

PHIL0186: Advanced Topics in Plato's Philosophy

Term 1, 2021/2022

Lecturer: Dr. Merrick Anderson

Teaching Assistants: Valeria Cinaglia

Time and Place: Mondays, 11am-1pm; Bedford Way (20) - room 739

Office Hours: Mondays, 2pm -4pm; Philosophy Department, office 303

Overview and Objectives

In this course we will take a deep dive into certain themes in Plato's moral philosophy. In particular, we will be evaluating his 'philosophical anthropology' - the study of earlier human beings, their nature, and what they can teach us about contemporary moral and political problems. In a number of places in Plato's dialogues we find prominent appeals to earlier periods in human history. Unfortunately, however, it is not immediately clear what the purpose of these appeals is. We will try to discover this purpose. Some questions we will ask are: When making these appeals to earlier time periods, does Plato really think he is describing history as it occurred in the past? If so, what is this history meant to teach us? If not, is the purpose merely rhetorical? And regardless of this, what do these appeals add to the moral and political teaching of the dialogues? The focus throughout the course will be on Plato, but we will also examine some of his predecessors and successors to get a better feel for the general strategy of appealing to earlier times.

Requirements and Evaluation

This course is open both to upper-level undergraduates and to graduate students, but requirements and evaluations for FHEQ level 6 and 7 are different. Undergraduates (level 6) will submit one final paper of 3500 words worth 100% of their grade. MA students (level 7) will submit one final paper of 4000 words worth 100% of their grade; MPhil students (level 7) will submit one final paper of 4500 words worth 100% of their grade. In all cases, final papers will be due on the first day of term 2 (ie., Monday, January 10th).

All students are expected to attend seminars regularly; additionally, students (especially graduate students) are encouraged to present during term.

Administrative Issues

Late Assignments: Modules at Levels 6 and 7:

Component Mark/Grade of 40.00-100.00% (and if no extenuating circumstances are granted)

- Up to 2 working days late: Deduction of 10 percentage points or 1 Letter Grade, but no lower than 40.00% / Grade D
- 2-5 working days late: Mark capped at 40.00% / Grade D
- More than 5 working days late: Mark of 1.00% / Grade E

Required Texts

- Some version of Plato's works will be required for the class. I suggest Cooper's *Plato: Complete Works*. Students can also access a translation of Plato's dialogues with opposing Greek through the university's online access to the Loeb Library.
- Most of the other texts will be uploaded directly to Moodle. This includes the readings from *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists* [G&W].

Provisional Syllabus (likely to change)

- Some weeks I will post lectures about the material in advance of the seminars. Students - particularly those who do not have a solid background in ancient philosophy - should listen to these before signing on to seminar.
- There has been a lot of secondary literature written on some of the topics we will be discussing, especially on Plato and Aristotle. Students are encouraged to read sources other than those cited here and discuss them in seminar. ***However,*** you are only required read one piece of secondary literature per class. You may pick whichever you like, but do come prepared to discuss it.

Week 1. Introduction to the Course & Core Themes.

Read - G&W: Hesiod; G&W: Aeschylus
Lovejoy and Boaz: Prolegomena to the History of Primitivism
Dodds: The Ancient Concept of Progress

Week 2. Plato's Predecessors

Read - G&W: Antiphon, Truth; G&W: Democritus, DK5; G&W Critias, Sisyphus;
G&W: Anonymous Iamblich; G&W Prodicus
Lovejoy and Boaz: 'Nature' as Norm
Bett: Is There a Sophistic Ethics?

Suggested Reading - Anderson: *Justice and Prospering*, Chapters 1&2
Cole: Democritus and the Sources of Greek Anthropology

Week 3. Plato's *Protagoras*

Read - Plato: *Protagoras* [esp. 318a-328d]
Beresford: Fangs, Feathers, & Fairness
Ferrarin: Homo Faber, Homo Sapiens, or Homo Politicus? Protagoras and the Myth of Prometheus

Week 4. Plato's *Republic*

Read – Plato: *Republic*, Books I&II [esp. 357a-374d]

Cooper: Two Theories of Justice

Anderson: Thrasymachus' Sophistic Theory of Justice in *Republic* i

Devereux: Socrates' First City in the *Republic*

Week 5. Plato's *Statesman*

Read – Plato: *Statesman* [esp. 268e-274e]

Carone: *Plato's Cosmology and its Ethical Dimensions*, Chapter 6

Nightingale: Plato on the Origin of Evil: The *Statesman* Myth Reconsidered

Vidal-Naquet: Plato's Myth of the Statesman, the Ambiguity of the Golden Age and of History

Week 6. Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias*

Read – Plato: *Timaeus*, 17a-27b; *Critias*

Johansen: *Plato's Natural Philosophy*, Chapters 1&2

Gill: The *Critias* and the Politicus

Stegman: Remembering Atlantis: Plato's *Timaeus-Critias*, the Ancestral Constitution, and the Democracy of the Gods

Suggested Listening – Ancient Greece Declassified: Decoding Atlantis

Week 7. Plato's *Laws*

Read – Plato: *Laws*, Book III [esp. 676a-683b] and Book IV, 713c-714a

Atack: 'An Origin for Political Culture': *Laws* 3 as Political Thought and Intellectual History

Farrar: Putting History in its Place: Plato, Thucydides, and the Athenian Politeia

Week 8. Plato's *Laws*

Read – Plato: *Laws*, Book X

Sedley: The Atheist Underground

Nightingale: Historiography and Cosmology in Plato's *Laws*

Week 9. Aristotle's *Politics*

Read – Aristotle: *Politics*, Book I [esp. 1252a1-1253b23]
Pellegrin: Is Politics a Natural Science?
Kraut: Nature in Aristotle’s Ethics and Politics

Week 10. Lucretius’ *On the Nature of Things*

Read – Lucretius: *On the Nature of Things*, Book 5 [esp. 772-1104]
Robitzsch: The Epicureans on Human Nature and its Social and Political Consequences
Blickman: Lucretius, Epicurus, and Prehistory

Suggested Reading – Campbell: *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution: A Commentary on De rerum natura Book 5 Lines 772-1104*

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