**Philosophy 205: Ancient Philosophy**

Class meets Monday, Wednesday and Friday 2:40 to 3:55 PM in...

**Your host:** Prof. Michael P. Wolf  
**Office:** 201 Humphrey House  
**Phone:** 7-7077  
**E-mail:** wolf@kzoo.edu

**Office Hours:** Mondays and Wednesdays 9:00-11:00 and by appointment

**Required Texts**

**What Is This Course About?**

My aim in this course, as in every course I teach, is to make you do some philosophy. Just what it means to "do some philosophy" is a matter of some debate, though. If you asked twenty philosophers what it means to do philosophy, you would get somewhere between twenty-five and thirty answers. Just which questions are important, and just how we ought to pursue answers for them are not matters on which philosophers agree. The one element that seems to be common to all these conceptions of philosophy seems to be that we must give and ask for reasons for what we believe. We may judge that some reasons are better than others, and so some views may be more plausible to us. Giving and asking for reasons is a practice that belongs to all rational animals - Earthly or extraterrestrial, human or not - and this is what we will focus our attention on this course. The goal of this course is not to provide you with information (names, dates, and famous quotes) that you can recite at cocktail parties in the future, although in many cases, knowing those details is an important part of taking part in the class. Rather, my goal here is to teach you (or improve upon) a certain kind of skill: the skill of giving and asking for reasons, and evaluating the reasons other may give.

Having said that, the more narrow and informative formulation of our course topic is Ancient Philosophy. Though there is certainly a certain ethnocentrism to this, professional philosophers tend to use the term to refer exclusively to philosophers working in the Western tradition in what we would now call Greece. This was an especially important time and place for the sort of thought that would give rise to much of the Western tradition in every field, from literature to politics to science. Though this distinction is certainly artificial and does not even reflect the actual history of the region very well (much of this philosophy was inspired, influenced or addressed by thinkers from the south in Egypt and the east in various countries), it is one that will guide our initial plan. This is largely because those who will go on to do philosophy in the analytical and continental traditions as well as those working in classics will need this material as a canon for further study and it is available nowhere else. Having acknowledged the limits and narrow scope of the material here, we should also emphasize its importance and its depth. These writers were responsible for presenting many of the ideas that have given shape to science, politics, literature, art, and our very conceptions of who we are that survive with us to this day. They also represent a turn in the method of philosophy, towards a more open and yet more critical style that has given rise to centuries of fruitful intellectual life in their wake. We cannot hope to address all the philosophy of ancient Greece, so we will focus largely on its two greatest minds, Aristotle and Plato and their predecessors, with occasional consideration of other strains of thought that surrounded them. The course will divide roughly into two halves, one devoted to their work in knowledge and metaphysics and the other to their work in politics and ethics.

I should warn people in advance about one other feature of this class, particularly those with an interest in classics and ancient languages. I am a philosopher by training, and my familiarity with the literature of this period is almost exclusively with the philosophers of this period. I am only slightly more likely than the
average person on the street to remember whether a particular play was written by Euripides, Aeschylus or Sophocles. My knowledge here is slightly below Jeopardy level, as they say. So I cannot promise to make interesting connections with fields like literature or art, much less ancient languages. If you wish to bring these matters up, you are more than welcome, but keep in mind that you may know as much or more than I do on many questions.

**Assessment**

Class participation is an important issue to me, especially in a small class like this. I expect you to come to class with the readings done and ready to discuss them. In order to get you involved in these ways and as an exercise in immersing yourself in the debates and details of real developments in contemporary bioethics, each student in this class will take part in a scheduled presentation. The presentation will involve offering an account of some debate or other matter related to some of the fields discussed in class. You will be expected to provide notes on what you expect to present a week in advance so that it may be evaluated in advance. The amount of preparation expected here is roughly the same as a five-page paper. Details of the format and topics will be made available as we progress. **This will count for 20% of your final grade.**

There will be **two major paper assignments**, each about 3000-3500 words (8-10 pages), due at roughly the mid- and endpoints of the semester. **Each of these is worth 40% of your final grade.** We will discuss topics and the way in which you should approach this assignment as the semester progresses.

I should mention a few things in closing. First, you are of course bound by the honor code here and any form of plagiarism will be severely punished. (Speak to me if you are unsure what counts as plagiarism.) This does not mean that you cannot use another source, or discuss and consult with your classmates about your assignments. I permit you to do the former and strongly encourage you to do the latter, so long as all the sources and classmates in question are properly cited in your paper. Finally, be forewarned that I reserve the right to lower the grades of papers given to me whose grammar and spelling do not meet college-level standards.

**A Tentative Syllabus**

**Class 1. (March 25):** Introduction

**Knowledge and Reality**

**Class 2. (March 27):** Pre-Socratics  
Read Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Heraclitus  
**Class 3. (March 29):** Pre-Socratics  
Read Parmenides Empedocles and Anaxagoras  
**Class 4. (April 1):** Zeno, change and reality  
Read Zeno's fragments  
**Class 5. (April 3):** Plato on the Forms  
Read Plato *Meno*  
**Class 6. (April 5):** Plato on the Forms  
Read Plato *Meno*  
**Class 7. (April 8):** Plato on the Forms  
Read Plato, selections from *The Republic*  
**Class 8. (April 10):** Plato on Knowledge  
Read Plato *Theaetetus*  
**Class 9. (April 12):** Plato on Knowledge  
Read Plato *Theaetetus*  
**Class 10. (April 15):** Plato on Knowledge
Read Plato Theaetetus

**Class 11. (April 17):** Aristotle on Knowledge and Reality
Read Aristotle Categories, Chapter 1-8, 12

**Class 12. (April 19):** Aristotle on Knowledge and Reality
Read Aristotle Categories, Chapter 1-8, 12

**Class 13. (April 22):** Aristotle on Knowledge and Reality
Read Aristotle Prior Analytics, Chapter 1-5 and Posterior Analytics, Chapter 1-4.

**Class 14. (April 24):** Aristotle on Physics and Metaphysics
Read Aristotle, Physics

**Class 15. (April 26):** Aristotle on Physics and Metaphysics
Read Aristotle Metaphysics, Book 1

**Class 16. (April 29):** Aristotle on Physics and Metaphysics
Read Aristotle Metaphysics, Book 13

**Class 17. (May 1):** Presentations on Metaphysics and Knowledge

*Ethics and Society*

**Class 18. (May 4):** Philosophy and Society
Read Plato Euthyphro

**Class 19. (May 6):** Philosophy and Society
Read Plato Apology

*First Paper Due May 6*

**Class 20. (May 8):** Philosophy and Society
Read Plato Crito and Phaedo (114d-118)

**Class 21. (May 11):** Plato on Society
Read Plato The Republic

**Class 22. (May 13):** Plato on Society
Read Plato The Republic

**Class 23. (May 15):** Plato on Society
Read Plato The Republic

**Class 24. (May 17):** Aristotle and Virtue Theory
Read Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1

**Class 25. (May 20):** Aristotle and Virtue Theory
Read Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1

**Class 26. (May 22):** Aristotle and Virtue Theory
Read Nicomachean Ethics, Book 2

**Class 27. (May 24):** Aristotle and Virtue Theory
Read Nicomachean Ethics, Book 3

**Class 28. (May 29):** Aristotle and Virtue Theory
Read Nicomachean Ethics, Book 3

**Class 29. (May 31):** Presentations on Ethics and Society

*Second Paper Due June 5*