

# History of Philosophy: Greek

Philosophy 203  
Skidmore College  
Fall Semester, 08 Sep – 10 Dec 2010  
WF 10.10-11.30a, Ladd 206

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Course Website: ph203.wordpress.com

## Required Texts [these versions only]

Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 1 (Loeb #184)  
Aristophanes, *Clouds* (Focus)  
Plato, *Protagoras* (Hackett)  
Plato, *Theaetetus* (Hackett)  
Aristotle, *De Anima* (Penguin)  
Aristotle, *Ethics* (Hackett)  
*Hellenistic Philosophy* (Hackett)  
[The material for 29 Sep and 01 Oct will be distributed in class]

## Course

Aristophanes' *Clouds* (ca. 423/419 BC) depicts Socrates' "thinkery" filled with obscure tools, globes, and maps. The joke is in the playwright's conflation of scientific research, a pursuit requiring technique and instrumentation, and philosophical speculation, normally supposed to take only the metaphorical tools of thought. The humor also comes from a skepticism about the overall value of esoteric projects. But what precisely distinguishes inquiry into the structure of the world from inquiry into the structure of our *ideas* about the world? What precisely distinguishes elite investigation from everyday "looking around"? These were key problematics in the early articulation of a concrete discipline called "philosophy." In this course we try to understand why something called "philosophy" came at times to be seem distinct in the classical Greek period both from traditional and scientific cosmological modes of thought, on the one hand, and from popular everyday argumentation, discovery, and critical exercise of self-knowledge, on the other.

The history of philosophy is the history of a concept, of a practice, and of some practitioners. The name for the practitioners (*philosophoi*) came first, indicating a

marked dedication to getting some kind of generalized wisdom, or skill, or competence. The distinctive activities characteristic of the practice (*philosophia*) will have come from other practices, seemed to have met or failed to meet certain needs, and developed through both reflective and historical considerations. The practitioners will have sometimes seen themselves as philosophers, sometimes not, depending on their interpretation of their predecessors and their literary and pedagogical goals.

The first works we read exemplify the modes of wisdom and advice-giving familiar to pre-fifth century Greeks. The later works display a working through of philosophy in the context of previous attempts at philosophizing, or a definition of that philosophical endeavor while practicing it, or a sort of implicit autobiography of the author as a philosopher. Through them we see how perennial problems of philosophy—the nature of the self, of knowledge, of moral reasoning, of happiness—are problems of *philosophy* (perhaps not in contrast to *regular problems of living*). Our basic concern is to ask: What needed to be found out that everybody wasn't trying to find out about already, and how did the activities constitutive of this new "philosophical" practice come to seem better than alternative ones?

### **Class time**

We will spend much of our time in conversation about our assigned texts, most often through close reading of important or characteristic passages, though also through argument reconstruction and assessment, character analysis, summary at various levels of abstraction, and critical response. We will ask questions like: "Why would the author say this?" "What total range of answers could we give to such a question?" "What does the fact that we find this claim completely implausible suggest about the text and about ourselves?" "Should we suspect that the Greeks would have the same perspective on this issue that we would?" "Under what conditions would we find this argument valid?"

You should take notes every day, about what your classmates or I say and what's written on the board. I will expect your work to reflect familiarity with what we've talked about. In-class use of your computer must be limited to note-taking. Please do not read or send texts or other electronic communications during our meeting time.

### **Work**

A broad range of writing assignments will give you a chance to work on the skills learned in class, to strengthen your familiarity with our texts, to engage in a deliberate manner with your peers and your instructor, and to develop your ability to articulate your reactions to the conversations and claims we read about. There are three categories of assignments; each involve some degree of revision.

#### Six Homework Assignments [45%]

Every several weeks you will respond to a prompt about the reading I will distribute at least two class-periods in advance. For each you may write as much as you wish.

HW I: Biography of philosophy.  
HW II: Winning arguments.  
HW III: Socrates among the Sophists.  
HW IV: The knowledge of knowledge.  
HW V: Examining life.  
HW VI: Virtue, friendship, wisdom.

Because this course is not a one-on-one tutorial, writing serves as the main way by which you develop and articulate your thoughts about the reading and class discussion. To get a C on an assignment, your work must be mostly responsive to the prompt, acknowledge relevant portions of the texts in question, have relatively clear exposition, and show some personal reflection. Getting a B takes complete responsiveness to the prompt, fully substantiated claims and citations, good structural organization, and demonstrated serious thoughtfulness about the issue. Getting an A- requires the above, plus excellent command of the reading, multiple modes of argument and preemptive counter-argument, crystalline structural organization, and both rigor and imagination in confronting the issues in question. An A paper exceeds an A- especially in its rigor (analytic sharpness and systematicity) and imagination (creative and exploratory and comprehensive ways of answering the prompt).

At some point during this semester your paper may not receive credit the first time I read it. I will return it to you with comments and a request to meet in office hours by a certain date. You will think about the comments, we will talk in detail about problems with your old draft and your plan for reworking it, and then you will resubmit a revised version or section of the original paper by another specified date. After reading this revision, I may require yet another sequence of revisions; refusing or failing to try to make adequate revision will prevent your paper from receiving credit. That your paper goes through this revision process does not mean your paper would otherwise fail—indeed it could even have gotten a B+, say—but that I am catching a problem I think you should confront in all your writings.

Assignments will always be due in class at the beginning of class. I will accept assignments only by hardcopy, never by email, unless you are explicitly told on the syllabus or prompt to email them. You must staple and paginate multi-sheet assignments, and include full heading information (full name, course number, name of the assignment, and the date it is due); failures to do so will lower the grade.

Late assignments will not be accepted more than once, and only by my discretion and if you have a good faith reason. In this case your assignment will lose a grade letter every 48 hours it is late. For example, if your printer broke thirty minutes before class and you want to run the paper over to my office after class, I will likely accept it, but you will still receive a grade-letter reduction. Or if you forget an assignment due Wednesday and put it in my mailbox that Friday at 4p, you will receive a two grade-letter reduction.

### Class blog [30%]

You are asked to contribute, both as original poster and as commenter, to our course blog at least weekly. Original posts will normally be only several paragraphs long (e.g., 500 words long)—though they might sometimes be much shorter or longer—and may be on any matter relevant to the reading, course discussion, papers, Greek philosophy or culture, or the nature of philosophy generally. You might talk through a confusion you have, cite what you think is a deeply significant passage, speak up about something you thought we skipped over in class, ask a question of your classmates, report on some article you read, transcribe and comment on an eavesdropped philosophical-seeming conversation, or write in any other way that could contribute to your and your classmates' understanding of the motivations for philosophizing. Comments should follow up my or your classmates' posts in ways that contribute to the overall thoughtfulness of the thread, and that are likely to provoke yet further discussion.

Participation in the blog constitutes nearly a third of your class grade. The largest part of your score will be regular participation; it will be impossible to get an A without at least one substantive post and pertinent reply in at least each of ten class weeks; it will be tough without one every class week. Your score will come also from the coherence, insight, creativity, variety, responsiveness, and generosity of your posts and replies.

### Abstract + Final Paper [25%]

Mid-November I will distribute a very open-ended prompt; through your own reflection and in meeting with me, you will work up a 2-page "abstract" which you will email to me before the first class-meeting of December. I will respond to you with questions and suggestions for development. Your final paper, due during finals period, will be about ten pages long. The grade will reflect, among the usual relevant qualities, your responsiveness to my comments on your abstract, and the evidence you show of comprehensive reflection on all the semester's discussions, readings, and writings.

### **Logistics**

#### Attendance

Much of the activity and value of the class comes through our twice-weekly discussions. Accordingly, your final grade will take into account your attendance, which I will spot-check. Repeated tardy arrivals and insufficient participation may count as absences. You must submit appropriate paperwork to excuse any absence. After two unexcused absence, each absence will lower your grade by one increment (e.g., from A- to B+).

#### Grades

Your course grade will represent the precision, accuracy, comprehensiveness, care, thoughtfulness, and effort demonstrated by your participation in the course activities. You will receive the grade nearest to your average numerical score; for example, a 3.9 will be an A; a 3.47 will be a B+.

- A 4.0 – Extraordinary
- A- 3.66
- B+ 3.33
- B 3.0 – Good
- B- 2.66
- C+ 2.33
- C 2.0 – Acceptable
- C- 1.66
- D+ 1.33
- D 1.0 – Minimal pass
- D- 0.66
- F 0.0 – Fail

### Technology

Please check class-related emails each weekday, and respond promptly. I will do the same. I will email you additional readings and assignments if I do not distribute paper copies. Please check with fellow students to ensure you have not missed any handouts, which include paper-prompts and notes.

### Accessibility

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150, or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

### Cheating

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for this course shall be grounds for failing the entire course and communication of dishonesty to the College. This includes, but is not restricted to, any plagiarism on any paper, or cheating on any portion of the homework. Plagiarism includes, among other things, not citing text, paraphrases, or ideas taken from any assigned or unassigned reading, or other students' comments or papers. Read at [cms.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/index.cfm](http://cms.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/index.cfm) and please ask about any case you're concerned about.

## **Reading and Assignment Schedule**

### September

- |      |                                                                       |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| W 08 | The origins of philosophy. Syllabus.                                  |
| F 10 | <i>Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i> [Book] I. Student introductions. |
| W 15 | <i>Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i> II.                              |
| F 17 | <i>Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i> IV. <b>HW I</b>                  |

W 22     *Clouds* 1-888.  
 F 24     *Clouds* 889-1510.

W 29     “Dissoi Logoi,” “On Helen.” **HW II**

October

F 01     *Apology*.

W 06     *Protagoras* 309a1-338e6.  
 F 08     *Protagoras* 338e7-362a4. **HW III**

W 13     *Theaetetus* 142a1-165b1.  
 F 15     *Theaetetus* 165b2-186e10.

W 20     *Theaetetus* 187a1-201c9.  
 F 22     *Theaetetus* 201c10-210d4. **HW IV**

W 27     *De Anima* I.  
 F 29     *De Anima* II.1-7.

November

W 03     *De Anima* II.12, III.1-8.  
 F 05     *De Anima*. III.9-13. **HW V**

W 10     *Ethics* I.1-10.  
 F 12     *Ethics* II, III.10-12, IV.4-9.

W 17     *Ethics* VIII.1-6, IX.3-12.  
 F 19     *Ethics* VII.11-14, X.1-8. **HW VI.**

W 24     **[THANKSGIVING]**  
 F 26     **[THANKSGIVING]**

December

W 01     *Hellenistic Philosophy* Introduction, 1.2-1.6. **Abstract due.**  
 F 03     *Hellenistic Philosophy* II.23-II.24.

W 08     *Hellenistic Philosophy* III.4, III.18-III.21.  
 F 10     *Hellenistic Philosophy* III.22-III.26. Course evaluations. **HW VII.**

Th 16     **Final paper due at 9a.**