

PHIL 31: Ancient Philosophy
Fall 2005; MWF 9-9:50am; Center 109
David O. Brink; 8062 H&SS
Office Hours: M 12-1pm, T 11am-noon, and by appt
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Final Exam: Wednesday, December 7, 8-11am

This course studies the development of Western philosophy in ancient Greece. We will concentrate on the three major figures in Greek philosophy -- **Socrates** (470-399 BCE), **Plato** (427-347 BCE), and **Aristotle** (384-322 BCE). We will examine their views on three main kinds of issues:

1. **Metaphysics** – the study of things behind nature -- especially issues in natural philosophy involving persistence and change, basic substances, and the relation between mind and body.
2. **Epistemology** – the study of knowledge – especially issues about the limits and nature of knowledge.
3. **Ethics** – especially the nature of virtue, the relation among the virtues, and the role of virtue in a good or happy life.

There is remarkable continuity in ancient Greek philosophy. Socrates was Plato's teacher, and Plato was Aristotle's teacher. But each of these three figures is influenced by Socrates's philosophical predecessors, the so-called Presocratics -- especially Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Democritus. And later Greek and Roman philosophical schools – especially the Epicureans and Stoics – responded to and developed the thought of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. We will try to appreciate this tremendous intellectual continuity by beginning with a brief look at the Presocratics and, time permitting, by ending with some discussion of the Hellenistic schools.

We will undertake a close reading of selected texts and fragments left by these philosophers, with an eye toward reconstructing and assessing their philosophical ideas and arguments. Their ideas are almost always interesting and sometimes downright paradoxical. For instance, Heraclitus believed that there are no persisting objects (“You can't step into the same river twice”). Parmenides thought that change was impossible. Democritus denied the reality of colors and smells and insisted that “atoms and the void” alone were real. Socrates thought that there wasn't anything more to virtue than knowledge and that it was not possible to act contrary to what one knows is best. Plato thought that in an ideal republic philosophers would rule autocratically. Even Aristotle, who is usually regarded as the Greek philosopher who stays closest to commonsense, believed that plants have souls. The Epicureans thought that we had no reason to fear death. And the Stoics believed that there is nothing more to happiness than virtue and that various other apparent goods (e.g. health, wealth, and worldly success) are merely “preferred indifferents”. Our aim will be to understand these and other striking philosophical claims in antiquity, appreciating both common themes and individual differences in the Greek tradition.

FORMAT

The lectures provide philosophical background and structure to the issues raised by the readings and will present and assess these issues in a fairly systematic way. Student questions and comments are welcome during these meetings. But extended discussion will be reserved for discussion sections. Section meetings present the opportunity not only for student discussion and clarification of lecture material but also for in-depth discussion of issues examined briefly in lecture. Students will profit by attending lectures and sections regularly.

REQUIREMENTS

Work for the course will consist of bi-weekly quizzes, two papers, and a final exam. The quizzes will be held every other week (generally on Fridays). They will include true/false, multiple choice, and short answer questions. They should not be too difficult for students that are up-to-date with the readings and lectures. The first paper should be approximately 2-3 pages; it is currently scheduled to be due Wednesday, October 12. The second paper should be approximately 4-5 pages; it is currently scheduled to be due Monday, November 14. Paper topics will be distributed at least one week before the due date. Students are encouraged to discuss paper topics and their plans for the paper with the TA or me. If students require an extension on a paper, they must get the extension approved in advance. Late papers (for which an extension was not approved in advance) will lose one fraction of a grade for every day late (e.g. a paper that would have received a B+ if handed in on time will receive a B- if handed in two days late). Study questions for the final exam will be distributed before the end of term (details later). The quizzes are worth 20% (collectively), the first paper is worth 15%, the second paper is worth 25%, and the final is worth 40% of your grade. All requirements must be completed to receive a passing grade. Students are not graded on a curve (that is, there is no quota for particular grades; there could in principle be a large number of As or Cs). Students can help their grades at the margins if their grades display linear progress or they are regular and constructive contributors in lecture or section.

BOOKS

The following (paperback) books have been ordered for the course and should be available at the campus bookstore.

- Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle, 2d ed., ed. S. Cohen, P. Curd, and C. Reeve (Hackett)
- Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings, 2d ed., ed. B. Inwood and L. Gerson (Hackett).

READINGS

The reading assignments are listed on the Syllabus. I will regularly indicate where we are on the Syllabus (remind me if I don't). It is very important to read the assignments on time, and it is helpful if you bring the texts we are discussing to class.

WEBSITE

All course materials and handouts will be available on the course website. You will be expected to have access to print or electronic versions of these handouts during class. You should check periodically to make sure that you have current versions of all the handouts (which are revised or updated from time to time).

<http://philosophy.ucsd.edu/~brink/courses/31-05>