

**Philosophy 208 / Fall 2009**  
**Philosophy of the Greeks**  
**Course Description and Syllabus**

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**Office hours:** After class, or by appointment (Mondays or Thursdays).

**Course description:** This course is a general introduction to some of the main problems discussed by the ancient Greek philosophers. These problems include: how many kinds of things exist? What are the primary constituents of the things that are? What sorts of basic principles should we posit in our theory of the natural world and the nature of change within it? Are we capable of acquiring knowledge about the natural world? If so, what are the objects of such knowledge, and how is it that we have cognitive access to these? Human beings also assure themselves that they are capable of acquiring moral knowledge, or the knowledge of what the best sort of life for a human being is. But is this assurance based on some sort of illusion? If it is, is the illusion remediable? Assuming we are capable of moral knowledge, is the nature of this knowledge the same, or importantly different from, our knowledge of the natural world?

**Course requirements:** (1) 14 take-home problems (one every week). Each of these home-works will be worth 3-4 points for a total of 50 points. (2) An in-class, open book, open notes final exam, worth 25 points. (3) A typed portfolio of your notes taken for each session of class, worth 25 points. (The first half of this portfolio is due in class on **Monday, October 19<sup>th</sup>**; the second is due in class on **Thursday, December 10<sup>th</sup>**, our last session). There is no mid-term exam. **Failure to fulfill any one of these three course requirements will result in automatic failure.** Minimal satisfaction of the homework requirement is defined as the submission of at least 10 of the 14 home-works. Failure to sit the final exam will result in failure of the course. You will also be automatically failed if you do not submit both halves of requirement (3).

**Grading:** Your grade for the course will be based on the number of total points you earn, assessed according to the following scale: A = 100-91, B+ = 90-81, B = 80-71, C+ = 70-61, C = 60-51, D = 50-41, F = 40-31.

**Other course policies:**

- (1) **Attendance is required**, and roll will be taken. If you miss four sessions, your grade will be lowered by 10 points. If you miss five sessions, you will lose another 5 points. If you are absent six days you will be automatically failed. If you leave class early or are significantly late to class, you will be counted absent for that session. **I expect**

**you to do your best work** on your home-works, and in your daily presence in class. In particular, I expect you to show up to class on time, prepared to listen to lecture, to take notes, and to participate in class discussion.

- (2) **The course materials will be read for their philosophical content.** As Aristotle said, ‘it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize’: that is, the impulse to philosophize begins with the desire to know the answer *why* to various sorts of problems and puzzles. In this course we will be examining various puzzles that preoccupied the ancient Greek philosophers, as well as the various solutions different thinkers proposed for these. Since philosophers both work their way into and out of puzzles by constructing *arguments*, this entails that we will be examining certain Greek modes of philosophical argumentation (albeit at a level of detail that is appropriate for a 200-level course). Past or current victims of No Child Left Behind teach-to-the-test curricula should therefore anticipate: you will not be spoon-fed factoids by PowerPoint in this course which you will be asked to regurgitate on a final exam. To have memorized the fact *that* Parmenides maintained that there was only one thing, or that motion was impossible, is to have learned nothing, if you do not understand i) why Parmenides argued for these theses, and ii) what is wrong with his arguments. To have memorized the fact *that* certain sophists maintained that it was impossible to make a false statement, is to have learned nothing, if you do not know *how* they argued for such a paradoxical thesis, or how to unravel their paradox. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle did not teach by distributing PowerPoint slides (or the equivalent) to their students. (They would, I expect, dismiss a student’s desire to be taught in such a fashion as the expression of a piteously disordered soul. I agree with them). Students who do not wish to read ancient Greek philosophy for its philosophical content should not take this course.
- (3) The home-works will usually be assigned on Mondays. They will be due the following Monday. **If you fail to turn in the work on the required day, you may not make up the work.** That means that under no circumstances will you be allowed to turn in late homework. There are no exceptions. **If you do not turn in 4 of the home-works, you will automatically be given an ‘F’.**
- (4) **All completed work must be brought to class.** You may not e-mail your course work to me without my express prior approval. I will not read it and I will delete your attachment. Do not under any circumstances put your work in my departmental mailbox, or under my office door.
- (5) **All written work, including your class note portfolios, must be typed.** I will not accept handwritten work. (That means you cannot attempt to turn in a handwritten version and then ask for more time to submit a typed version of your work when I refuse to accept your handwritten version).
- (6) Homework and papers that are full of typos and grammatical errors will be marked down an entire grade.

(7) **You may not use as source materials for your papers any secondary literature that is not on the syllabus below.** In particular this means you may not ‘research’ your work by cutting and pasting (i.e., plagiarizing) from a website. **Any suspected violations of academic integrity will be turned over to the Dean of Judicial Affairs.**

(8) **Class notes portfolio:** Your class notes are due on the two dates indicated above. They must be typed, bound or stapled together, and placed in some kind of folder (but no ring-binders, please). You may of course format your own personal copies of your class note portfolios in any manner you wish; but please format the copies you turn in to me as follows: **Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, standard margins; single spaced, double sided.** Please clearly indicate in your notes how your sections correspond to a class session (e.g., ‘Monday, October 5<sup>th</sup>’).

The purpose of this course requirement is to compel you to keep up with the weekly readings, and to encourage you to develop both your note-taking and your listening skills. You may organize your class notes in any manner that you find useful. It is not necessary (nor indeed, recommended) that you attempt to record verbatim everything that is said in lecture; rather, you should attempt to gloss the main points and arguments that were made in lecture, and canvassed in class discussion. You will naturally find as you sit down to do this that there are certain gaps in your understanding of what was covered in class. You should try to fill in these gaps, first, by returning to the assigned reading to see if you can solve the problem by yourself. If you find that you cannot, you should bring up your question at the beginning of our next class meeting (if you’re puzzled, probably other folks are too; and I need to hear from you if something covered in lecture needs to be clarified or repeated before we move on to a new topic). If your question involves more than a point of clarification, it is very likely that you have put your finger on a questionable move in the argument of one of the philosophers that we are reading. You are now doing philosophy. Bring up your challenge in class, so that everyone may benefit from your question.

Students are strongly encouraged to supplement their class notes with their own proposed solutions to such discovered problems. If there is something of this sort in your notes to which you particularly wish to draw my attention, you should highlight it in some fashion (e.g., by using a different colour for your font, or the highlighting function). The grades assigned to your note folders will not be based on the number of pages you turn in, but rather on the following criteria: evidence that you have notes from every session; evidence that you grasped the basic content of lecture and discussion; evidence that you are thinking about the material, and what you are thinking about it.

As for the physical process of note-taking in class, you may do that in any manner that suits you. Studies show, however, that the best way to get the most out of lecture is to take handwritten notes, which you may thoughtfully supplement at your leisure. That is the method I would recommend.

(9) **Extra credit:** You may earn up to 10 extra credit points by participating in class discussion. There will also be occasional opportunities to answer extra credit questions on homework assignments. Students wishing to do so may also earn up to 20 extra points by writing a 7-8 page essay. (Paper topics will be distributed in the first week of October; the paper is due November 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Monday before Thanksgiving break). Essays will not however be graded on a curve, but according to the degree to which you meet certain standards described in a guideline distributed with the description of paper topics. Poorly composed essays will receive very low marks.

### **Course syllabus:**

The following editions of our core readings are currently available at the Cook/Douglass Co-op Bookstore. These editions are required for the course. Do not use or purchase alternative translations. All other course readings will be available by electronic course reserve, or distributed by class handouts.

(1) *Plato: The last days of Socrates*. Translated by H. Tredennick and H.Tarrant, with introduction and notes by H.Tarrant. (Penguin) 2003.

(2) *Plato: Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Revised by C.D.C. Reeve. (Hackett) 1992.

(3) *Plato: Timaeus*. Translated, with introduction, by Donald J. Zeyl. (Hackett) 2000.

### **Tentative schedule of topics:**

(1) **Thursday, 9/3:** The search for principles. First steps in natural philosophy. Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes; Xenophanes, Heraclitus. Readings: class handout.

(2) **Tuesday, 9/8:** The Monists: Parmenides, Melissus, and Zeno. Readings: class handout.

(3) **Thursday, 9/10:** The Monists, continued. The Pluralists: Empedocles and Anaxagoras. Readings: class handout.

(4) **Monday, 9/14:** The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus. Readings: class handout.

(5) **9/17:** The Sophistic Movement. Varieties of sophist: Gorgias, Protagoras, Hippias, Prodicus. Readings: Plato, *Sophist* 216a-237d [E-RESERVE]; Gorgias, *Helen* [E-RESERVE]; Plato, *Gorgias* 447a-461b [E-RESERVE]; Plato, *Protagoras* 309a-328d [E-RESERVE].

- (6) **9/21:** The Sophists, continued: Moral relativism and skepticism; ‘Megarianism’; Eristic argumentation. Readings: Plato, *Theaetetus* 142a-161a [E-RESERVE]; Plato, *Euthydemus*, 271a-278e; 282d-286c [E-RESERVE].
- (7) **9/24:** Socrates: the ‘Socratic mission’, dialectic, and the search for definition. Reading: Plato’s *Apology*. [*Plato: Last days of Socrates*].
- (8) **9/28:** Plato’s *Apology*, continued.
- (9) **10/1:** Plato’s *Euthyphro*. [*Plato: LDS*].
- (10) **10/5:** Plato’s *Euthyphro*, continued.
- (11) **10/8:** Plato’s *Protagoras*: the unity of virtues and the argument that all wrongdoing is the result of ignorance. Reading: *Protagoras* 328d-362a. [E-RESERVE].
- (12) **10/12:** *Protagoras*, continued.
- (13) **10/15:** Socrates meets Thrasymachus: the defense of justice. Reading: Plato’s *Republic*, Book I. [*Plato: Republic*. (Hackett edition)].
- (14) **10/19:** The Platonic definition of justice and the tripartite soul. Reading: *Republic* II-IV.
- (15) **10/22:** The theory of Forms and Forms as causes. Reading: *Republic* V.
- (16) **10/26:** Sun, Line, Cave; the Form of the Good. *Republic* VI-VII.
- (17) **10/29:** Plato and the explanation of the physical world; the craftsmanship of Intellect. Reading: *Timaeus* 27d-47e2. D.Zeyl, Introduction, pp.xiii-liv. [*Plato: Timaeus*. (Hackett edition)]; M.Burnyeat, ‘Plato on why mathematics is good for the soul’. [E-RESERVE].
- (18) **11/2:** *Timaeus*, continued. The effects of Necessity. Reading: *Timaeus* 47e2-69a5; D.Zeyl, Introduction, pp.liv-lxxvii.
- (19) **11/5:** *Timaeus*, continued. The cooperation of Intellect and Necessity. Reading: *Timaeus*, 69a6-92c9; D.Zeyl, Introduction, lxxvii-lxxxix.
- (20) **11/9:** Aristotle on dialectic, the special sciences, and the search for principles; the refutation of Heraclitus, and the ‘elenctic proof’ of the Principle of Non-Contradiction. Reading: extracts from Aristotle’s *Topoi*; *Nichomachean Ethics* Book VI; *NE* VII.i-iii; *Metaphysics* IV.iv-v. [E-RESERVE].
- (21) **11/12:** Aristotle and the refutation of Parmenides and Melissus. Reading: *Categories* I-5; *Physics* I.i-iii. [E-RESERVE].

(22) **11/16:** Aristotle and the distinction between matter and form; the refutation of the ‘material monists’; the four kinds of cause. Readings: *Metap. A*; *Physics* I.iv--ix. J.Lear, Aristotle: The desire to understand, chapter II (‘Nature’). [E-RESERVE].

(23) **11/19:** *Physics* I.iv—ix, continued; the refutation of Anaxagoras and Empedocles.

(24) **11/23:** The analysis of change and Zeno’s arrow. Readings: Lear, *ADTU*, chapter III (‘Change’). [E-RESERVE].

**Thursday, 11/26:** Thanksgiving.

(25) **11/30:** Aristotle and the refutation of Leucippus and Democritus. Reading: *On Generation and Corruption*, I.ii. [E-RESERVE].

(26) **12/3:** Aristotle’s rejection of the theory of Forms. Reading: extracts from the *Peri Ideôn*. [E-RESERVE].

(27) **12/7:** Aristotle’s definition of the soul; the soul as Form. Reading: *De Anima* I, II.i. [E-RESERVE]

(28) **12/10:** Soul as substance. Reading: *De Anima* II.i-iv. [E-RESERVE].

[note: 28 days total]