

Course Syllabus
PHIL 201 **History of Ancient Philosophy**

Summer 2017
MEI / FSU

Instructor: Dr. Charles Bonner
Ph.D. in Philosophy, Boston University (1995)

Required Texts:

Reeve, and Miller, eds. *Introductory Readings in Ancient Greek and Latin Philosophy*
Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*

Course Description:

This course will be conducted along the lines of what we call “Socratic inquiry,” meaning a form of *conversation* that deals with fundamental philosophical questions (What is truth? What is the good life? What is ultimately real?) by way of open dialogue. The class meetings will be devoted to *discussion* of assigned readings (not lectures and not power-point presentations).

Much of the content of the course will focus on the two great Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, but we will also read and discuss excerpts of the earlier, so-called Pre-Socratic thinkers, and two full weeks will be devoted to Roman thinkers such as Cicero, Seneca, and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Short quizzes and 2 – 3 page “response papers” will be given each week. Success in the course will depend very much on students making an effort to keep up with (generally brief) assigned readings, and above all on their willingness to participate in classroom discussion. (Such participation is far more important for the study of philosophy than for other subjects, since here it is not a matter of processing bullet points but of gaining an appreciation for fundamental philosophical questions.

Some attempt will be made, if only at a “beginner’s level,” to compare and contrast ancient Western philosophy with the ancient Chinese traditions of Confucianism and Taoism.

Aims of the Course:

The course is intended to give students an overview of the first stages of Western philosophy and science. This should be valuable for students of both Western and “non-Western” cultures, insofar as we are interested in understanding what is unique to the civilization whose institutions and technologies have taken on global significance in the modern age. The “breakthrough” of Greek rationalism and the rise of Roman power structures will be focal points of our readings and class discussions.

Students should gain an appreciation for the methods of Socratic inquiry, Platonic dialogue, and Aristotelian logic. They will also develop their own verbal and writing skills in philosophical thinking and analysis. Success in the course will lead to conceptual insights into the distinguishing features of Western philosophy and practical skills in verbal and written argumentation.

Assessment

Grades will be based on four components, each counting as 25% of the overall grade. In-class **reading quizzes** will be given regularly, based on the assigned texts for a given class. A **midterm exam** will be given at the end of Week 3. Short **writing assignments** will be given each week, and a slightly longer paper (5 – 6 pages) will be completed at the end of the course. A final exam will be given at the end of the course.

Schematic plan for the course material:

Week 1 will be devoted to the figure of Socrates, as he is presented in the works of Plato and other contemporaries (Xenophon, Aristophanes).

Week 2 will turn to the works of Plato, and a partial survey of his most important dialogues will be read and discussed.

Week 3 will focus on Aristotle, and selections from his *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Physics* will be assigned.

Week 4 will be concerned with the origins of the various schools of Hellenistic philosophy, including Stoicism, Epicureanism and Skepticism.

Week 5 will take up Roman philosophy and culture, focusing on figures such as Cicero and Seneca as well as the philosopher-Emperor Marcus Aurelius. More attention will be given to the historical context of the Roman Empire.

Week 6 will be a general review of the course material in preparation for the Final Exam. Students will give brief class presentations of the questions and arguments dealt with in their Final Papers.