

Classical Greek Philosophy - Fall, 2006

Christopher M. Young

Course Information

Course Code: PHILO 212

Instructor: Christopher Young

Prerequisites: One course in philosophy and English 120

Class time: Tuesday and Thursday, 5:35pm-6:50pm

Office Hours: Tuesday, 2:30-3:30, and by appointment.

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Course Description

What is a good life? How should we regard pleasure? virtue? friendship? political power? intellectual accomplishment? death? What attitude should we take towards our emotions? What is the relationship between what we know and believe and what we do? How can we be truly free?

Ancient philosophers were as interested in these questions as most of us are. And just as we disagree about the answers to these questions, so did ancient philosophers disagree with each other. In this course we will spend most of our time on three central texts which take up these and other questions: Plato's *Gorgias*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Cicero's *On Moral Ends*. Additional topics will include the Presocratics, and Plotinus.

Required Texts

The required texts are available at *Shakespeare and Company*, at 939 Lexington (at 69th St.). The ISBN number is provided in case you wish to purchase the books elsewhere. Students will find it very helpful to purchase *these* versions of the texts, since the translations do sometimes make quite a difference. Please consult with me if you wish to use an alternative translation of any text.

- Curd. *A Presocratics Reader*. (ISBN: 0872203263)
- Plato. *Gorgias*. (translated by Donald J. Zeyl) (ISBN: 0872200167)
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics, Second Edition*. (Translated by Terence Irwin) (ISBN: 0872204642).
- Inwood and Gerson. *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings, Second edition*. (ISBN: 0872203786)
- Cicero. *On Moral Ends*. (edited by Julia Annas, translated by Raphael Woolf) (ISBN: 0521669014)

Course Work

Course work will consist of:

1. Two short papers (20% each)
2. The best four quizzes out of five (5% each)
3. One final exam (30%)
4. A participation and attendance grade (10%)

You will have an option to write second drafts of the two short papers. This is strongly recommended. The grade for the second draft will replace the grade for the first draft, assuming it is higher (as it almost always is).

Please note that attendance is absolutely essential. There will be no opportunity to make up the quizzes.

Statement on Academic Integrity

“Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.”

There is a complete ban on research (library, internet, etc.) for this class. Plagiarism will be punished by automatic failure in the class, with the strong possibility of further disciplinary action.

Schedule of Readings

1. **Topic:** Introduction to “Classical Greek Philosophy”
Topic: What is Ancient Philosophy?
Topic: Course work and expectations
Topic: An overview of the class
2. **Topic:** The Sophists: Protagoras, Gorgias, Antiphon, Critias (pay special attention to Antiphon and to Gorgias’s fragment on Helen)
Reading: *A Presocratics Reader*, pages 97-108
3. **Topic:** Who was Socrates?
Topic: Who was Plato?
Topic: Plato’s life and work
Topic: An Introduction to Plato’s *Gorgias*
Reading: *Gorgias*, 447a-455a
4. **Topic:** Writing a good philosophy paper
Topic: Avoiding plagiarism
Reading: Handout - “A few tips for writing your philosophy paper”
5. **Topic:** Socrates and Gorgias begin to argue

- Reading:** *Gorgias*, 455a-466a
6. **Topic:** Socrates and Polus
Reading: *Gorgias*, 466a-469a
Deadline: Assignment #1 due
 7. **Topic:** Socrates and Polus continued
Reading: *Gorgias*, 469a-481a
 8. **Topic:** Socrates and Callicles
Reading: *Gorgias*, 481a-491d
 9. **Topic:** Finishing the *Gorgias*
Topic: Reflecting on the *Gorgias* as a whole
Reading: *Gorgias*, 491d to the end
 10. **Topic:** An introduction to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I (you can skip chapter 6)
 11. **Topic:** The human function
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I (you can skip chapter 6). Focus especially on chapter 7
Deadline: Assignment #2 due
 12. **Topic:** What is a virtue of character?
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, chapter 13, Book II, and Book IV, chapter 1.
 13. **Topic:** The intellectual virtues
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI
 14. **Topic:** Weakness of will
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII, chapters 1-10
 15. **Topic:** The varieties of friendship
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII
 16. **Topic:** Friendship and self-regard
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX
 17. **Topic:** Pleasure
Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, chapters 1 to 5
 18. **Topic:** The Presocratics: Democritus
Reading: *A Presocratics Reader*, pages 79-88, plus a supplementary handout
 19. **Topic:** Background on the Epicureans
Reading: *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, pp. 3-5, 28-45, 75-80, 95-102
 20. **Topic:** An introduction to Cicero's *On Moral Ends*
Topic: Torquatus defends Epicurus
Reading: *On Moral Ends*, Book I

21. **Topic:** Cicero criticizes Epicurus
Reading: *On Moral Ends*, Book II
22. **Topic:** Background on the Stoics
Reading: *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, pp. 103-110, 190-203, 232-260
Reading: Stockdale handout (optional)
23. **Topic:** Cato expounds Stoicism
Reading: *On Moral Ends*, Book III
24. **Topic:** Cicero criticizes Stoicism
Reading: *On Moral Ends*, Book IV
25. **Topic:** Plotinus
Reading: Handout (Selection from The *Enneads*)

Assignments

General Instructions

- Your assignments should be no more than 2 pages long, double-spaced. Please do not attach a cover page. Be sure to staple the pages of your assignment together.
- Avoid quotation when you're explicating a text. I want to see you try to put the ideas in your own words. It is, however, very important to cite the particular passages that you are paraphrasing.
- These assignments are intended to focus your attention on the texts we're reading in class. No outside research is permitted for these assignments. This includes Internet resources, books and articles from the library, and so on. If you have used secondary sources or encountered this material in other classes, please indicate this in your paper.
- You may choose to write two drafts of the short assignments, and discard the lower of the two grades. Second drafts of the short assignments are due on the final day the class meets.
- I prefer that you submit assignments by email, though you may also submit paper versions. Accepted submission formats are: .rtf, .doc, .txt, .wpd, .tex and .odt. Please, please, please do not submit anything in .wps. If you email me an assignment, expect a response within 12 hours. If you don't receive a response, something may have gone wrong, so try again. **Please note: It is your responsibility to make sure that I have received your assignment by email.**

Assignment #1 - Plato

Reading: Plato's *Gorgias* (especially 466a-469a)

Socrates and Polus disagree about whether the orators in the city have great power. Why does Socrates think that the orators have the least power in the city?

Assignment #2 - Aristotle

Reading: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I (especially, Chapter 7)

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7, Aristotle appeals to the function of human beings in order to reach more precise conclusions about the human good. His argument has long perplexed commentators and will probably perplex you if you stop to think about it. Briefly describe the "function argument" that Aristotle offers in I.7 and briefly explain how an intelligent critic of Aristotle's might go about disputing it.

Final Take-Home Exam

General Instructions

- You don't need to write more than 8 to 10 pages in total for the exam, but there is no length restriction.
- This exam is a chance to show off what you've learned in the class. Originality is good, but never pass up a chance to demonstrate your familiarity with the texts we've studied. About 30% of your grade is for originality, and 70% for a demonstrated familiarity with the texts we've studied this semester.
- Because this is an exam, it is less formal than a paper. But you still need to include references to texts which you either paraphrase or cite. (Indeed, you should cite texts if only to help demonstrate that you've read and understood them.)
- Please submit your final exam by email. Accepted submission formats are: .rtf, .doc, .txt, .wpd, and .odt. Please, please, please do not submit anything in .wps.

Exam Questions

Answer **one** of the following questions:

1. Most of the philosophers we've read this semester have touched on the subject of pleasure and its value. In Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates and Callicles argue about the relation between pleasure and goodness. Aristotle discusses pleasure in connection with virtuous activity and happiness, declaring that pleasure isn't the good, though the good life is the most pleasant. Epicurus, by contrast, makes pleasure the good, though what he means by pleasure turns out to be a bit of a surprise. In elevating pleasure to the role of the good, Epicurus becomes a target of criticism from the Stoics, who claim that virtue is the good and that pleasure (and equally, pain) is in fact a matter of indifference to happiness.

Which of these views strikes you as *most* plausible? Why? Explain carefully what the view is, and why it strikes you as plausible. Why is it more plausible than the alternatives we've studied? (You'll need to explain carefully at least what at least one or two of those alternatives are.)
2. Most of the philosophers we've read this semester have touched on the subject of virtue and its relation to happiness. In Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates suggests that virtue is a necessary, though perhaps not a sufficient, condition for happiness. Callicles, his interlocutor, thinks this is absurd. Aristotle, though, agrees, and develops a sophisticated account of the way that virtue fits into a good life. Epicurus believes that virtue is necessary for a good life, but only because it is instrumentally valuable. The Stoics, by contrast, insist that virtue is not merely necessary for happiness, but is sufficient. (Notice that all of these philosophers comment at one point or another on the question of whether the wise, i.e., virtuous, man would be happy on the rack. This gives one nice point of comparison.)

Which of these views strikes you as *most* plausible? Why? Explain carefully what the view is, and why it strikes you as plausible. Why is it more plausible than the alternatives we've studied? (You'll need to explain carefully what at least one or two of those alternatives are.)
3. Most of the philosophers we've read this semester have attempted to justify claims about what is good for human beings by appealing in one way or another to nature. In the fragment of Antiphon, we find nature contrasted with convention or law, to the detriment of convention or law. In Plato's *Gorgias*, we find Antiphon's idea—or something like it—taken up and forcefully presented by Callicles - and equally forcefully rejected by Socrates. Aristotle offers us his so-called "function argument,"—a sort of appeal to human nature—apparently in an attempt to justify his claims about happiness. And later, both the Epicurean and Stoic schools offer similar arguments about what is natural for humans with strikingly different conclusions.

Which of these views strikes you as *most* plausible? Why? Explain carefully what the view is, and why it strikes you as plausible. Why is it more plausible than the alternatives we've studied? (You'll need to explain carefully at least what at least one or two of those alternatives are.)