

HUMA 11500/7: Philosophical Perspectives I

Time and Place: Tuesday/Thursday, 12:30-1:50, Cobb 119

Instructor: Ryan Simonelli

Email: simonelli@uchicago.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 3:00-5:00 or by appointment in Rosenwald 216

Writing Specialist: Nick Nurre

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1 Course Overview

What is the value of knowledge or understanding? From Socrates's famous pronouncement that "the unexamined life is not worth living" to Aristotle's claim that the contemplative life is the happiest, the idea that knowledge or understanding is a distinctive human good—indeed, perhaps the highest of all goods—is a founding thought of Ancient philosophy which animates the whole of the Western philosophical tradition. In this course (the first in a sequence of three courses jointly aimed at introducing students to this tradition), we will explore this thought as it is developed in the work of the three greats of Ancient Greek Philosophy: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. We will also look at a tragic counterpoint to it in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. Classical readings will be supplemented by several more recent writings relevant to or reflecting on the Ancient philosophical tradition.

2 Course Requirements and Expectations

Papers: There will be four 4-5 page papers, but only the top three count for your grade, each one being worth 20% of the total grade. If you do the first three, and you're happy with your grades for those, you don't need to do the fourth. Alternately, you're free to not do any one of the four papers, if you're happy accepting the grade you get for all of the other ones. However, if you can, I recommend doing all four not just to better your grade, but also to practice your philosophical writing skills.

Extensions and Late Work Policy: I understand that things (both academic and non-academic) can come up that make it difficult to complete work by the designated due dates and that a few days of extra time can sometimes make

the difference between a bad paper and a good one. So, if there's a legitimate reason you cannot turn in your paper on time, I'm generally willing to grant an extension. The amount of extra time granted will be decided on a case by case basis, based on needs. If you do need an extension, please do so as soon as you know you'll need it. Late work submitted without an extension having been granted will be penalized by 5 points for each day that it is late.

Group Presentation: There will be one group presentation on contemporary interpretations of *Oedipus Rex*, worth 10% of the total grade. Each group of 4-5 students will read one article by a contemporary philosopher and prepare a 10 minute presentation on it, followed by a 5 minute Q&A session with the class. Sign ups will be posted a week prior to the presentation.

Participation: Participation is worth 30% of the total grade. This comes in three forms, each worth 10% of your total grade. First, for *one of the two* classes each week you are expected to submit a discussion post—either a question initiating a discussion or a follow-up to a posted question—prior to 8am that class day. These can be very simple questions or thoughts, and you don't need to spend a lot of time constructing them. The point of these discussions is just to get you thinking critically about the texts before class and to give us a jumping-off point in class discussion. Discussion questions and responses are to be submitted in the "Discussions" section of the Canvas page. The second 10% is participation in class discussions. A significant portion of each class will be dedicated to class discussion. Your grade for engagement in these discussions is based not just on how often you speak but also, and to no less of an extent, how well you listen to your fellow classmates when they speak. Finally, 10% of your participation grade is participation in writing seminars, explained below.

Writing Seminars: Writing is the main medium of philosophy, and a principle aim of this course is to bring you to the point where you are able to do philosophy yourself in this medium, critically reconstructing and evaluating philosophical arguments in writing. The assignments are geared towards this end and, to aid you in achieving it, there is a dedicated writing specialist, Nick Nurre, who will help you learn the ropes of academic and specifically philosophical writing. Nick will hold three writing seminars throughout the quarter in which you'll receive instruction on how to write philosophy essays and have the chance to workshop your essays with Nick and your classmates.

Readings: The three books that you need to purchase for the course are the following:

- Plato. *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, Second Edition (Hackett Classics). Translated by G.M.A. Grube and Revised by John M. Cooper. Hackett: 2002.
- Sophocles. *Theben Plays* (Hackett Classics). Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruff. Hackett: 2003.

- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford World Classics). Translated by David Ross with an Introduction and Notes by Lesley Brown. Oxford University Press: 2009.

It is important that you get these specific editions of these texts. They are all available at the Seminary Co-op bookstore, and it's recommended that you get them there if you can. All other readings will all be posted on the Canvas site under the "Files" section.

3 Diversity and Accessibility

Diversity: As an instructor, I am actively committed to creating an inclusive classroom environment where diverse backgrounds and viewpoints are recognized, respected, and valued. If there is anything you believe I should be doing differently, I welcome any feedback both during and outside of class. I pledge to take any comments regarding my teaching or content seriously and without defensiveness.

Accessibility: The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations.

Phone: (773) 702-6000
Email: disabilities@uchicago.edu

Class Schedule

Class 1, Tuesday 9/27: Introduction

No Assigned Reading

Class 2, Thursday 9/29: The Euthyphro

Reading: Plato, "Euthyphro"

Class 3, Tuesday 10/4: The Apology

Main Reading: Plato, "Apology"

Optional Background Reading: Aristophanes, "Clouds" excerpt (Canvas)

Class 4, Thursday: 10/6: The Crito

Reading: Plato, "Crito"

Class 5, Tuesday 10/11: Obedience and Disobedience in Plato and MLK

Readings:

King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

Marcou, "Obedience and Disobedience in Plato's Crito and Apology"

First Essay Due Before the Start of Class 6

Class 6, Thursday 10/13: Phaedo

Reading: Plato, "Phaedo," Beginning to 87c (p. 126)

Class 7, Tuesday, 10/18: Phaedo, Continued

Reading: Plato, "Phaedo," 87d (p.126) to end

Sign Up Link for Group Presentations Posted

Class 8, Thursday 10/20: Oedipus

Reading: Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, lines 1-862

Optional Background Reading: Lev, *A Short Introduction to Greek Theatre*, excerpt

Class 9, Tuesday, 10/25: Oedipus, Continued

Reading: Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, lines 863-1530

Additional Reading: Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, excerpt.

Class 10, Thursday, 10/27: Oedipus, Modern Interpretations

Readings (only required to read the one you signed up for, others optional):

Carroll, "Oedipus Tyrannus and the Cognitive Value of Literature"

Nussbaum, "The Oedipus Rex and the Ancient Unconscious"

Leer, "Knowingness and Abandonment"

Williams, "Recognizing Responsibility"

Hagberg, "In the Ruins of Self-Knowledge."

Second Essay Due Before the Start of Class 11

Class 11, Tuesday, 11/1: Republic

Reading: Plato, *Republic*, end of Book Five (473d) through book Six

Class 12, Thursday, 11/3: Republic, Continued

Reading: Plato, *Republic*, Book Seven

Tuesday, 11/8: Election Day, No Class. Go vote!

Class 13, Thursday, 11/10: Ethics: The Human Good

Reading: Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book One

Class 14, Tuesday, 11/15: Ethics: Moral Virtue

Reading: Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book Two

Third Essay Due Before the Start of Class 15

Class 15, Thursday, 11/17: Ethics: Intellectual Virtue

Reading: Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book Six

Thanksgiving Break

Class 16, Tuesday, 11/29: Ethics: Happiness

Reading: Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book Ten

Class 17, Thursday, 12/1: Wrapping up

Reading: Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics"

Class 18, Tuesday, 12/3: Open Discussion, Donuts

Reading Period: Attendance Optional!!

Final Essay Due Friday, December 9 at 11:59pm