

Classical Greek Philosophy - PHILO 212 (Fall, 2005): Syllabus

Course Information

- Class meets Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 7:00pm to 8:15pm
- Instructor: Chris Young
- Office Hours: T.B.A.
- Email: cmy5@cornell.edu
- Course prerequisite: At least one previous course in philosophy and English 120

Required Texts

These books are all available at Shakespeare & Co. at 939 Lexington (at 69th St.)

- Patricia Curd. *A Presocratics Reader*
- Plato. *Gorgias* (translated by Donald J. Zeyl)
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* (translated by Terence Irwin)
- Cicero. *On Moral Ends* (edited by Julia Annas, translated by Raphael Woolf)

Course Work

- Course work will consist of:
 1. Three short papers (20% each)
 2. One final exam (30%)
 3. A participation and attendance grade (10%)

Course Description

What is a good life? How should we regard pleasure? virtue? friendship? political power? intellectual accomplishment? death? What attitude should we take towards our emotions? What is the relationship between what we know and believe and what we do? How can we be truly free?

Ancient philosophers were as interested in these questions as most of us are. And just as we disagree about the answers to these questions, so did ancient philosophers disagree with each other. In this course we will spend most of our time on three central texts which take up these and other questions: Plato's *Gorgias*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Cicero's *On Moral Ends*. Additional topics will include the Presocratics, and Plotinus.

Statement on Academic Integrity

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations,

obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures."

Schedule of Readings

We will work through the numbered topics at a rate of about one per class.

Unit One: The Presocratics

1.

- Topics:
- Introductory remarks
 - What is ancient philosophy?
 - Course work and expectations
 - An overview of the class

2.

- Topics: • The Presocratics: Xenophanes and Heraclitus
Reading: • *A Presocratics Reader*, pages 25-42

3.

- Topics: • The Sophists: Protagoras, Gorgias, Antiphon, Critias
• How to write a philosophy paper
Reading: • *A Presocratics Reader*, pages 97-108

Unit Two: Plato's *Gorgias*

4.

- Topics: • Who was Socrates?
• Who was Plato?
• Plato's life and work
• An Introduction to Plato's *Gorgias*
Reading: • *Gorgias*, 447a-455a

5.

- Topic: • Socrates and Polus begin to argue
Reading: • *Gorgias*, 455a-466a

6.

- Topic: • Socrates and Polus: Is it better to suffer injustice than commit it?
Reading: • *Gorgias*, 466a-469a

7.
Topic: • Socrates and Callicles: But seriously, is it better to suffer injustice than commit it?
Reading: • *Gorgias*, 469a-481a

8.
Topic: • Socrates and Callicles, continued
Reading: • *Gorgias*, 481a-491d.

9.
Topics: • Finishing the *Gorgias*
• Reflecting on the *Gorgias* as a whole
Reading: • *Gorgias*, 491d to the end

Unit Three: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

10.
Topic: • An introduction to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
Reading: • *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I (you can skip chapter 6)

11.
Topic: • What is happiness?
Reading: • *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I (you can skip chapter 6)

12.
Topic: • The human function
Reading: • *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I (you can skip chapter 6). Focus especially on chapter 7.

13.
Topic: • What is virtue?
Reading: • *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, chapter 13 and Book II.

14.
Topic: • The varieties of friendship
Reading: • *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII

15.
Topic: • Friendship and self-regard
Reading: • *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX

16.
Topic: • Pleasure
Reading: • *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, chapters 1 to 5

17.
Topic: • Happiness reconsidered
Reading: • *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X

Unit Four: Cicero's *On Moral Ends*

18.

- Topic: • An introduction to Cicero's *On Moral Ends*
Reading: • *On Moral Ends*, Book I, sections 1 to 26

19.

- Topic: • Torquatus defends Epicurus
Reading: • *On Moral Ends*, Book I, sections 27 to 71

20.

- Topic: • Cicero criticizes Epicurus
Reading: • *On Moral Ends*, Book II

21.

- Topic: • Cato introduces us to Stoicism
Reading: • *On Moral Ends*, Book III

22.

- Topic: • A critical discussion of Stoicism
Reading: • *On Moral Ends*, Book IV

Unit Five: Plotinus

23.

- Topic: • Plotinus
Reading: • Handout (Enneads, I.2, I.4, I.8, III.5)

Assignments

Your assignments should be no more than 2 pages long, double-spaced. Please do not attach a cover page. Be sure to staple the pages of your assignment together.

Avoid quotation when you're explicating a text. I want to see you try to put the ideas in your own words.

These assignments are intended to focus your attention on the texts we're reading in class. **No outside research is permitted for these assignments.** This includes Internet resources, books and articles from the library, and so on.

Assignment #1

Reading: Plato's *Gorgias* (Focus on 466a-469a)

Socrates and Polus disagree about whether the orators in the city have great power. Why does Socrates think that the orators have the least power in the city?

Assignment #2

Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7, Aristotle appeals to the function of human beings in order to reach more precise conclusions about the human good. His argument has long perplexed commentators, and will probably perplex you, if you stop to think about it. Briefly describe the "function argument" that Aristotle offers in I.7 and briefly explain how an intelligent critic of Aristotle's might go about disputing it.

Assignment #3

Reading: Cicero's *On Moral Ends*, especially Books I and II.

In Book II of Cicero's *On Moral Ends*, Cicero and Torquatus disagree about what exactly pleasure *is*. Briefly describe Cicero's main complaints in this discussion about the way that Epicureans such as Torquatus think and argue about pleasure.