

ANCIENT GREEK AND ROMAN ETHICS

Sample syllabus -- mid-level undergraduate

Course description: How should we live our lives? How should we weigh the needs of the individual against the needs of the collective? For that matter, how are the needs of the individual bound up in the needs of the collective? In what virtues or qualities does a good human life consist, and how best can we understand the natures of these virtues or qualities? How best can we organize our cities to encourage health, flourishing, and happiness? How have the ways we have answered these questions changed over time?

These are some questions we will ask and do our best to answer in our study of ancient Greek and Roman ethical theory. We will read and evaluate answers given to these questions by Pythagoreans, Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics. Along the way, we will be tasked with doing our best to answer these questions ourselves, and to consider how our own thinking about the good life is influenced by the world in which we find ourselves.

Learning Objectives:

- To study and engage critically with the early history of Western ethical philosophy
- To consider critically our own, contemporary forms of moral reasoning with reference to their history, addressing sameness, difference, and relative values of the different approaches
- To develop critical reading and thinking skills
- To develop academic and professional writing skills

Textbook: No texts or other items are required for purchase in this course. All readings have been made available through the course Canvas page. These files come from our university library website.

Grading:

10% Participation
10% In-class reading responses (average of seven, two lowest grades dropped)
10% Weekly discussion boards
20% Midterm exam
25% Final exam
20% Research paper
5% Annotated bibliography for research paper

10% Participation: Students will be expected to demonstrate genuine engagement with and investment in the course content, as well an understanding derived from the readings. Students are required to prepare for each class session by completing the reading indicated on the course calendar below. Completing all readings is a necessary condition for success in this course. Attendance will be taken.

10% In-class reading responses: Seven in-class reading response quizzes will be given on unannounced days throughout the semester. Any student who has completed the reading should have no trouble passing these. The goal is to demonstrate basic comprehension and show engagement with the philosophical theories in the assigned texts. In calculating the final grade, the lowest two quiz scores will be dropped. (Hint: These will start appearing sometime around the fifth week.)

10% Weekly discussion boards: Each week, half the class will be responsible for asking one substantive question (in a post of about 50 words), while the other half will be responsible for answering the questions (in a post of about 300 words). Question posts are due before the start of Tuesday's class, and answers are due before the start of Thursday's class. Students will alternate responsibilities. A rubric will be provided.

20% Midterm exam and 25% Final exam: Two exams will be given on the dates specified on the course calendar below. The final exam will be cumulative and given at the designated time during finals week.

20% Research paper: Students must submit a research paper, due on date specified on calendar below, of between 2000 and 3000 words. The assignment must incorporate at least three secondary academic sources taken from research beyond that of course content. These sources must be academic sources from the university library, not web pages from Google. A set of prompts, grading rubric, and explanation of standards for acceptable sources will be provided.

5% Research paper annotated bibliography: A short annotated bibliography and description of research paper is due on date specified on calendar below.

(NOTE: Boilerplate syllabus content removed. See first syllabus above.)

Reading schedule:

Week 1: Introduction and Pythagorean philosophy as a way of life
Pythagorean fragments in Patricia Curd (ed.), *A Presocratic Philosophy Reader*
Perictione, "On Wisdom"

Week 2: Plato on philosophy as a way of life
Plato, *Euthyphro*
Plato, *Apology*

Week 3: Plato on courage and temperance
Plato, *Laches*
Plato, *Charmides*

Week 4: Plato on virtue and friendship
Plato, *Meno*
Plato, *Lysis*

Week 5: Plato on justice and the good city 1/3
Plato, *Republic*, Books 1-3

Week 6: Plato on justice and the good city 2/3
Plato, *Republic*, Books 4-6

Week 7: Plato on justice and the good city 3/3
Plato, *Republic*, Books 7-10

Week 8: MIDTERM EXAM
No reading -- catch up and review for midterm exam

MIDTERM EXAM given in regular classroom during class time

Week 9: Plato: more (?) on the good city
Plato, *Statesman*

Week 10: Aristotelian ethics 1/2
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 1, 2, 3, 5

Week 11: Aristotelian ethics 2/2
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 6, 7, 9, 10

Week 12: Stoic ethics 1/2
Early Stoic fragments (selections)
Selections from Brad Inwood, *Later Stoicism: 155 BC to AD 200*

Week 13: Stoic ethics 2/2
Cicero, *On the Emotions*
Seneca, *Selected Philosophical Letters* (selections)

Week 14: Epicureanism
Epicurus, *Letter to Menoecus*
Cicero, *On Moral Ends*

Week 15: Cynicism
Diogenes the Cynic, *Testimonia*

FINAL EXAM GIVEN DURING FINALS WEEK (Time TBA)