V27.0700 / V83.0122, Greek Thinkers

Spring 1999

Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:50–4:05 p.m., 507 Main Building

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Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:30–4:30 p.m.,
and by appointment.

Overview

This course will focus on what we might roughly call the “literary” context of philosophical thought in classical Greece, taking works of Plato and Aristotle as our starting point. What I mean by “literary” is a concern for questions such as how these thinkers appropriate works by other authors and how their own writings must be understood as literary artifacts. We will be no less concerned for the philosophical content of the works we shall study, but our guiding purpose will be to explore the ways in which recovery of these works’ historical circumstances is central to understanding their philosophical purposes. The goals of the course are therefore several: to examine selected topics in works of Plato and Aristotle, to survey some related works of their philosophical predecessors, to acquaint you with important works of secondary literature, and to introduce the characteristic methods and problems of scholarship in this area. While no formal prerequisites are listed, I will expect that students in the class will have completed the first year of university study, in particular Conversations of the West and the Expository Writing sequence. While no prior course work in philosophy is required, a strong interest in the details of ancient philosophical thought is assumed.

Nearly every class meeting will begin with a student presentation. These brief presentations should identify the major ideas and issues in the day’s readings. Presentations will be required of everyone, but you are encouraged to volunteer if you have a strong preference about the day or topic you would like to present. You are also encouraged to discuss the content of your presentation with me in advance.

The papers you will be asked to write are not intended to be research papers; rather, you should view them as opportunities to deepen your understanding of the texts we will read. So while you will be invited to make use of the secondary sources we will consider in class, no additional literature should be consulted except on my advice.
Requirements

You are expected to read each of the works listed below, to attend all class meetings, to arrive at class promptly, and to participate actively in class discussion. Three papers and a class presentation are required. The first two papers, respectively on Aristotle and the “Pre-Socratics,” should be five to six pages; the final paper, on Plato, should be eight to ten pages. All papers should be typed double-spaced and should conform to the Chicago Manual of Style bibliographical format “A.” In addition, brief written assignments and in-class writing exercises may sometimes be required, as well as some supplemental reading. All work will be graded as submitted, with no opportunity for revision, and credit will be deducted for poor grammar and spelling.

In determining your grade, I will weigh your completion of the course requirements approximately as follows; bear in mind, however, that you are expected to complete every assignment in order to receive a passing grade for the class.

- Participation................................................... 10%
- Two (2) Short Papers @ 20% each........................ 40%
- Final Paper.................................................... 35%
- Class Presentation............................................ 15%

Note well the following policies. A failing grade may be assigned to any student with more than one (1) unexcused absence from class. Late work will not be accepted. Incompletes will be considered only in cases of documented medical emergency or other comparably grave circumstances. In the event than you are for good reason unable to attend class, you are expected to contact me in advance (or as soon as is practicable) by telephone or e-mail.

Bibliography

The following books are required. Please be certain to purchase the editions listed below. All have been ordered through the N.Y.U. Book Center.


Photocopies of the following required readings are available for purchase at Unique Copy Center, 252 Greene Street.


Schedule of Classes

Please complete the readings prior to the class meeting at which they will first be discussed. Be sure to bring the appropriate texts to class.

W 1/20: Introduction.


M 2/1: Aristotle, *Physics, A.*
W 2/3: Aristotle, *Physics, B.*

W 2/10: Introduction to the “Pre-Socratics.”

M 2/15: Holiday.

M 2/22: Heidel, “Qualitative Change in Pre-Socratic Philosophy.”
W 2/24: Anaximander; Anaximenes.

M 3/1: Parmenides, fragment 3. (Reading to be distributed.)
W 3/3: Parmenides, fragment 8. (Reading to be distributed.)

M 3/8: Heraklitos.
W 3/10: Empedokles; Anaxagoras.

W 3/17: Spring Break.


M 3/29: Plato, *Republic*

M 4/5: Plato, *Phaedrus.*
W 4/7: Plato, *Phaedo.*

W 4/14: Kahn on Plato.

M 4/19: Plato, *Timaeus.*

M 4/26: Plato, *Timaeus.*

M 5/3: Conclusion.

W 5/12: 12:00 m.................................................................Paper III due.