

Greek Philosophy

Classics & Philosophy 270

Spring 2023



Detail from Raphael's *The School of Athens* (1509–11)

Meeting Time & Location
MWF 12–1:10 pm | GDH 105

Professor: Dr. Brandon Polite
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Office Hours: MWF 2:30–3:30 pm
office: OM 304

Course Description

Our examination in this course will focus entirely upon Ancient Greek **metaphysics** (the study of being) and **epistemology** (the study of knowledge) as they relate to the study of the natural world. In particular, we will examine the critical mode of inquiry initiated by the Presocratics and its influence on the accounts of the nature and generation of the universe offered by the two central figures of early antiquity: Plato and Aristotle.

By the end of the term, you should be able to

- **Articulate** some of the most influential views on metaphysics and epistemology in history.
- **Articulate** the influence of the Presocratics on Plato and Aristotle, as well as the relationship between Plato's and Aristotle's views.
- **Defend** your own analyses.

course details

Website: Accessible via <https://classroom.google.com>

Masks: Masks are required in class at all times. Your mask should be at least surgical quality: e.g., KN95, KF94, & N95. Cloth and paper masks are ineffective at preventing the spread of Covid-19.

Book: *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*, 5th ed., S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C. D. C. Reeve (eds.), Hackett 2016. ISBN: 978-1-62466-532-5.

Honor Code: This course operates within the parameters set by the Honor Code. Students are encouraged to talk through all course material with one another and to function as interlocutors for one another. This extends to preparing to write your prompts and essays. However, each student is required to write their own work, to cite all sources fully, and to give explicit credit where particular formulations of claims, arguments, and examples are the product of cooperative work.

Accommodations: If you have academic accommodations of any sort and need particular allowances, such as a notetaker or more flexible deadlines, please let me know early on in the term so that we can make a plan to help you succeed in the course.

Course Requirements

Daily Writing Prompts | 15 pts

For each class meeting, you will have the opportunity to select **one** significant quote from (one of) that day's reading(s) and write a **minimum 50-word response** to it. The aim of these assignments is for you to generate ideas about the readings that could eventually be developed into your papers, in addition to facilitating class discussions. As such, the grading scale is simple:

Satisfactory | 1 pt: The prompt is adequately thoughtful.
Unsatisfactory | 0 pts: The prompt is inadequately thoughtful.

You can earn up to **4 pts** for the Presocratics unit, **5 pts** for the Plato unit, and **6 pts** for the Aristotle unit. Prompts are due by class time.

Engagement | 25 pts

Engagement comes in many forms, not just attendance. It includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- Preparation:** reviewing readings & materials before class
- Focus:** avoiding distractions during in-class activities
- Presence:** engaged and responsive during in-class activities
- Asking Questions:** in class, out of class, online, offline
- Listening:** hearing what others say, & also what they're not saying
- Specificity:** referring to specific ideas from readings & discussions
- Synthesizing:** making connections b/w readings & discussions

Late Assignments

Daily writing prompts cannot be turned in late for credit, as they're meant to facilitate class discussion. But if you feel like you need additional time and would like to negotiate reasonable, extended deadlines for Paper 1 or 2 for any reason, get in touch with me prior to their deadlines. Communication is essential. **Unapproved late work will not be accepted.**

Further Information

For further information about the thinkers or schools of thought we are considering this term, the [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy \(SEP\)](#) and the [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy \(IEP\)](#) are both excellent resources. The *SEP* is recommended for more advanced students, as it is more advanced than the *IEP*.

Formal Papers | 60 pts

You will write three formal papers over the course of the term:

Paper 1 | 10 pts: 600–900 wrds (2–3 pgs) on a central aspect of one or more Presocratics' view(s).

Paper 2 | 25 pts: 1200–1500 wrds (4–5 pgs) relating a central aspect of Plato's view to one or more Presocratic thinker's view(s).

Paper 3 | 25 pts: 1200–1500 wrds (4–5 pgs) relating a central aspect of Aristotle's view to one or more of Plato's view(s).

Note:

Papers 2 and 3 will undergo a proposal and workshop process. Failure to submit a proposal or attend a workshop for either paper will result in its grade being reduced by 5% for each.

Grading Scale

A+	100 – 97.7	C+	79.9 – 77.7
A	97.6 – 93.4	C	77.6 – 73.4
A-	93.3 – 90	C-	73.3 – 70
B+	89.9 – 87.7	D+	69.9 – 67.7
B	87.6 – 83.4	D	67.6 – 63.4
B-	83.3 – 80	D-	63.3 – 60



Left to Right: Busts of [Socrates](#), [Plato](#), and [Aristotle](#)

Syllabus

1. The Presocratics			4/24	M	<i>Timaeus</i> , 27e–47e
3/22	W	Introductions	4/26	W	<i>Timaeus</i> , 47e–58c
3/24	F	Thales, Anaximander, & Anaximenes	4/28	F	No Class Paper Workshops
3/27	M	Pythagoras, Philolaus, & Xenophanes	5/1	M	No Class Work on Paper
3/29	W	Heraclitus	5/3	W	No Class Paper 2 due by 11:59 p.m.
3/31	F	Parmenides, Zeno, & Melissus	3. Aristotle		
4/3	M	Empedocles & Anaxagoras	5/5	F	<i>Categories</i> , 1–5
4/5	W	Leucippus & Democritus	5/8	M	No Class Flunk Day
4/7	F	No Class Paper 1 due by 11:59 p.m.	5/10	W	<i>Posterior Analytics</i> I.1–6, 10; II.8–10, 19
2. Plato			5/12	F	<i>Physics</i> I.1, 5–9; II.1–3
4/10	M	<i>Meno</i>	5/15	M	<i>Physics</i> II.7–9; III.1–3
4/12	W	<i>Republic</i> , 507b–520a	5/17	W	<i>On Coming-to-be and Ceasing-to-Be</i> I.1, 3–4; II.1–5
4/14	F	<i>Symposium</i> , 201d–212c	5/19	F	<i>Metaphysics</i> I.1–4, 6, 9 Paper 3 Proposal due
4/17	M	<i>Symposium</i> , 212c–222c	5/22	M	<i>Metaphysics</i> VII.1–4, 6, 10–11, 13, 15, 17
4/19	W	<i>Republic</i> , 595a–612a	5/24	W	<i>Physics</i> VIII.6; <i>Metaphysics</i> XII.6–9
4/21	F	Paper 2 Discussion Paper 2 Proposal due	5/30	Tu	Paper 3 due by 10 p.m.