

West Los Angeles College

Philosophy 12 History of Greek Philosophy

Fall 2015

Instructor

Rick Mayock, Professor of Philosophy

Required Texts

There is no single text book for this class. All of the readings, whenever possible, will be distributed in class as handouts. The reading list will be subject to renewal and editing, and will be updated and distributed throughout the semester.

Course Objectives

This course introduces a survey of philosophical ideas as they arose in written form in ancient Greece in the 5th century BCE through the classic era of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in the 4th century BCE. Special attention will be paid to questions concerning the unique importance of ancient Greek thinkers and how their ideas influenced philosophical and cultural activity in future eras.

Why do the Greeks matter? What is special about their approach to learning and thinking and why did philosophy flourish in their time? We will look at the development of philosophical thinking, beginning with the philosophical aspects of mythology as it is passed on through the oral tradition and written down by the great epic poets Homer and Hesiod. We will then see how philosophical thinking develops in the birth of tragedy and drama, specifically in the works of the first great dramatist Aeschylus. The ideas of the early pre-Socratic philosophers will be examined, as well as the intellectual and cultural impact of the sophists. As philosophical thinking becomes more mature, systematic and influential under Socrates, philosophical writing finds its greatest expression in the works of Plato and Aristotle.

In order to enrich our experience of great works of philosophy and literature we will include, whenever feasible, speakers, films and music.

In addition to the assigned readings there will be occasional handouts. Students are responsible for all material given in class.

Grading Procedure

Grades will be determined by three take-home exams. The take-home exams will comprise questions that evaluate students' understanding of the material and ability to express philosophical concepts coherently. Exam questions will be given in advance of the due dates, which will be strictly enforced.

Essays with internet research and citations will not be accepted. All essays should be typed and double-spaced. Essays not in this format will not be accepted. Late essays will not be accepted.

Essays should be given to the instructor personally, on or before the appointed due date. If an essay is not handed to the instructor personally, the student will not receive credit. Essays should **not** be left in the instructor's office or mail box, or given to any other instructors, secretaries, administrators, or anyone but the instructor. Essays sent to the instructor by email will **not** be accepted.

The study of philosophy involves communication, so students are expected to attend class and to participate in class. If students are reading the assigned material carefully and do not fall behind, no additional preparation for the exams will be necessary.

The study of philosophy involves communication, so students are expected to attend class and to participate in class. The idea is to discuss philosophy and to allow ourselves to explore philosophical concepts in an atmosphere that is tolerant, stimulating and intellectually nurturing.

Attendance Policy

The instructor will keep records of attendance and timeliness of assignments. Excessive absences will adversely affect the final grade for the course.

Students are expected to attend every meeting of all classes. Violation of this regulation may result in exclusion from the class. **Whenever absences "in hours" exceed the number of hours the class meets per week, the instructor will consider whether there are mitigating circumstances that justify the absences. If the instructor determines that such circumstances do not exist, the instructor may exclude the student from the class. Three cases of tardiness may be considered equivalent to one absence.**

It is the student's responsibility to consult with his or her instructor regarding absences that would alter the student's status in the class. If a student is not present when the instructor takes role, he or she will not receive credit for attendance. If a student comes late to class, it is his or her responsibility to inform the instructor after class; otherwise he or she will not receive credit for attendance.

Cell Phone Policy

Cell phones are not permitted in the classroom. A ringing cell phone that is audible during the class is a disruption of the class and the owner will be asked to leave the classroom and will not be given credit for attendance. If the cell phone goes off a second time the student will be excluded from the class. This policy also applies to pagers, beepers and any kind of electronic device that disrupts the class.

Students are not permitted to make audio or visual recordings of any portion of the class or lecture without the consent of the instructor.

Cheating and Plagiarism Policy

The following is based on the provisions of the California Educational Code, the California Penal Code and the LACCD Board of Trustees: Board Rule 9803.12: "Dishonesty, such as cheating, or knowingly furnishing false information to the Colleges." Any student who cheats on a quiz or plagiarizes an essay will be given no credit for that quiz or essay and will be referred to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. In addition, that student will have the equivalent value of that assignment subtracted from the total points earned for the class. In other words, if an exam is worth 33 points, and plagiarism has been detected, the student will receive no credit for the exam **and** will have 33 points subtracted from the total points for the class.

Exams with internet references or citations will be considered plagiarism and will not be accepted. There is much scholarship available in philosophy, but most of what is on the internet is spurious at best. Students are warned to be cautious and skeptical regarding philosophical internet sites. All of the material needed to write the essays is contained in the assigned readings and will be discussed at length in class. Students who wish to read additional secondary sources may consult the reading list or discuss other sources with the instructor. **Any material downloaded from the internet and presented as the student's own work will be considered plagiarism.**

Reading Assignments

Students are expected to stay current with the reading assignments. Reading the material **before** it is discussed greatly increases your understanding and enriches your philosophical experience.

In addition to the assigned readings there will be occasional handouts. Students are responsible for all material distributed in the class.

It should be noted that this schedule is tentative, and may be subject to amendment.

Philosophy and Myth: Epic Poetry

Philosophy's beginnings in the oral traditions and epic poetry; poetic writings record accounts of the influence of the gods, myth and ritual on early philosophical thinking; mythos, logos
-selections from early epic poetry and hymns (Homer's *Odyssey*, Hesiod's *Theogony*)

Philosophy and Tragedy: Greek Tragedy

Writing becomes more sophisticated as drama and Greek theatre grows out of religious ritual; Apollonian and Dionysian influences on the tragic view of life
-selections from Aeschylus (*Prometheus Bound*, *The Eumenides*), Aristotle's *Poetics*, Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*

Philosophy and Cosmology: Pre-Socratic Philosophers

Pre-Socratic philosophers try to de-mythologize and de-mystify philosophical explanations by appealing to natural science

-fragments from pre-Socratic philosophers (Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Pythagoras, Parmenides, Heraclitus, the atomists), Nietzsche's *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*

Philosophy and Rhetoric: Sophists

The focus of philosophy turns to human understanding with the onset of democratic ideals and the arrival of itinerant teachers (sophists) who present rhetorical techniques to facilitate the individual's relation to the community; philosophic inquiry now includes issues of individual knowledge and perception

-selections from various sophists [Gorgias, Protagoras, Thrasymachus (from Plato's *Republic*)]

Socrates

The life (and death) of the first great philosopher, who sees the mission of philosophy as a pursuit of universal truth; the development of the Socratic method of questioning; Socrates' dialogues with the sophists

-selections from Plato's dialogues (*Euthyphro*, *Apology*)

-selections from Aristophanes' *The Clouds*

Plato: Metaphysics

Socrates' most talented and influential disciple, founder of the Academy, develops a metaphysics (theory of reality) based on universal truths

-selections from Plato's *Republic* (Allegory of the Cave), *Meno*

Plato: Epistemology

Plato's epistemology (theory of knowledge) is articulated; knowledge (*gnosis*) is distinguished from opinion (*doxa*); philosophy separates itself from poetry; Plato's critique of poetry and sophistry

-selections from Plato's *Republic* (The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry), *Ion*

Aristotle: Physics and Metaphysics

Plato's most talented student brings us down to earth to observe nature and develops the first sciences (physics, biology, meteorology, psychology)

-selections from the *Physics* (Aristotle's four causes)

Aristotle: Ethics

Greek virtue-based ethical systems find their most complete expression in Aristotle's ethical writings; practical wisdom (*phronesis*); the golden mean of moderation; the good life (*eudaimonia*)

-selections from the *Nicomachean Ethics*

Commentaries

The philosophical readings in this class are largely original sources rather than commentaries. In other words, we will be reading the philosophers in their own words rather than reading what others have written about them. For commentaries the following works are recommended:

Copleston, Frederick, S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vol.

Edwards, Paul, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vol.

Both works are in our library, and should be consulted for specific topics. Also, both works contain excellent bibliographies.

This reading list is somewhat ambitious and it is unlikely that the course will cover all of the material. The operating assumption is that it is better to go slowly and thoroughly than to rush through the material. Consequently, this list will go through several amendments and revisions. One purpose of reading philosophy is to enhance our understanding and **enjoyment**. Consequently selections are chosen as introductions to these authors in hopes that students will read more of their works.