

History of Philosophy: Ancient PHIL 110

I. Course Content

In this course we will study the origins of Western philosophical thought, primarily by delving into the philosophy of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. We will also devote some time to the views of the Sophists and the earliest of the Greek philosophers, the Presocratics.

Many philosophical questions of concern today had their first formulations in ancient Greece. We will deal primarily but not exclusively with metaphysical and epistemological matters, including:

- Some putative explanations are natural, attempting to explain the material universe in terms of the material universe itself; some others are supernatural, attempting rather to explain the phenomena of the natural universe by appeal supernatural entities—gods, for instance. What is the difference between these types of explanations? Is one form to be preferred to the other?
- What, in general, makes an explanation satisfactory? Many philosophers and natural scientists suppose that *causal* explanations are to be privileged as superior. Why? Is that so? What, specifically, makes an explanation a causal explanation?
- Some of these questions implicate us in distinguishing objective from subjective explanations. What is the difference? What, in general, is the difference between the objective and the subjective?
- Can human knowledge be objective? If so, is there objective knowledge of moral matters?
- Where the canons of morality are concerned, should we be relativists? What, exactly, is relativism? Is this a sustainable view?
- We will test some answers to these questions by investigating a series of specific proposals in moral theory, regarding: moral facts; justice; the relation between prudence and the demands of morality; the relation, if any, between divine commands and morality; and the nature of happiness.

In the texts of the philosophers to be read this term, many of these questions arise in complex and arrestingly intersecting ways.

As the tenor of this list suggests, our emphasis in this class will be primarily philosophical rather than literary or historical—and philosophical in a living and engaged sort of way: we will want to uncover what the philosophers we read actually hold, and to determine for ourselves whether we should accept their views, that is, whether we should be persuaded that what they hold to be true is in fact true.

II. Office Hours and Contact Information:

Office: Arts & Humanities Building 447

Office hours: W 4.00-5.00 and by appt.

e-mail: CJShields@ucsd.edu

website: cjshields.com

N.b. I prefer e-mail to telephone as a manner of student contact. I make an effort to answer student e-mails promptly, but please be aware that I measure promptness in this domain in days rather than hours or minutes.

III. Required Text

Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy, 5th ed., edd. Cohen, Curd, and Reeve (Hackett Pubs: 2106) [RAG, below]

This edition is available in our campus bookstore. E-books in various formats are also available [online](#).

You may use any format you wish.

Please note that although there are many other adequate translations of the works we will read this term, the translations in our collection all meet a high professional standard—which is, alas, not something one can say with confidence about some other available translations. Indeed, at some junctures this term, I will depart even from the translations offered in our texts; I will

always signal when I do so. Still, for course discussions and the like, it is important that we all have access to the same texts. So, please do purchase this one.

Requirements and Protocol:

Students will sit two examinations, one at mid-term and at the end of term, and write two essays, of approximately 1,000 words each. I will offer prompts and instructions for the papers closer to their due dates.

Dates for the examinations:

First Examination: **Friday, 1 November**, in our regularly scheduled classroom.

Second Examination: **Friday, 6 December**, in our regularly scheduled classroom.

Due Dates for the Essays:

First Essay: **Monday, 28 October**

Second Essay: **Monday, 25 November**

The essays are to be submitted electronically in a main-stream word-processing format or (if you use something non-standard) as .pdf documents, to our Canvas site. Assignments will be accepted until 17.00 on their due dates.

Due to the extreme compression of the term, late assignments cannot be accepted; exceptions to this policy will be made only in cases of documented emergencies.

Attendance is required at all class meetings: you will lose one letter grade for each three unexcused absences.

IV. Reading Schedule

Week One: *RAG*, The Presocratics and Sophists §§1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7

Week Two: *RAG*, The Presocratics and Sophists §§10, 13

Week Three: *RAG*, Plato: *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*

Week Four: *RAG*, Plato, *Meno*, *Phaedo*

Week Five: *RAG*, Plato, *Republic* i-iv

Week Six: *RAG*, Plato, *Republic* v-x

Week Seven: *RAG*, Aristotle, *Categories*, *Posterior Analytics*

Week Eight: *RAG*, Aristotle, *Physics*

Week Nine: *RAG*, Aristotle, *De Anima*

Week Ten: *RAG*, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*