

Introduction to Ancient Philosophy
Philosophy 2200F (001)
The University of Western Ontario

Class Days and Hours: M 3:30 – 4:30, W 3:30-5:30
Room: University Community Centre (UCC) 67

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course tells the tale of three main areas of Ancient Greek philosophy: Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Hellenistic Philosophy. Plato, arguably the most lively and engaging literary figure in the history of philosophy, was the first to truly engage in the rigorous and systematic examination of ethical, political, metaphysical, and epistemological issues. In this sense philosophy can be called his invention. However, Ancient Greek philosophy—and some say, philosophy itself—reached its zenith with Aristotle, who is perhaps the most influential and prolific thinker in the history of human thought. His ideas revolutionized practically every area of inquiry from logic to biology to psychology to metaphysics. Stoicism was one of the new philosophical movements of the Hellenistic period. Their ethical position was based on the idea that emotions arise from false judgements and that the true sage would not experience them. The goal of life, according to the Stoics, was to live in accordance with nature, which includes achieving a state of self-sufficiency (becoming “*autarkês*”). The other Hellenistic school, Epicureanism, advocated what is known as hedonism, where the goal of life is to live as pleasantly as possible. The Stoics and Epicureans also disagreed over the question of freedom and determinism. For the Stoics, all events, including human behaviour, are causally determined by antecedent causes. Nevertheless, what we do is still “up to us” in the sense that our own characters influence how we are affected by the world. This position has become known as “compatibilism”. By contrast, the Epicureans rejected determinism and argued for what we now call “indeterminism”. What happens is not inevitable because, at the microscopic level, the atoms that make up the world sometimes *swerve* without any prior cause, which breaks the chain of antecedent causes.

This course will provide students with an introduction to the major themes and issues confronted by these thinkers. We shall examine such questions as: What is the underlying nature of reality? Is the fundamental state of the universe motion or stability? Is knowledge possible? If so, how do we acquire it? Can we have knowledge of a changing world or does knowledge require eternal, unchanging objects (e.g. Plato’s Forms)? What is philosophy and how should it be practiced? What is the nature of happiness and how does one attain it? How many kinds of friendship are there? Is friendship necessary for happiness?

WHY STUDY ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY?

Students will find Ancient philosophy worth studying from both an historical and contemporary perspective. On the one hand, the theories and explanations offered by the Ancients are fascinating and worth understanding in their own right, even where their ideas no longer have contemporary relevance. In many cases those ideas helped set the agenda for much of the subsequent development of the history of Western philosophy and science. This course will thus offer philosophy students an insight into the foundations of their discipline. On the other hand,

many of the problems raised by the Ancients continue to be *our* problems. In some cases the student of Ancient philosophy will find solutions that have not yet been appreciated by contemporary philosophers. And even where students disagree with the Ancients, reflecting on *why* they disagree can point them towards their own solutions to these enduring problems. In this way, studying the history of philosophy can be useful in helping burgeoning students develop positive philosophical views of their own.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course has two objectives. The first is to give students of philosophy an introduction to the origins and foundations of their discipline, including the problems that define it. The second is to help students develop their ability to read and understand difficult philosophical texts and to reflect on the ideas and arguments they offer us. These are basic skills that every well-rounded philosopher should have. Class discussions, writing assignments, and exams will provide the main vehicle for assessing a student's success in these areas.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Five Dialogues (Required)

ISBN: 0872206335

Author: Plato Publisher: Hackett

Price: \$9.45

Introduction To Aristotle (Required)

ISBN: 0075536528

Author: Aristotle Edited By Mckeon Publisher: Mcgraw

Price: \$12.30

Hellenistic Philosophy Introductory Readings (Required)

ISBN: 0872203786

Author: Inwood Publisher: Hackett

Edition: 2nd

Price: \$17.85

*Students may find helpful Peter Adamson's podcasts on the history of philosophy ("History of Philosophy without any gaps"), which is available at www.historyofphilosophy.net or on iTunes (search: King's College London History of Philosophy).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Two annotated bibliographies (preceding each essay), 5-7 entries per bibliography, 150-200 words per entry.
 - Bibliography 1 due Oct. 8 10%
 - Bibliography 2 due Nov. 19 10%
2. Essay 1 (2,000-2,500 words) due Oct. 17. 35%
3. Essay 2 (2,000-2,500 words) due Dec. 3 35%
4. Participation (includes in-class quizzes) 10%

*For help on annotated bibliographies see:

- <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/annotated-bibliography>

- <http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/writing/annotated-bibliography>
- http://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/assistance/writing_services/resources/components/documents/writing_an_annotated_bibliography.pdf

**Essay word limits are *hard caps*. Papers that fall short *or* exceed those limits will be penalized accordingly. Good scholarship includes being able to make your case in the space allotted. Late papers will be deducted 3% per day. Papers that are more than 5 days late (including week ends) will not be accepted.

***All papers must be submitted through [Turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) on our website before being graded.

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.