

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Philosophy 334: History of Philosophy: Classical Philosophy -- Fall 08
Instructor: John Humphrey, Office: AH 218R
Office Hours: MWF: 10am to 11am, 1pm to 2pm, and by appointment
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Required Text: *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy (3rd edition)*, edited by S. Cohen, P. Curd and C. Reeve.

Format, Scope and Purpose: As with any course in philosophy, emphasis will be on analysis and assessments of concepts, statements and arguments, which will encompass a consideration of their presuppositions, consequences, connections, force, worth, etc. Most of the time, class time will be devoted to getting clear on the various ideas, claims and arguments that are to be found in our readings, along with a discussion of their pros and cons, both in themselves, and with respect to their connections to other ideas, concepts, arguments, etc. Ideally, all members of the class will come to class prepared for the class period, that is, each member of the class will have read the relevant material, thought about it, discussed among roommates, written something about it, re-read it, made thorough notes about it, (or something close to most of this), *before* class begins. Still, I've been around long enough to realize that ours is not a perfect world and that occasionally "forces beyond ones control" (and occasionally rather trivial matters as well) prevent adequate preparation for class. Do not let this be an excuse for not attending class however, since it is not always the case that contribution to the discussion can be made only by those who have read the day's material. Still, students in an upper division philosophy class should be sufficiently intelligent, diligent and mature to realize that coming to class each day prepared for the day's activities is perhaps the single most controllable variable necessary to doing well in the course.

A related necessary variable is coming to class each day with the relevant textual material for the day's discussion. For better or worse, a big part of "doing philosophy" involves a close reading of the writings of other philosophers. Most often, the relevant material will be in our required texts but on occasion, I may assign readings that will require downloading material from the web.

Also, I am very serious about the format of the class being primarily analysis and discussion. As you will discover, ancient western philosophy is a very speculative and even chaotic enterprise. This is due in part to the lack of actual writings by the pre-Socratics but also because of the language barrier; what the early philosophers meant by their terms is by no means clear. The upshot is that I will not pretend to have all of the answers nor even a firm grasp of all of the major issues and arguments and philosophers we discuss.

I have my 'educated opinion' but there are a great many different ones floating about and so I do not claim to have the last word on the issues and persons we discuss. I do promise however to give vent to that which puzzles or pleases or prods or perplexes me and I fully expect that each of you will do the same. I also promise

to provide whatever insight and connections I can make between our ancient authors and more modern major figures in the history of philosophy (Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Wittgenstein, et. al.). As odd as it may seem, *prima facie*, such connections are abundant. Indeed, the famous 20th century logician and process philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead tells us that the entire history of western philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato. Personally, I do not think this is an overstatement. However, Plato himself owes a few things to his predecessors and so perhaps it is more accurate to say that the history of western philosophy is a series of footnotes to the people we will study in this course.

Grading: Your grade for the course will be determined by a variety of written assignments and contributions to class discussions. The writing assignments will be such as to satisfy the University's writing intensive requirements. Contrary to past versions of the course, there will be more writing assignments due more often but they should be no more than two or three page papers. Roughly speaking, a two or three page paper (typed and double-spaced) every other week or so should allow us to satisfy the writing intensive requirements for the course. Ultimately, I will need a total of 20 pages (typed and double-spaced), from each student, ten of which will receive my written scrutiny. It's likely that some of the 20 pages you turn in will be rewrites of some of your earlier papers. I will distribute questions for you to answer. It is possible that on some occasions, and with my approval, that you will be able to choose a topic or question that is not among the questions I distribute. A not insignificant portion of one's grade (anywhere from 0 to 20 percent) will be based on attendance and participation and contribution to class discussions. My policy on attendance is that not coming to class will not count against you but that coming to class everyday will be beneficial to you, both grade-wise and understanding-wise.

Attendance

1. Absences from 15-20% will result in a final course grade lowered by one letter.
2. Absences higher than 20% will result in a final course grade of F regardless of earned grade in the course.
3. Absence due to documented family or medical emergencies may be excused by the instructor, if appropriate notification is provided by Student Affairs. It is the student's responsibility to contact Student Affairs in such cases. Absences for university-sponsored activities (e.g., athletics, forensics, etc.) must be provided in advance to the instructor. The instructor may request that all work be completed prior to the absence.

Tentative Reading Assignments

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Read and discuss AGP, Introduction and Milesians

Week 3: Read and discuss AGP, Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Heraclitus

Week 4: Read and discuss AGP, Parmenides, Pluralists and Zeno

Week 5: Read and discuss AGP, Atomism and Sophists

Week 6: Read and discuss AGP, Plato, Introduction and "Euthyphro"

Week 7: Read and discuss AGP, "Apology" and "Crito"

Week 8: Read and discuss AGP, selected portions of "Protagoras", "Gorgias", "Meno" and "Phaedo"

Week 9: Read and discuss AGP, *Republic*, Book I

Week 10: *Republic*, Books II and III

Week 11: *Republic*, Books IV, V, VI

Week 12: *Republic*, Books VII, VIII, IX

Week 13: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I, II and III

Week 14: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books V and VI

Week 15: To be determined