

PHIL1010 – Introduction to Ancient Philosophy

Lectures Time: Tuesdays 4-5. (For your seminar time, see your UCL timetable)

Lecturer: Simona Aimar (s.aimar@ucl.ac.uk) - office hours: Mondays 3-4, room 202.

TAs:

Niels Christensen (niels.christensen.14@ucl.ac.uk)

Emily Crampton (emily.crampton.09@ucl.ac.uk)

Rowan Mellor (rowan.mellor.11@ucl.ac.uk)

Course description

This course is an introduction to central questions in ancient Greek philosophy. It does not presuppose any knowledge of philosophy or antiquity.

Our main goals will be:

- Getting a grip of central philosophical questions in ancient Greek philosophy; many of them, you will soon find out, continue to interest philosophers today.
- Engagement with the philosophers we study – not as historians, but as philosophers; we'll actually do philosophy together with ancient thinkers; for instance, we'll assess their views from both their perspective, and ours.
- Acquisition of philosophical skills (writing clearly, providing good arguments for a view, assessing views...).
- Acquisition of practice skills required for the philosophical analysis of texts of different kinds: fragments, poems, dialogues, lecture notes, treatises.

General overview of the topics of the course

We will start with the Milesians, arguably the first philosophers in the ancient Greek world. We'll see how they ask questions about the nature of reality, and how their views are challenged by the next generations of philosophers, including Heraclitus, Parmenides and, subsequently, the so-called Atomists.

The remaining part of the course will be devoted to the classical period of ancient philosophy, represented by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. We'll get a sense of who Socrates is by reading some passages of his most famous pupil, Plato. We'll then turn to Plato himself, and discuss some of his main dialogues (or parts thereof): the *Euthyphro*, the *Meno*, and the *Republic*.

In the *Euthyphro*, Plato asks Euthyphro for an account of piety. In the course of the dialogue, it Euthyphro realizes how difficult it is to give the right type of answer to 'What is piety?'. This is a 'What is X?' question, and Plato portrays Socrates as mainly interested in answering these questions. By answering them, we get to define things, or provide an account of them. That's how Plato's Socrates does philosophy.

In the *Meno*, we start off with the question 'What is virtue?'. It will soon lead us to difficult questions in epistemology (the theory of knowledge): how can we get to know something that we do not yet know? And how to we start to think about something if we do not know what it is?

We'll finish our introduction to Plato with bits of his major dialogue, the *Republic*. Plato does many things here, including giving us an account of what knowledge one has when one can answer a 'What is good?' question in a satisfactory way. The person who knows the answer to "What is the Good?" knows the Form of the Good. We'll try to get a sense of what forms are, and how they relate to various things: the fact that things change (but forms don't), the fact that (sometimes) we have knowledge, and the fact that (some?) things are good.

Finally, we'll see how Plato's main student, Aristotle, does philosophy. Unlike Parmenides, and like Plato, Aristotle thinks that there is change in our world. He also thinks he has the best account of change out there, and that Plato located forms in the wrong place. We'll see whether his story about how things change really is much better than what came before.

We'll then turn to knowledge and causes. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* I begins with the famous sentence that all human beings desire to know. We'll look at how he supports this claim, and why he thinks that to know X is to be able to answer the question 'Why X?'. Aristotle thinks that there are four kinds of answers to each why-questions, and that his predecessors didn't understand change partly because of their conflating the four causes. We'll look and assess the arguments he gives us for this conclusion.

Like Plato, moreover, Aristotle discusses knowledge and wisdom in ethics: knowledge and wisdom are crucial to the leading of a good life. We will look at Aristotle's theory of happiness, and ask him what the best human life is.

The course will end with a debate. You will divide into four groups, or schools: Heracliteans, Parmenideans, Atomists, Platonists and Aristotelians. Each of you will take part in the discussion from the standpoint of the philosophical school you'll be assigned to. Maybe one school will prove to be superior on a given topic, or all topics. Maybe not. We'll see.

Lectures and Seminars

The lectures are on Tuesdays, 4-5 (actual starting time 4.05). There is an additional discussion section of one hour per week (you can see which seminar group you are in by checking your UCL timetable). Seminars begin in week 1, just like the lectures. The readings for the seminars are the same as the reading for the corresponding lecture.

Please note that laptops, tablets, phones, etc. may not be used in the lectures. Needless to say, if you have a disability which prevents you from taking notes in another way, please contact me and I will gladly make an exception.

Lectures will involve a dynamic interaction with each of you. I will provide you with detailed handouts for each lecture, so that you won't need to spend all your time jotting things down. Instead, you'll be able to discuss passages and figure things out *with* me. In a sense, we'll be co-teaching this course.

Requirements

- Regular **attendance** at, and **participation** in class.
- Regular attendance at, and participation in seminar section.
- **Careful reading** is *essential* to do well in class. Please take your time to read things carefully. Some readings are short. But they aren't easy. You are expected to do the readings before the lecture for which they are assigned. You can assume you've read things carefully enough when you are able to individuate the arguments and ideas they contain, and have thoughts about their plausibility. I also advise you to read the primary texts *again* after the lecture.
- Three **written assignments** (these are ALL formative essays, i.e. graded assignments):
 - ⇒ the **first assignment** (length: approx. 400 words) is due on Tuesday, Oct 25th, at noon.
 - ⇒ the **second assignment** (length: approx. 800 words) is due on Monday, Nov 14th, at 4pm.
 - ⇒ the **third assignment** (length: at most 1200 words) is due on Monday, Jan 9th, at 4pm.

Assignment topics will be provided on Moodle, and announced via email. There is no final exam for this course. The final assignment will take the place of the exam. Details on how to submit papers can be found on Moodle.

Grading

First assignment: 15%. Second assignment: 25%. Third assignment: 60%. Participation in class and in section is also a requirement for passing the course.

Shared Feedback

After grading and giving comments on your first and second assignments, we will upload them (in their anonymous version) on a shared folder, with feedback. The goal is to give you the opportunity to benefit from *all* the feedback we will give you on your essays.

Week by Week Plan & Main Readings

Set text for this course:

Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy, Cohen S. M., Curd P., and Reeve C.D.C. (eds.), Cambridge: Hackett Publishing. (Any edition.)

Below, 'ST' stands for SET TEXT. Further readings will be uploaded and indicated on Moodle. Readings are finalized a week ahead of the lecture.

- *UNIT 1: Presocratics*

Week 1 (Oct, 4th): Presocratics (part 1) – The Milesians, and Heraclitus

Primary reading:

- passages from Tales and Heraclitus [ST]

Secondary readings:

- introductions to the Presocratics, the Milesians, Heraclitus [ST]

- Hussey, E. (2011). 'Heraclitus', in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ch. 5.

Week 2 (Oct, 11th): Presocratics (part 2) – Parmenides and the Atomists

Primary reading:

- the passages from Parmenides [ST]
- passages 2-6 from the Atomists [ST]

Secondary readings:

- Sedley, D. (2011). 'Parmenides and Melissus', in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ch. 6. [The bit on Parmenides.]

- *UNIT 2: Plato*

Week 3 (Oct, 18th): Plato (part 1) - Socrates and 'What is X?' questions

Background readings:

- Plato's *Phaedo* 96a-99d, *Apology* 19d-22e. [ST]

Primary reading:

- Plato's *Euthyphro*. [ST]

Secondary readings:

- Benson, H. (2011). 'Socratic Method', in Morrison, D. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 179-200.
- Geach, P. (1966). 'Plato's *Euthyphro*: an Analysis and Commentary', in the *Monist* (vol. 50), pp. 369-382.

TUESDAY, Oct 25th, noon: FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE

Week 4 (Oct, 25th): Plato (part 2) – Epistemology in the *Meno*: Inquiring

Primary reading:

Selections from Plato's *Meno*. [from the start to 86d, ST]

Secondary reading:

Scott, D. (2006), *Plato's Meno*, ch.4.

Week 5 (Nov, 2nd): Plato (part 3) – Recollecting Plato's forms

Primary readings:

Selections from Plato's *Meno* [from 86d till the end, ST]

Selections from Plato's *Republic*. [the allegory of the cave, ST]

Secondary readings:

Fine, G. (1992). 'Inquiry in the *Meno*', in Kraut, R. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*.

Sedley, D. (2016). 'An Introduction to Plato's Theory of Forms', in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 78, pp. 3–22. [Skip the bit on Plato's *Parmenides*.]

Plato's *Phaedo* 74a-75b, Plato's *Republic* 596a-597e (these passages tell you more about Plato's forms). [ST]

READING WEEK

MONDAY, Nov 14th, 4pm: SECOND ASSIGNMENT DUE

- *UNIT 3: Aristotle*

Week 6 (Nov, 15th) - Aristotle (part 1): How things change

Primary readings:

Aristotle's *Categories* V, selections [ST].

Aristotle's *Physics* I.7-8 [ST].

Secondary readings:

Lear, J. (1988). 'The Parmenidean Challenge', in his *Aristotle – The Desire to Understand*, pp. 55-60.

Lewis, F. (2009). 'Form and Matter', in Anagnostopoulos, G. (ed.), *A Companion to Aristotle*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, ch.10 [selected bits].

Week 7 (Nov, 22nd) - Aristotle (part 2): Wisdom and causes

Primary readings:

Aristotle on wisdom and causes - Aristotle's *Metaphysics* I.1. [ST]

Aristotle on the four causes - *Metaphysics* I.3 (selections), *Physics* II.3 (selections) [ST]

Secondary readings/podcasts:

Annas, J. (1982). 'Aristotle on Inefficient Causes', in *Philosophical Quarterly*, pp. 311-326.

Shields, C. (2007). *Aristotle*, New York: Routledge, selections.

Podcast of Peter's Adamson: ['Form and Function: Aristotle's Four Causes'](#).

Week 8 (Nov, 29th) - Aristotle (part 3): Happiness

Primary readings:

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I [ST].

Secondary readings/podcasts:

Korsgaard, C. (2008). 'Aristotle's Function Argument', in *The Constitution of Agency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.129-150.

Peter Adamson's podcast '[The Goldilocks Theory: Aristotle's Ethics](#)'.

Week 9 (Dec, 6th) - Aristotle (part 4): How humans may live a good life

Primary readings:

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1-6, X.7-9 [selections from ST].

Secondary readings:

Young, C. M. (1996). 'The Doctrine of the Mean', in *Topoi*, pp. 89-99.

Richardson Lear, G. (2004). *Happy Lives and the Highest Good*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, Introduction.

Week 10 (Dec, 13th) - Review & Debate: Arguing on Behalf of Ancient Thinkers

We'll divide into five groups, or schools: Heracliteans, Parmenideans, Atomists, Platonists and Aristotelians. You'll have to take part in the discussion from the standpoint of the philosophical school you'll be assigned to. We'll discuss a number of issues, and see how each group understands and assess the views of the other groups. Will one group persuade all the others to join their school?

Guidelines for our ancient debate: your task is to argue on behalf of ancient thinkers, and consider other views through the lenses of your assigned school. If you are a Platonist, for instance, you begin debating by assuming that Plato's views are true, and argue from this perspective. You can change your views along the way, provided someone gives you a sound argument to that effect.

FRIDAY, Dec 16th, 4pm: OUTLINE OF THIRD ASSIGNMENT DUE (OPTIONAL BUT ENCOURAGED)

MONDAY, Jan 9th, 4pm: THIRD ASSIGNMENT DUE