

PHIL 2140*01: Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy

Instructor: John Russon, Mackinnon 338

Office Hours: Wednesday 5:00-6:00

Class Meets: Wednesday 7:00-9:50 pm, RICH (Richards) 2529

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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 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). 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 begin with the works of Plato's student, Aristotle, (who was himself supposedly the teacher of Alexander the Great), for the systematic study of nature and our place in it. We will consider in particular the odd way that the human being seems both to fit and not to fit within the world of nature. This issue will become especially clear when we study the political domain, which, according to Aristotle, supplies our proper environment. We will draw upon Thucydides (460-395 B.C.), another great Athenian thinker, to investigate the distinctive character of the Athenian invention of "democracy," and its consequences. From here, we will move, finally, to Plato himself, and focus on his study of the distinctive activities that fulfill the human soul, and especially his study of how these do and do not fit comfortably in the political world. We will conclude with the Roman philosopher Seneca (c. 4BC to AD 65)—the advisor to the Roman Emperor Nero—to see how the Greek philosophical perspective has developed and been transformed in dealing with the realities of political life in the time of the Roman Empire. We will supplement our study with the reading of two of the great Greek tragedies: *Antigone*, by Sophocles, (which will help us to reflect on the nature of political life, and how it relates to other aspects of life) and *Hippolytus*, by Euripides, (which will help us to reflect on the nature of desire, and how it relates to other aspects of life). We will also read a short excerpt from Tacitus, to help us to understand the shift from government in the form of democratic republics to government by an emperor.

Course Texts:

Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. Cooper, (Hackett).

Aristotle, *Basic Writings*, ed. McKeon, (Modern Library).

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Warner, (Penguin).

Seneca, *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca*, trans. Hadas, (Norton). –**Not yet in bookstore**

Greene (ed), *Greek Tragedies: Volume I*, (Chicago).

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 *politics* in general and about *democracy* in particular, about the distinctive nature of *human* life, about *knowledge*, about *virtue*, about *happiness*, 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.

Assignments:

1. Reading, Attendance, and Participation.
You must do the assigned readings in advance of class, and come to class prepared to discuss them.
2. In-class test on Aristotle, October 1: 25%
The test will include essay questions, primarily focused on Aristotle's views about nature and knowledge.
3. Short critical essay on politics due October 29: 25%
This will be a paper, about 5 pages in length, reflecting critically on the texts we have read (Aristotle, Thucydides, Sophocles, and Plato's Gorgias) that discuss the nature of politics and the problems of democratic Athens.
4. Short critical essay on Plato, due November 19: 25%
This will be a paper, about 5 pages in length, reflecting critically on the discussion in Plato's texts of the human soul, its fulfilments and its place in the world.
5. Final Examination, December 3: 25%
This will be a comprehensive examination, that is, it will include questions on all of the material from the course.

Schedule of Readings:

Do the following reading before the indicated classes. Come to class prepared to discuss the material you've read.

Date: Reading:

Sept 10 Introduction

Aristotle:

Sept 17 Physics II.1-3, De Anima II.1-4, Parts of Animals I.1

Sept 24 De Anima I.5, **II.12**, III.1-2, Posterior Analytics II.19, De Anima III.4-5

Oct 1 Nicomachean Ethics, I.7, 13; II. 2,6,7. De Anima, III.10, Politics I.1-2,
Nicomachean Ethics II.1.

NB: In-class test on Aristotle

Thucydides:

Oct 8 Pericles' Funeral Oration, (History of the Peloponnesian War, pp 143-151)
Also Sophocles, Antigone.

Oct 15 Mytilenean Debate, Melian Dialogue, (History, pp 194-223, 400-8)

Plato:

Oct 22 Gorgias: 447a-476a

Oct 29 Republic, V.472a-VI.511e

NB: Short critical essay due

Nov 5 Republic VII.514a-521a

Apology

Nov 12 Symposium 201d-223d

Also Euripides, Hippolytus

Seneca:

Nov 19 Letters 5 (Moderation), 7 (Crowds), 12 (Old Age) and 70 (Suicide) [pp
170-177, 202-207]

Also Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome (excerpt on Courselink)

NB: Short critical essay due

Nov 26 Letters 41 (God in Man), 92 (The Happy Life), and 124 (Reason and the
True Good) [pp 188-190, 239-247, 256-261]

Wednesday Dec 3: Final Examination, 11:30 am – 1:30 pm

College of Arts Standard Statements:

Email communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their uoguelph.ca email account regularly: email 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 email contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar's [information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration](#).

Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is Friday, October 31, 2014. See the Undergraduate Calendar's [regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses](#).

Copies of out-of-class assignments

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

Accessibility

The University of Guelph is committed to creating a barrier-free environment. Providing services for students is a shared responsibility among students, faculty and administrators. This relationship is based on respect of individual rights, the dignity of the individual and the University community's shared commitment to an open and supportive learning environment. Students requiring service or accommodation, whether due to an identified, ongoing disability or a short-term disability should contact the Centre for Students with Disabilities (soon to be re-named Student Accessibility Services) as soon as possible. For more information, contact CSD at 519-824-4120 ext. 56208 or email csd@uoguelph.ca or refer to the [CSD website](#).

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of 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. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

The Academic Misconduct Policy is [detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar](#).

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

Resources

The Academic Calendars are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs:

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