

PHIL 3310 Ancient Philosophy

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This class will examine the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers. We will briefly survey the preSocratic philosophers before devoting half of the semester to Plato and the other half to Aristotle. The goal of this course will be to read these philosophers not as ancient relics, who can only be understood in the context of their times, but as our contemporaries, who have something vital to share with us today. We will examine how issues in philosophical anthropology (who am I? what is human nature?), ethics and political philosophy (how should I lead a just and virtuous life? what is a good government?), epistemology (what do I know? what is truth?), and metaphysics (what is reality?), are interrelated for the Ancient Greeks, as they are for us, too. We will focus especially on the moral and political dimensions of Plato and Aristotle, which isn't difficult, since those issues were their primary concerns, as well.

We will focus especially on the moral and political dimensions of Plato and Aristotle, which isn't difficult, since those issues were their primary concerns. We begin with the *Euthyphro*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Gorgias*, where Socrates argues with people who claim to know what they don't. These dialogues distinguish between philosophy and sophistry, and they show how Socrates made the enemies who eventually put him on trial. From there we devote several weeks to the *Republic*, Plato's longest and most sustained argument about justice and government; then the trial and death of Socrates to examine Plato's views about law, obligation, and the good life; four weeks on Aristotle's account of virtue, character, and human flourishing in the *Nicomachean Ethics*; then two weeks on the *Politics*, which Aristotle sees as a continuation of the *Ethics*. We will briefly touch on ancient Greek metaphysics and epistemology but only insofar as they relate to ethics and politics. Our focus will be on what makes for a good life.

Texts: *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 5th edition (Hackett)

Requirements: First, you are expected to read every assignment. Second, you are expected to participate in every discussion. Third, you are expected to turn in every assignment. Fourth, you are expected to be polite to others in class.

Grading: Your grade will be based on class discussions, 8 response papers, and two oral exams. Both the response papers and oral exams will be graded on a scale of 1-5: 5 is excellent, 4 is good, 3 is satisfactory, 2 is unsatisfactory, 1 is like a D-.

Response papers	40%
Exams	40%
Discussion posts	10%

Every response paper and class participation are required for a passing grade.

Late policy: late papers will be accepted

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

CO 1. Analyze Ancient Greek metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics.

CO 2. Compare pre-Socratic philosophers, Plato, and Aristotle.

CO 3. Reconstruct and evaluate the central arguments of Plato and Aristotle concerning virtue, justice, and the best form of political life.

CO 4. Critically evaluate the relevance of Ancient Greek philosophy for our contemporary world.

PHIL 3310 Reading Schedule

Week	Topic	Reading	Pages	Count
1	From cosmic order to moral convention	Presocratics: Milesians; Xenophanes; Sophists	1–11, 15–19, 63–73	27
2	Socratic inquiry and whether virtue can be taught	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> ; <i>Protagoras</i> (317e–334c, 348c–362a)	80–89, 114–130	27
3	Rhetoric, power, and the good life	Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> (462a–481b)	131–144	14
4	What is justice?	Plato, <i>Republic</i> I	234–253	20
5	Why be just?	Plato, <i>Republic</i> II	254–270	17
6	Education and the shaping of desire	Plato, <i>Republic</i> III	271–292	22
7	Justice in the soul and the city	Plato, <i>Republic</i> IV; V (471c–480a)	293–310, 327–332	24
8	Knowledge, the Good, and the return to the cave	Plato, <i>Republic</i> VI (484a–489d); VI 504a–VII 521c; VII (537d–541b)	333–339, 346–356, 366–368	21
9	The philosopher on trial	Plato, <i>Apology</i> ; <i>Crito</i> ; <i>Phaedo</i> (115b–118a)	90–113, 199–201	27
10	Happiness, function, and virtue of character	Aristotle, <i>NE</i> I.1–5, 7–9, 13; II.1–7, 9	577–593	17
11	Choice, responsibility, and justice	Aristotle, <i>NE</i> III.1–5; V.1–2, 5, 10	593–604	12
12	Practical wisdom, weakness of will, and contemplation	Aristotle, <i>NE</i> VI.1–3, 5–9, 11–13; VII.1–3; IX.8; X.6–9	604–622	19
13	The naturalness of the city and the critique of Plato	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> I.1–6, 8–10, 13; II.1–5	623–639	17
14	Citizenship, constitutions, and the best life	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> III.1–10, 12; VII.1–3, 13, 15	639–654	16