

PHILOSOPHY 3310-001: ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

Professor Martin D. Yaffe
Office Hours: TR 12:30-1:45
Office: ENV 310N

SPRING 2009
TR 2:00-3:20
LANG 322

SYLLABUS

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

What makes us who we are, as modern people, must be seen in light of our roots in the ancient world. Those roots are twofold. We are heirs to both ancient Israel (more exactly, the Hebrew Bible) for our understanding of morality, and to ancient Greece (above all, classical philosophy) for our understanding of philosophy or science. To understand those roots is not just an antiquarian exercise. It is essential for our self-understanding.

Classical philosophy means especially Socrates (469-399 B.C.), Plato (427-348 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). Each was teacher to the next. Socrates, though not the first philosopher, is said to have been the first to call philosophy down from the heavens (that is to say, from its being simply cosmological speculation) and to bring it into cities and households by making it inquire about what is good and bad in human life. Since then, “philosophy” (literally, “love of wisdom”) has become almost a household word. Yet Socrates himself wrote nothing for posterity. His philosophical inquiries are preserved in writing above all by Plato.

Plato’s writings are peculiar hybrids. They are, so to speak, half arguments, half dramas. They are called “dialogues” and are designed to recreate Socratic conversations for potential philosophers. We must read those conversations both as participants and as observers in order for their Socratic teaching to emerge.

Aristotle wrote treatises. These reproduce Socratic questions and answers even for those unfamiliar with the idioms of ancient Athens (where Plato and Socrates flourished as well). Aristotle makes it possible even for “barbarians” (non-Greeks) like ourselves to learn to philosophize. In so doing, he had to fashion a philosophical vocabulary that could pass into almost any language. Our course therefore starts with Aristotle and his vocabulary, and works backwards to Plato and Socrates.

The course emphasizes close reading, clear thinking and careful writing. Class lectures, essay examinations and other requirements are geared to these emphases. Give-and-take class discussion is indispensable.

II. REQUIRED TEXTS

- A. Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Translated by Joe Sachs. Santa Fe, N.M.: Green Lion Press, 1999.
- A. Aristotle. *Physics*. Translated by Joe Sachs. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995.
- B. Fustel de Coulanges, Numa Denis. *The Ancient City*. Translated by Willard Small. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Plato and Aristophanes: Four Texts on Socrates*. Translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. rev. ed. Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Plato. *Phaedo*. Translated by Eva Brann, Peter Kalkavage and Eric Salem. Newburyport, Mass.: Focus Philosophical Library, 1998.
- Plato. *Symposium*. Translated by Seth Benardete. With commentaries by Allan Bloom and Seth Benardete. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

III. ADDITIONAL REQUIRED TEXT

Harbrace Handbook. 16th ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2006.
—or any earlier edition; or any comparable handbook concerning grammar and style

IV. OPTIONAL TEXT

Aristotle. *Physics, or Natural Hearing*. Translated by Glen Coughlin. South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s Press, 2005.

V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Daily (almost) pop quizzes or investigative reports (acceptable in specified format only) are worth approximately one-third of your course grade. These may be supplemented occasionally by optional oral reports (for extra credit).
2. A midterm take-home essay-examination on Aristotle is worth approximately one-third of your course grade.
3. A final take-home essay-examination on Plato is worth approximately one-third of your course grade.¹
4. You must earn passing grades in both examinations to pass the course.
5. Regular and punctual attendance is required. Absentees may be penalized.²
6. All examinations, investigative reports, etc., must be submitted in hard-copy, using standard 12-point font, with a single title-page clearly listing the following information *only*: course number and title, instructor (including formal title), date, name of assignment (exactly as found on the assignment instructions), and student's name and student-number.
7. Use one surface of a page only.
8. Leave one-inch margins on all sides of each page for comments.
9. Double-space everything, *including title-page*.
10. Spelling counts. So does grammar. Our authority is *Harbrace Handbook*. On the need for correct punctuation, see Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (New York: Gotham, 2004). On the need for plain, jargon-free, non-ideologized language, see Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn* (New York: Vintage, 2003).
11. Footnote citations, etc., are needed where you are relying directly on another's published work. You are expected to be familiar with UNT's policies concerning academic dishonesty: http://www.unt.edu/policy/UNT_Policy/volume3/18_1_11.html.
12. When you are citing works that have standard reference formats, you must use those formats exclusively—e.g., Aristotle, *Physics* 192b20-23; Plato, *Phaedo* 99d.
13. Carelessness or sloppiness counts against you. The burden is first and foremost on the writer to make things reasonably clear. If your writing skills do not yet meet the minimum requirements for upper-division college-level work, you may visit the University Writing Center for remedial help.
14. *Assignments that are deficient in any of the aforementioned ways may be returned with a grade of F or D*, at the instructor's discretion. The instructor may offer to read a suitably revised assignment for a possibly improved grade. If so, the revised assignment will be treated as a late submission. (See item 15, below.)
15. Every effort will be made to return written assignments by the next class period. Late submissions will be accepted if they are handed in *before* the due date for the next assignment, but they will then be graded without comments and made available at the instructor's office at his convenience. Responsibility for retrieving late submissions, etc., rests entirely with the student.
16. Handouts you may have missed will be photocopied for you on request at the reception desk in ENV 225.
17. Generally speaking, the instructor does not return phone calls. Please feel free, however, to leave a clear and concise message at 940-565-2259 (voicemail) or yaffe@unt.edu (e-mail). Every effort will be made to answer e-mail messages promptly.

¹ The final take-home examination is due in LANG 322 on Tuesday, May 12, at 1:30 p.m. sharp.

² You may consult the instructor about making up for occasional or unavoidable absences.