

History of Philosophy - Greek

PHIL 203:01 (3 cr.)
Skidmore College
Fall 2011

Professor:	Catherine McKeen	Office:	Ladd 214
Class times:	Tu. & Th. 12:40-2:00pm	Hours:	Wed. & Fri. 1-3pm
Class venue:	Ladd 206	Email:	cmckeen@skidmore.edu
Phone/voicemail:	(518) 580-5403		

Course description:

Philosophy in the Western tradition begins with the Greeks. It is common to date the start of this tradition to Thales in 580 BCE. After Thales, the period of Ancient Greek philosophy extends to about 300 CE. So, as commonly understood, what we call “Ancient Greek philosophy” spans roughly 900 years. We won’t be able to cover everything in this period. But we will examine the ideas of some key figures and explore some important issues that still have currency.

We will proceed roughly in chronological order, starting with the earliest philosophers and ending with the most recent. We’ll look at four distinct movements in Ancient Greek philosophy: (a) the Pre-Socratics; (b) Socrates and Plato; (c) Aristotle; and (d) Hellenistic philosophy. Philosophers at each of these stages were interested in a variety of questions concerning the nature of reality, the soul, knowledge, ethical conduct, and human freedom. So, we will be involved in discussion of a wide range of philosophical topics in this course.

In this course, then, we will “meet the Greeks”. We will try to understand how the Greeks thought – how they understood their universe and themselves as human beings. And we will see how Greek thought developed towards a mode of thinking that is distinctively “philosophical”. The Greeks have had an indelible influence on Western thinking, culture, and politics. In coming to understand the Greeks, we can better understand their continuing influence on us.

What can you expect to get out of this class?

This course will give you a solid grounding in Western philosophy. If you plan to study philosophy further, an acquaintance with the Greeks is crucial for seeing how Western philosophy developed and for understanding discussions that are still with us.

Even if you don't plan to study philosophy further, I think you'll find the Greeks fascinating. The Greeks are like us, but also not like us. They lived in a world that would be strange and foreign to us in many ways. Yet, they are strongly related to us and we can recognize them as our kin. In this course, you'll have the opportunity to grapple with the ideas of some founding members of the Western intellectual tradition: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, for starters.

In addition to studying the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers in this course, we will actively engage in philosophical thinking. That is, we won't simply study philosophy, we will *do* philosophy. We will endeavor to discover what it is like to think as philosophers do. We will explore the distinctive mode of thinking developed by the Greeks from the inside.

Materials.

The works of the ancient Greek philosophers are available in many different editions and translations. To avoid any unnecessary confusion, it's important to get the versions listed below. You can check the ISBN number or check with me if you are unsure about a certain text. Some additional readings will be made available on reserves or by xeroxed copy distributed in class.

A PreSocratics Reader, ed. Curd and McKirahan, Hackett Publishing, ISBN-13: 978-0872203266

Five Dialogues, Plato, Hackett Publishing, ISBN-13: 978-0872206335

Protagoras, Plato, trans. Lombardo and Bell, Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 0872200949

The Republic, Plato, trans. Lee and Lane, Penguin Classics, ISBN-13: 978-0140455113

De Anima, Aristotle, trans. R. D. Hicks, Cosimo Classics, ISBN-13: 978-1605204321

Physics, Aristotle, trans. Bostock and Waterfield, Oxford University Press, ISBN-13: 978-0199540280

Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle, trans. Ackrill, Urmson, and Ross, Oxford University Press, ISBN-13: 978-0192834072

Hellenistic Philosophy, trans. Inwood and Gerson, Hackett Publishing, ISBN-13: 978-0872203785

Course reserves, available through the library at lib.skidmore.edu.

Contact and availability.

I am happy to talk with you about any aspect of this course. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have about the course, the material, or the course work. Email is the best way to contact me with short questions or to set up a time to meet.

I also welcome the chance to talk with you in person about ideas connected with the course, your own plans (intellectual and otherwise), and really just about anything else at all. My office hours are Wednesday and Friday, 1-3pm at Ladd 214.

Course work and expectations.

Preparation – You should expect to regularly attend class and to come prepared. Being prepared means that you have read the material for class, and that you’ve read in a thorough and thoughtful way. You should give yourself enough time to think carefully about what you have read, and you should come to class with questions and thoughts about the readings. You can expect that the readings will often make strong demands on your interpretive and analytical skills. So, give yourself plenty of time to read, re-read, and reflect on the readings.

Papers – There will be three papers of 5-7 pages for this course. The papers are designed to allow you to show progress in analyzing texts and arguments, in synthesizing the material, and in making significant connections. You will be expected to present the views of a philosopher or philosophers clearly and thoughtfully. You will also be expected to go beyond exposition and to work towards developing an analysis or argument in response to these views. To this end, your papers should incorporate a well-defined thesis to be advanced and supported.

Class participation – You should expect to make constructive contributions to the intellectual life of our class. In some cases, this will involve asking questions about texts and issues that are puzzling to you. In others, this will involve trying out ideas or interpretations in class discussion. Participation will also involve active listening to what others are saying in class, and responding to what others in the class say. In all cases, your presence (mentally and physically) is required. You need to show up to be in the game.

Other work – There will be other short assignments for this course which may include submitting discussion questions, quizzes, short response pieces, and in-class work.

Evaluation.

I will evaluate your work for this course based on how well you (a) demonstrate strong positive involvement with and understanding of the course material; (b) demonstrate progress towards rigorous, coherent and in-depth philosophical thinking in your written work; (c) demonstrate active and honest engagement in class meetings.

Class work will be weighted as follows in your course grade:

1 st paper:	25%
2 nd paper:	25%
3 rd paper:	25%
Other work:	15%
Participation:	10%

Nota bene: The following will result in failure of the course: (a) failure to turn in one or more paper; (b) absence from 6 or more class meetings; (c) demonstrated Honor Code violation.

Due dates.

1 st paper due:	T 10/4
2 nd paper due:	T 11/1
3 rd paper due:	R 12/8

Course policies.

Attendance – Much of our class time will be devoted to working through the course material, and critically thinking through that material. So, your presence and preparation for class meetings is essential. You should plan on attending every class meeting. You are allowed 2 absences without penalty. I will not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences for these, so you should exercise care here. Any unexcused absences beyond the 2 allowed will result in a penalty to your overall course grade. Six or more absences will result in a failure of the course.

You should also plan on getting to class on time. Repeated latenesses to class meetings will negatively affect your overall course performance.

If you do miss a class meeting, you will be responsible for contacting a classmate to get notes for that meeting, and to learn of any assignments or announcements.

Electronic devices – You are expected to be fully present in class meetings. You can't do that if you are texting. So, all electronic devices (laptops, cell phones, Blackberries, I-pods, and the like) should be turned off and safely stowed for each class meeting.

Leaving during class – You should only leave class during a meeting in the event of an emergency or sudden illness. That being said, no one wants to be a Tycho Brahe. So, please exercise good classroom etiquette and your own good judgment.

Format of written work – Written work should be word-processed in a readable 11 or 12 pt. font. Essays should be double-spaced and with margins of 1 inch around. You should number your pages. No title page is needed, but you should include your name, the course, and the date on the first page, and your name on a running header. Staples are your friend.

Extensions – You have the option of turning in one of your three papers a week later than the due date. If you do this, I will evaluate your paper for a grade but I will not make substantive comments on it. If you take this option, your other two papers will be due on the dates listed. I will not accept late papers. So please plan accordingly.

Make-up assignments – In-class work cannot be made up. Short assignments missed because of illness, family emergencies, or other legitimate reasons may be made up with my permission. You will be responsible for contacting me within 24 hours of the assignment deadline to schedule a time to submit the assignment.

Submission of work – Hard-copies the first two papers should be turned in at the beginning of the class meeting in which they are due. You will also need to submit a digital copy of your paper to our Blackboard site. The 3rd paper will be due in my mailbox in the Philosophy Department, Ladd Hall. Other written work will either be submitted in class meetings or submitted on Blackboard.

Academic integrity.

All of your work for this course is subject to the College's Honor Code. In this course, as in all college courses, your written work should represent your own ideas, interpretations, and research. If your written work consists mostly of the thoughts of others, this is a problem. You can make some *limited* use of others' work, but this must always be done with appropriate citation. (In philosophy, either MLA or APA format is appropriate.) It is *never* acceptable to borrow someone else's words, ideas, interpretations or research without noting that you are doing so -- this includes any and all material that is posted on the internet, appears in a blog or a social networking site, is from an online encyclopedia or other reference work, is heard on the radio or t.v., is given in conversation, or appears in print. After all, borrowing without permission goes by the somewhat less nice name of "stealing".

I take violations of academic integrity seriously. I will thoroughly investigate any suspected cases. And I will pursue the severest penalties for proven cases of academic dishonesty.

Sometimes people are confused about what exactly constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty involves. Such confusion can have disastrous consequences if it results in an actual violation. So, if you have any questions at all, please ask me.

Accommodation.

If you have a disability that requires accommodation, please let me know early in the semester so that we can determine a viable plan for your work. You will also need to contact the Office of Student Academic Services (518-580-8150).

Class plan.

What follows is the plan for the course over the semester. Of course, plans can change. If the plan for readings or course work does change, I will let you know in advance. Page numbers refer to the bookstore editions of the texts.

PR = PreSocratics Reader
FD = Five Dialogues
Prot. = Protagoras

R = Republic
HP = Hellenistic Philosophy
DA = De Anima

Ph. = Physics
x = xerox (to be handed out in class)

NE = Nicomachean Ethics

Week 1:	Introduction and background	readings:
R 9/8	The context for Greek philosophy	Hesiod (x), Thales (x)

I. The PreSocratics

Week 2:	Monists and pluralists	readings:
T 9/13	Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes	PR, pp. 13-22
R 9/15	Empedocles	PR, pp. 73-100

****T 9/13 – add deadline****

Week 3:	Divisibility of matter	readings:
T 9/20	The atomists: Democritus and Leucippus	PR, pp. 109-125
R 9/22	Anaxagoras: matter as gunky	PR, pp. 101-108

****W 9/21 – drop deadline****

Week 4:	Being and becoming	readings:
T 9/27	Pythagoras, Heraclitus	PR, pp. 23-30, 39-54
R 9/29	The Eleatics: Parmenides and Zeno	PR, pp. 55-65, 66-72

T 10/4 ****first paper due****

II. Socrates and Plato

Week 5:	Socrates and his rivals	readings:
T 10/4	Socrates: his rivals, his trail, his mission	<i>Apology</i> , FD, pp. 21-44
R 10/6	<i>Euthyphro</i> : The search for real definitions	FD, pp. 1-20

Week 6:	Virtue and knowledge	readings:
T 10/11	<i>Meno</i> : All learning is recollection	FD, pp. 58-79 (87c)
R 10/13	<i>Meno</i> : Is virtue teachable?	FD, pp. 79 (86d)-92

Week 7:	Virtue and knowledge	
T 10/18	<i>Protagoras</i> : Is virtue teachable?	pp. 1-34 (338e)
R 10/20	<i>Protagoras</i> : Is weakness of the will possible?	pp. 34-59

Week 8:	The Soul	
T 10/25	<i>Phaedo</i> : Don't cry for me	FD, pp. 93-123
R 10/27	<i>Phaedo</i> : The soul as independent	FD, pp. 123-154

T 11/1 ****second paper due****

****M 10/31 – F 11/4 – advising week****

Week 9: Ascending from the Cave

T 11/1 *Theaetetus*: the objects of knowledge

R 11/3 The Sun, The Cave and The Line: RVI-VIII

readings:

reserves

R, pp. 196-248

****M 11/7 – spring registration****

III. Aristotle

Week 10: Substances and causes

T 11/8 Primary substances and other existents

R 11/10 The four causes, chance, teleology

Categories, reserves

Ph., Bk. II, chs. 1-9, pp. 33-55

Week 11: The soul

T 11/15 Soul as the form of the body

R 11/17 A non-dualist theory of soul?

readings:

DA, Bk. II, pp. 37-71

DA, Bk. III., pp.73-103

Week 12: Virtue and happiness

T 11/22 Summum bonum, virtue

readings:

NE, Bks. I & II

R 11/24 Thanksgiving break – no class meeting

T 11/29 Voluntary action; happiness

NE, Bk. III chs. 1-5 & Bk. X

IV. Hellenistic philosophers

Week 13: Epicureans and Stoics

R 12/1 Dealing with desire

readings:

HP, pp. 5-19, pp. 28-36

Week 14:

T 12/6 Freedom and determinism, ethics

R 12/8 last class: wrapping up

HP, pp. 179-190, pp. 233-260

R 12/8 ****3rd paper due****