

PHIL V2101 History of Philosophy I—Pre-Socratics through Augustine

Fall 2020

Location: Zoom

Time: Monday/Wednesday 1:10-2:25pm EST

Instructor: Katja Maria Vogt (kv2101@columbia.edu)

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Welcome to the Online-Version of History of Philosophy I

In the Fall 2020, we are offering History of Philosophy I as an online class. A lot of effort has gone into restructuring the course for remote teaching, adding components to the class that did not exist in the past, etc. Please feel welcome to be in touch with any questions and suggestions that you may have.

Philosophy involves practicing how to formulate ideas and arguments. Hence, the class offers a number of opportunities to work through the ideas and arguments in ancient philosophy, many of which are still relevant today, both in writing and in oral discussion.

Office Hours

There'll be individual office hours as well as group office hours. Please make use of these opportunities, the TAs and I want to talk to every single student!

Recitation Section

Please sign up for a section right at the beginning of the semester.

Asynchronous Learning: Mini Lectures + Handouts

For every lesson, you're expected to do three things on your own time, asynchronously:

- read the primary text closely,
- work through the handouts carefully,
- watch two mini lectures, maybe repeatedly, each of which ends with a question.

Synchronous Learning

Synchronous class time will focus on discussion, questions from students, and on looking more closely at important issues.

Active Learning

We'll use the "polling" tool in Zoom to take votes on interpretive and philosophical puzzles. In this context, "voting" typically means that you decide which of several theories or ideas you find more/less compelling. We will use "breakout rooms" to offer occasions for you to discuss the options with peers.

Study Groups

There are no joint assignments in this course; everyone is graded only on their own work. Nevertheless, you are expected to participate in a 3-student study group. The purpose of the study groups is that

- you have a chance to talk through the material with peers,
- you can study together for assignments and exams.

We assign you to a study group. That said, there can be reasons for wanting to switch study groups, for example, because of difficulties managing different time zones. Don't worry, there's always the option to switch, just write to your section TA. The important thing is that you are part of a study group.

Study Groups: second Round

After 5 weeks, we'll ask everyone to join a different study group. That is, you'll get a chance to see how others are working and how they are thinking about the material.

Zoom etiquette

Sometimes there's reason to switch off the video, for example, when one's internet connection isn't working well (we've all been there...). But we ask you to "be there" as much as you can, joining the class with your video switched on whenever possible. As you can imagine it's much easier to teach if one sees the students. And your fellow students should be able to see you and you see them.

You are welcome to use background images. Not all computers work for this, so don't worry if it doesn't work for you. Here's how you can check whether it works. In Zoom, go to "Preferences" and "Virtual background." Add a photo and make it your background.

Please use your real name as your Zoom name. Ideally you use your full name, but it's also fine if you use your first name or a version of your first name. We want to be able to address you by name.

Course Description

The course offers an introduction to ancient philosophy. It does not presuppose any prior knowledge of philosophy or antiquity.

The course offers:

- an introduction to central questions in ancient philosophy,
- an introduction to questions in ancient philosophy that continue to interest philosophers today,
- exercises and assignments that help you practice oral and written philosophical skills,
- an introduction to a wide range of formats in which ancient philosophers engage in philosophical thought, including poems, dialogues, and treatises.

We start with Parmenides, one of the main figures in Presocratic philosophy. We explore his influence by asking how the atomists—Leucippus and Democritus—engage with his theses.

The largest part of the course will be devoted to the so-called classical period of ancient philosophy, represented by Plato and Aristotle. Our study of Plato begins with the *Euthyphro*. In the *Euthyphro*, Plato asks his interlocutor, Euthyphro, for an account of piety. As the dialogue proceeds, it becomes clear that it is difficult to give the right kind of answer to a "What is X?" question (in this case "What is piety?"). According to Plato's portrayal of him, Socrates is interested in definitions, or accounts of things. With any object of study, he wants to know *what it is*.

Next we turn to the *Meno*, where similar problems are explored, this time via the question "What is virtue?" How can we search something that we do not know? If we do not know what virtue is, can we even begin to think about virtue? Are we doomed to be ignorant?

In the *Republic*, Plato presents an account of the kind of knowledge needed to satisfactorily answer a “What is X?” question. The person who knows the answer to “What is the Good?” knows the Form of the Good. She knows an intelligible, abstract entity: the Good. Our study of the *Republic* shall focus on what precisely this means. What are Plato’s Forms? How should we understand his distinction between being and becoming, and how does it relate to Plato’s distinction between knowledge and belief? Why is knowledge so important to our lives?

In Aristotle, we begin with some excerpts from the *Topics* (a book on method). We study selections from the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Book I of the *Metaphysics*. Like Plato, Aristotle discusses knowledge and wisdom in ethics: knowledge and wisdom are integral to the leading of a good life. We study Aristotle’s theory of action, his conception of happiness, his notion of practical wisdom, and his discussion of the best human life.

Metaphysics I begins with the famous sentence that all human beings desire to know. We shall ask what this means, and how Aristotle argues for this claim. It is a key Aristotelian proposal that knowledge is concerned with ‘the why.’ The knowledgeable or wise person can explain why things are the way they are. She knows the first causes and first principles of things. Aristotle develops a theory according to which there are four kinds of causes. In *Metaphysics* I, he reviews the positions of his predecessors, the Presocratics and Plato, arguing that they came up with preliminary versions of these four kinds of causes.

We then turn to Hellenistic philosophy. We briefly look at Epicurean atomism, a theory which aims to improve on Presocratic atomism. Arguably, Epicurean atomism is not vulnerable to Aristotle’s objections, at least not in the same way in which PreSocratic atomism is. These questions lead us to study some brief passages from Aristotle’s *Physics*.

Epicurus coins the notion of a *criterion of truth*, a notion that also becomes central in Stoic philosophy and to the debates between Stoics and Skeptics. We discuss some key Hellenistic arguments regarding knowledge, belief, and the criterion of truth. The course ends with a discussion of St. Augustine’s theory of knowledge, which anticipates arguments that are associated with Descartes.

Requirements

- Careful reading is essential to do well in class. You are expected to read the texts prior to the class for which they are assigned.
- Prior to every class, you receive a handout. You are expected to use the handout to prepare for class and to study for assignments.
- Every week, you receive several recorded mini lectures, devoted to specific themes we cover. You are expected to watch the videos on your own time, asynchronously. While the recorded lectures remain online so that you can watch them as often as you like, it is crucial to be an *active* listener and to budget a bit of time for this component of the class.
- Participation in class and in your section. You’re not required to post comments/questions on the Discussion Board, but contributing to the Discussion Board is one way of meeting the participation requirement. It’s also a way of getting asynchronous input. I will designate 1 hour per week, and the TAs will each designate 30 minutes per week (times TBD), to live chatting on the Discussion Board. This is an opportunity to ask questions, about the video recordings, readings, and material in general. We will aim for times that speak to a range of time zones.
- Regular attendance at, and participation in synchronous class meetings. Our synchronous meetings will be *shorter than the regular time (details TBD)*. This plan responds to two considerations: (i) while it can

be difficult to sustain attention during a long day of in person classes, and while we are all of us getting better at teaching/learning in online formats, there may be such a thing as “Zoom fatigue”; (ii) you are receiving significant chunks of my lectures as recorded “mini lectures” that you are watching asynchronously.

- Regular attendance at, and participation in discussion section.
- Papers: 10 “votes” on a philosophical puzzle.
 - These votes are taken on the questions that we also use for “polls” in class.
 - The prompts are explained in the video lecture and on the handout. If in doubt, use the handout.
 - Typically, there are four prompts per week. This means that you have a lot of choices for topics to write on. However, please *think through all* prompts; we’ll discuss some of them in class, and you should be prepared for these discussions.
 - You submit your vote through Courseworks combined with *reasons* for your vote.
 - 7 of your “votes” should come with a 120-140 words rationale. At least two short assignments must be submitted by September 21.
 - 2 of your “votes” should come with a 250-280 words rationale. At least one mid-length assignment must be submitted by October 5.
 - 1 long “vote” with a c. 500 words rationale, to be submitted at the latest by November 18, on any prompt distributed prior to November 18.
 - It’s up to you which prompts you use for the longer assignments.
 - Often, several replies are defensible. We grade the rationale you submit, rather than the vote itself.
- A take-home, multi-question final examination.
- You are expected to read emails associated with this class.

Grading

- Participation in class, discussion board, participation in section 15%.
- Seven short votes (120-140 words each) 25%.
- Two mid-length votes (250-280 words each) 20%.
- One long vote (c. 500 words) 15%.
- Take-home multi-question final examination 25%.

Readings

Please make sure that you have access to the following books (which have been ordered at BookCulture near campus, but are widely available):

- *Early Greek Philosophy*, tr. and with an introduction by Jonathan Barnes (Penguin).
- *Plato: Five Dialogues*, ed John Cooper (Hackett: Indianapolis, 2002) + *Plato’s Republic*, translated Grube rev. Reeve (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1992) OR *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1996). [It’s significantly less expensive to purchase the two smaller volumes, but if you’re planning to take other ancient philosophy classes, you can consider the *Complete Works* edition.]
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Broadie/Rowe, Oxford University Press). [Please let me know if you have questions about different editions of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.]
- Additional readings can be downloaded through Courseworks/Canvas. For the first week of classes, I will upload the readings to Courseworks. That is, it’s no problem if you don’t yet have any books at the beginning of the semester.

Outline

Please note that the syllabus is constructed such as to permit some flexibility. Reading assignments for classes may be modified as we go along; please look out for class emails!

Sept 9: Intro and Thales

Thales: all fragments in Barnes ch. 2, with special attention on Aristotle, *Met.* 983b6-11, 17-27.

Sept 14 and 16: Parmenides, Melissus, Leucippus, Democritus

Parmenides: all fragments in Barnes ch. 9, esp. 28 B 8.1-52.

Melissus: first fragment in Barnes, ch. 10 (Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics* 103.13-104.15).

Sept 21: Leucippus and Democritus

Leucippus: first fragment in: Barnes ch. 20 (Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics* 28.4-15).

Democritus: first and second fragment in ch. 21, I Atomism (Simplicius, *Commentary on On the Heavens* 294.30-295.22 and Aristotle, *Met.* 985b4-20).

Sept 23: Socrates

Selections on Socrates' life and philosophy from Plato's *Apology* 18a-22e and *Phaedo* 96a-99d.

Sept 28: "What is X?"-questions

Plato's *Euthyphro*

Sept 30: Guest Speaker on Parmenides

This session is part of the Workshop in Ancient & Contemporary Philosophy.

Guest speaker: Oliver Primavesi, LMU, "The Path to Revelation: On Light and Night in Parmenides' Prooimion."

Commentators: Margaret Corn (Columbia), Luke Lea (Columbia)

Oct 5: "What is X?"-questions (continued)

Plato's *Euthyphro*

Oct 7, 12, 14: Is investigation possible?

Plato's *Meno*

Oct 19 and 21: Virtue and the soul

Plato's *Republic*, Book IV

Oct 26 and 28: Being and becoming, knowledge and belief

Plato's *Republic*, selections from Books V-VII

Nov 4, 9 and 11: Aristotle on method and on the good human life

Aristotle's *Topics* I (selections).

Nicomachean Ethics Book I, II.1-6

Nov 16, 18 and 23: Aristotle on wisdom and causes

Aristotle's *Metaphysics* I (on Courseworks)

Thanksgiving Break

Nov 30, Dec 2 and 7: Epicurus, Extracts from Aristotle's *Physics*, Zeno's paradoxes

All readings on Courseworks. Fragments on physics 4A, B; 5 A, B; 6A; 7 A, B; 8 A, B; 9 A, B, C; 10 A, B; 11 A, B, D, E; 15A, B, C, D. Aristotle, *Physics* IV.7 and 8 (the section which is online). *Early Greek Philosophy*, Barnes, section on Zeno. Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics* 138.3-6, 138.29-140.6, 140.18-141.11.

Dec 7 and 9: Stoics and Skeptics

All readings on Courseworks. Fragments on virtue and on the theory of knowledge, some Skeptic arguments and Stoic responses. 60 (all), 61 (all), 39 (all), 40 (all), 41 (all).

Dec 14: Augustine on knowledge

Passages from *The Trinity* on knowledge (on Courseworks).

Preliminary schedule of assignments

- At least two short assignments must be submitted by September 21.
- At least one mid-length assignment must be submitted by October 5.
- The longest assignment must be submitted at the latest by November 18.
- Final exam, take-home, due date TBD. Multi-question exam, covering a range of texts. Specifics will be announced in class and you'll receive study questions ahead of time.

University/course policies

Disability Services

If you have a disability or impairment that requires special accommodation, please make sure to get in touch with the Office of Disability Services <<http://health.columbia.edu/disability-services>>. All requests must go through this office, which grants special accommodations. I will make every effort to help, so please get in touch with me too.

Academic Integrity and Honor Code

Please consult Columbia University's policies on academic integrity as well as Columbia's honor code:

<http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>

<https://www.college.columbia.edu/ccschonorcode>

These policies explain Columbia University's academic regulations and how you can safeguard the integrity of your original work. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the details of what constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty. You are expected to confirm to these policies in your academic work. It is important that you understand that academic dishonesty can lead to disciplinary action, including failure in the course and suspension, or even expulsion, from the University.