

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Philosophy 334: History of Philosophy: Classical Philosophy, Fall 06
Instructor: John Humphrey
Office: AH 218R
Office Hours: MWF: 10-11 a.m. and 12-1 p.m., after 3 p.m. and by appointment

Required Text: *A Presocratics Reader*, edited by Patricia Curd, *Plato: Five Dialogues*, (G.M.A. Grube, trans., revised by John Cooper), *Plato, Republic*, (Grube, Reeve, trans.), Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*.

Recommended Text: *Aristotle on his Predecessors*, A.E. Taylor

Grading: Your grade for the course will be determined by both written assignments and contributions to class discussions. The writing assignments will likely be a matter of 10 pages (typed and double-spaced), one at mid-term and one at the end of the year. I will distribute copies of questions for you to choose from and you will likely be asked to select at least one question from particular categories (e.g. Milesians, Pythagoreans, Parmendides, Socrates, Plato, etc.). The likeliest scenario is that you will be asked to write a couple of pages or so on at least 4 and no more than 5 different questions. 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.

Format, Scope and Purpose: Ideally, class time will be spent studying and discussing the assigned reading material. Ideally, all members 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, etc., before the class discussion. 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.

Also, I am very serious about the format of the class being primarily studying 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.

Tentative Reading Assignments

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Read and discuss *Presocratics Reader* (PR), Introduction, pp.1-8, The Milesians, pp. 9-16

Week 3: Read and discuss PR, Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism, pp. 17-24, Xenophanes, pp. 25-28

Week 4: PR, Heraclitus, pp. 29-41, Parmenides, pp. 43-51; Zeno of Elea, pp. 73-77

Week 5: PR, The Pluralists, Anaxagoras . . . , pp, 53-60, Atomism, Leucippus and Democritus, pp. 79-88, The Sophists, pp. 97-107.

Week 6: *Five Dialogues*: "Euthyphro", "Apology"

Week 7: *Five Dialogues*: "Apology", "Crito", (perhaps part of "Meno")

Week 8: Plato's *Republic* -- Book I

Week 9: *Republic* -- Books II and III

Week 10: *Republic* -- Books IV, V (Handout from Reeve's *Women in the Academy*).

Week 11: *Republic* -- Books VI, VII

Week 12: *Republic* -- Books VIII, IX, X

Week 13: *Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics*: Book I

Week 14: *Nichomachean Ethics*: Books II and III

Week 15: To be determined