

Framingham State University Syllabus

Summer 2019

PHIL 201 History of Ancient Philosophy

Instructor: TBA

Semester: Summer 2019(July 8th ,2019-August 9th,2019)

Required Texts:

Reeve, and Miller, eds. *Introductory Readings in Ancient Greek and Roman 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: no lectures and no 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 the goal is to enter into philosophical thinking – rather than just dealing with information *about* philosophy.)

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. Throughout the course we will focus on the Q. of how (and why) philosophy is important for *life*.

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. A **final exam** will be given at the end of the course.

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. The weekly writing exercises will be “response papers” based on specific texts and issues discussed in class.

Attendance policy, participation grade + plagiarism problem will be discussed in class at appropriate times.

Schematic plan for the course material:

Week 1 (7/8-7/12) will be devoted to the figure of Socrates, as he is presented in the works of Plato and other contemporaries. We will make an initial attempt to define philosophy as “what Socrates does.”)

Week 2 (7/15-7/19) will continue with the dialogues of Plato, and in addition to excerpts from *the Republic*, another dialogue called *Euthyphro* will be read closely and discussed as a complete work.

Week 3 (7/22-7/26) will focus on Aristotle, and selections from his *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Physics* will be assigned. Discussion will focus on particular passages that will illustrate the rigorous style of thought that characterizes this culminating figure of Greek philosophy.

Week 4 (7/29-8/2) will be concerned with the origins of the various schools of Hellenistic philosophy, including Stoicism, Epicureanism and Skepticism. Some attention will be given to pre-Socratic thinkers such as Empedocles and Democritus.

Week 5 (8/5-8/9) 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. Stoic philosophy and Epicureanism will be compared to the great “wisdom traditions” of ancient Chinese civilization, Confucianism and Taoism.

Selections (and page numbers) from the textbook will be given at the beginning of the course.