If you do not study the books, you will not learn much.

2. Come to class prepared, and willing to participate in collaborative discussion of various ideas that come up. The less you contribute, the less successful and effective the class will be.

3. I will give you some writing assignments. Forcing yourself to articulate your thoughts and then subjecting this articulation to the judgment others is one of the most powerful ways to develop your thinking.

Your grade will be based on two components.

1. Participation: 20%
2. 2 essays @40% each: 80%

Essay 1 on Plato: due February 12, in class.

Essay 2 on Hegel: due April 2, in class.

NB: OPTION—I am open to the possibility of substituting a classroom presentation for a paper. Discuss this with me if you are interested.

As I said above, the point of the class is for you to read these works. Doing this is what will count as success in the class. Your grade, however, will primarily be based on two essays that you will write. It may well be that you can get away with writing the essays and getting a good grade without committing yourself to serious reading over the semester. You should consider that an educational failure, though.

I will give you details about the essays as we proceed. Basically, you will write one essay each on Plato and Hegel. As well as defending a critical thesis, your essay will involve careful exegesis of selected textual passages in the relevant text, and will involve discussion of some other empirical material pertaining either to art or to politics.

DO NOT read commentaries on Plato or Hegel unless I specifically direct you to do so. DO read everything you can about art history and ancient Greek history.

Finally, pay attention to the issue of academic integrity, i.e., DO NOT PLAGIARIZE. Any work you submit must be your own. See the undergraduate calendar for a fuller discussion.

Standard Statements from the College of Arts:

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 Winter 2014 courses, without academic penalty, is **Friday, March 7, 2014**. 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 that involve, 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 Counselling Office: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/baco/contact.shtml>