

Origins of Greek Philosophy

Phil/CAMS 499

Pennsylvania State University at the Athens Centre

MW 2-4p, 20 Jan – 16 Apr 2014

Instructor: Christopher Moore

Departments of Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies and of Philosophy

Email: c.moore@psu.edu

Required Texts

Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Harvard, 1985)

Guthrie & Fideler, ed., *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library* (Phanes, 1987)

Richard McKirahan, ed., *Philosophy Before Socrates*, 2nd ed. (Hackett, 2011)

Plato, *Five Dialogues*, Grube, ed. (Hackett, 2002)

Plato, *Euthydemus*, Sprague, ed. (Hackett, 1993)

[Other texts will be distributed by the instructor.]

I recommend buying these used online (e.g., Amazon.com), unless you can find them at a large independent bookstore near home. Ensure you have the editions indicated.

Course description

We seek to understand the origins of Greek *philosophia* (“philosophy”). We will investigate the reasons certain ways of carrying on a conversation, disciplining oneself, seeking matters of highest value, and investigating the world and human society came to seem distinct from other important intellectual, investigative, and spiritual practices. In particular, we will distinguish *philosophia* from disciplines we might now call religious expertise, political leadership, natural history, linguistics, and self-improvement. We will be sensitive to the contributions the urban environment, the natural environment, and the international environment—all to which our semester-long situation in Attica will expose us—provide to this development and differentiation.

We hypothesize the importance of Pythagoras (c.570-c.495) to the origins of the discipline as such, though as a practitioner of wisdom he provides evidence only of one way of going about life philosophically. We will study this man and his travels across the Eastern Mediterranean as he gathered up wisdom-literatures from surrounding nations and trained the young in techniques of civic government. Since we can understand his novelty and power only against the background of Greek religion and its sage traditions, we will first study the way piety, reflection on the transcendent, and the mythological underpinnings of daily ritual influenced Greek intellectual life. As soon as Pythagoras distinguished himself from his predecessors—theologically, pedagogically, and personally—he became the target of criticism. We turn thus to Heraclitus (d. c.490)

and Xenophanes (570-480), intensely brilliant iconoclasts who lambasted the increasingly famous Pythagoras from their new-yet-old cultural perches.

We spend the second half of the semester studying the high points of philosophy in Athens. Plato's dialogues of Socrates (469-399) provide the most vivid, if late, insight into the style and manner of philosophical discussion of Socrates' generation. The *Charmides* incorporates thoughts about foreign and mystical medicine, aristocratic virtue, Delphic prescriptions, imperial and oligarchical aggression, and quotidian educational method—all directly pertinent to our inquiry into the nature of the earliest self-consciously “philosophical” practices. The *Euthydemus* pits Socrates against a pair of fantastic debaters in a contest for potential students. The *Phaedo*, depicting Socrates' day before his execution by the Athenians (due to the trial depicted in the *Apology*), unites Socrates with some Pythagorean friends in a conversation about the afterlife of the soul and the nature of “true philosophy.”

After the depictions of Socrates, we turn to Plato and Aristotle themselves. The *Epistles* (“letters”) attributed to Plato, though possibly forgeries, appear to tell the real life of a fourth-century philosopher devoted to political education. The *Protreptic* of Aristotle, recently reconstructed from later quotations and summaries, appears to stage a debate among three philosophers each with his own unique attitude toward his practice.

Class time

The purpose of this class is to read and discuss some primary and secondary texts crucial to the reconstruction and understanding of the origins of Greek philosophy. We aim to engage with these texts with such vigor, curiosity, and completeness that we come to appreciate the challenges that remain to making sense of this important intellectual and social movement. We may find as well that our personal perplexities and frustrations in facing the world have their profound articulation in these earlier authors, and that by studying the history of philosophy we may study ourselves.

Reading Presentations

Most sessions will begin with a 15-minute presentation by a student. These should include two elements, incorporated however you wish. First, they should outline the structure of the reading, and state the significance of that structure (as seen from various levels of abstraction). Second, they should direct us to the most intriguing, complicated, important, thematically significant, or otherwise fascinating aspects of the assigned texts, and talk us through those aspects.

Presentations will be graded in terms of their clarity, coherence, effectiveness, insight, imagination, and improvement on everybody else's previous presentations.

Class Discussions

Most of the remaining time in each session will involve diverse forms of conversation about the works we read. We will stick close to the texts, aiming to use our common knowledge and diverse perspectives to reconstruct our authors' intentions, our texts'

qualities, and their respective claims' validity and truth. You should take notes, listen carefully, query one another, and keep track of your changing beliefs and attitudes.

Graded work

Quizzes [20 pts]

Frequently through the semester you will take an unannounced 5-minute quiz at the beginning of the class. These will assess that you did the reading with careful attention. I will grade only your top four scores. There are no make-ups for any reason.

Exams [60 pts]

Three times through the semester you will take a 30-minute written exam at the beginning of class. It will review the reading and discussions since the previous exam, as well as the assignment for the day. Studying for the exam will give you an opportunity to synthesize and analyze the main threads of the course, and to remind yourself of the most important passages and claims. We will use the exam also as a way to introduce subsequent sections of the course.

Presentations [20 pts]

Each student will present twice. Your grade on the second presentation will include a judgment about its improvement over both your previous, and other students' recent, presentations.

Delphi paper [30 pts]

In preparation for our Delphi trip of 4-6 April, you will write a three-to-five page paper on any topic in ancient Greek philosophy connected in some way to Delphi. You will prepare a one-page outline, and consult with me, by 24 March. You will give me a copy of your paper before we leave for our trip, and you will present it orally during our trip. You will take questions, and request specific advice for improvement. A significantly revised and lengthened version will be due, by email, after the semester, on 21 April.

Photo blog presentation [20 pts]

Throughout the semester you will keep a photo tumblr blog on your choice of themes. Each week you will decide on exactly three (3) representative images (or snippets from elsewhere) and upload them, with captions, to your tumblog. Each week I will reblog the very best of these onto a curated course tumblog; being so chosen will benefit your presentation grade. At the semester's end, you will prepare a narrative presentation—in whatever digital venue or media you prefer—about your theme, its evolution, your discoveries, and so forth. The project will be graded in terms of thoughtfulness, readiness to see items of relevance throughout our trip, and coherence and ingenuity of the final presentation. I will also reward those who show interest in the production and creation of their classmates' photo blogs.

Logistics

Grades

A 141-150 – Extraordinary
A- 135-140
B+ 130-134
B 125-129 – Good
B- 120-124

C+ 115-119
C 105-114 – Acceptable
D 90-104 – Minimal pass
F 0-89 – Fail

Technology

Please check and promptly respond class-related emails each school-day. I will do the same. I will email you additional handouts if I do not distribute paper copies. Please check with fellow students to ensure you have not missed any handouts. At no point should you look or touch your cellphone unless asked to do so.

Accessibility

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) +1 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit www.equity.psu.edu/ods/. I should be notified before our departure to Greek regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.

Cheating

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for this course shall be grounds for failing the entire course and communication of dishonesty to the College. This includes, but is not restricted to, any plagiarism on any homework, or cheating on any quiz or exam. Please ask about any case you're concerned about. For details on the PSU policy, see www.psu.edu/oue/aappm/G-9.html.

Topic, Reading, and Assignment Schedule

Jan	M 20	Burkert, 54-118
	W 22	Burkert, 119-131, 139-149, 161-167, 174-189
	M 27	Burkert, 216-225, 246-250, 260-275
	W 29	Burkert, 194-203, 277-304
Feb	M 03	Diogenes Laertius, Book I
	W 05	Pythagoras, 19-48; Burnyeat, "Other Lives"
	M 10	Pythagoras, 57-90
	W 12	<u>Exam 1.</u> Pythagoras, 90-122
	M 17	Hesiod & Xenophanes (in McKirahan)
	W 19	Anaximander, Anaximenes, Anaxagoras (in McKirahan)
	M 24	Heraclitus (in McKirahan)
	W 26	Heraclitus (redux), Burnyeat, "Letter from Heraclitus"
Mar	M 03	NO CLASS (Clean Monday)
	W 05	<u>Exam 2.</u> Plato, <i>Apology of Socrates</i>
	M 10	NO CLASS (Spring Break)
	W 12	NO CLASS (Spring Break)
	M 17	<i>Charmides</i>
	T 18	ADDITIONAL CLASS: 6-8p. <i>Charmides</i>
	W 19	<i>Charmides</i>
	M 24	<i>Euthydemus</i>
	W 26	<u>Exam 3.</u> <i>Euthydemus</i>
	M 31	<i>Phaedo</i>
Apr	W 02	<i>Phaedo</i>
	M 07	Plato, <i>Epistles</i>
	W 09	Aristotle, <i>Protreptic</i>
	M 14	<u>Presentations.</u> Aristotle, <i>Protreptic</i>