

Sample syllabus: Ancient Greek Philosophy (upper-level undergrad)

Instructor: Dr. Colin Smith (he/him)

Course description: This course entails a study of the major texts in ancient Greek philosophy, including the best and most influential writing by the Presocratics, the Sophists, Plato, and Aristotle. Questions we will ask include, what is the world made of most fundamentally and where did it come from? Is everything in constant flux, or are some things permanent throughout eternity? Is truth something common to everyone, or instead is truth merely "up to the individual?" What is a good human life, and how can we achieve this? Our goal throughout is to understand how and why Western philosophy began and developed as it did, and to recover its valuable early insights, many of which are lost to us in our own day.

Learning Objectives:

- To gain a critical perspective on philosophical theory and its history.
- To become familiar with major movements in ancient Greek philosophy while also identifying their underlying premises or assumptions and developing critical responses to them.
- To develop critical reading and thinking skills.
- To develop academic and professional writing skills.

Textbook: No books are required for purchase. All readings have been made available on Canvas. These have been downloaded from the university library webpage.

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.

Masks

Currently, we are not requiring masks in the classroom. This may change. The instructor reserves the right to mandate masks in the classroom, though there is no expectation of needing to do so. Students are welcome to wear masks in class if desired.

Technology

Students are not permitted to use or look at their cell phones during class meetings. (If a student has a need to monitor their phone on a given day, they should please let me know *before the start of class* and I will waive the policy for them for the day.) Students are permitted to use laptops and tablets in class, but are not permitted to use outside communication methods like texting or direct messages during class meetings.

Absences and lateness

Because the value of the course depends largely on the conversations during the seminars, attendance is required. Repeated failure to attend will result in lower participation grade or, in serious cases, the overall grade, at the instructor's discretion. Students are strongly encouraged to be in touch to explain absences, which do not necessarily require documentation to be excused.

Accessibility

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Students with a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course should contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) located in Boucke

Building Room 116 at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit their web site at www.equity.psu.edu/ods/. I request that students notify me as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.

Cheating

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for this course shall be grounds for failing the entire course and communication of dishonesty to the College. This includes, but is not restricted to, plagiarism or cheating on any assignment, quiz, or paper. For details on the PSU policy, see www.psu.edu/oue/aappm/G-9.html . All written work must be the student's own. Use of AI or webpages for writing is not permitted, and confirmed cases will result in a grade of zero (0%) for the assignment and likely the class.

Reading schedule:

UNIT ONE: The Presocratic philosophers, and the Sophists

Week 1: Introduction, Milesians

The Milesians (fragments and testimonia)

Week 2: Pythagoras, Pythagoreans, and Heraclitus

Pythagoras (and the Pythagoreans, fragments and testimonia)

Perictione, *On Wisdom*

Heraclitus (fragments and testimonia)

Week 3: Parmenides and the Eleatics, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras

Parmenides and Zeno (fragments and testimonia)

Empedocles (fragments and testimonia)

Anaxagoras (fragments and testimonia)

Week 4: The Atomists and the Sophists

Leucippus and Democritus (fragments and testimonia)

The Sophists (fragments and testimonia)

UNIT TWO: Plato

Week 5: Socrates and Plato

Plato, *Euthyphro*

Plato, *Apology*

Week 6: Plato on knowledge

Plato, *Meno*

Week 7: Plato on death, care for the soul, and the philosophical life

Plato, *Phaedo*

Week 8: Midterm exam

No reading -- catch up, review for exam

MIDTERM EXAM in regular classroom during regular class time

Week 9: Plato on justice

Plato, *Republic* Book 1

Plato, *Republic* Book 2 (excerpt)

Week 10: Plato on philosophy

Plato, *Republic* 5-7 (excerpts)

Plato, *Parmenides* (excerpt)

Plato (or Pseudo-Plato?), *The Seventh Letter* (excerpt)

UNIT THREE: Aristotle

Week 11: Introducing Aristotle

Aristotle, *Categories* 1-5

Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 1-4, 7, 9

Week 12: Aristotelian metaphysics #1, basic concepts and the soul

Aristotle, *Physics* (excerpts)

Aristotle, *De Anima* (excerpts)

RESEARCH PAPER ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY due

Week 13: Aristotelian metaphysics #2

Aristotle: *Metaphysics* (excerpts)

Week 14: Aristotelian ethics

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (excerpts)

RESEARCH PAPER DUE

Week 15: Course conclusion

No reading -- catch up, conclude course, review for final exam

FINAL EXAM sometime during finals week