

PHIL/POLS 2325
ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

COURSE INFORMATION

Class Meetings: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday (1:35-2:40); Hastings Suite 119

Instructor: Getty L. Lustila, Department of Philosophy and Religion
Ph.D., Boston University, 2019
gettylustila@gmail.com
<https://gettylustila.com/>

Office Hours: Monday, Thursday (11:00-12:00); 420S Renaissance Park (Humanities Center)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Community, Friendship, Love, Justice – we perk up when we hear these words since they pick out a few of our core values as human beings. These values have a history: one that begins over 6000 years ago, in the Mediterranean, with the Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and others. In this course, we will examine the Greek civilization and focus primarily on the *classical period* of Greece, which covers 510 BCE - 323 BCE. We witness the birth of philosophy and democratic political thought as we know it today.

The majority of this course is dedicated to Plato's *Republic* (376 BCE) and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* (~340 BCE). In these writings, we are met with some of the earliest attempts to make sense of the ideas of community, friendship, love, and justice. Additionally, we touch on the roots of Greek philosophy and political thought (e.g. Homer, Hesiod, Solon) and discuss later developments in the Hellenistic period (322-31 BCE), including Epicureanism and Stoicism. By the end of this course you better understand a chief source of our thinking about philosophy and politics. You will also appreciate what it means to live *reflectively* with our values – to ensure they represent the best of who we are.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the course are to:

- Familiarize you with one of the important periods in the history of philosophy and politics.
- Refine your ability to read and analyze texts.
- Develop your skills as a writer – learning to produce clear, coherent prose and craft well-structured arguments.
- Develop your skills as a communicator – learning to receive feedback on your ideas and writing from your peers and to give helpful feedback to others.
- Spark your natural curiosity for philosophical ideas and questions.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Plato, *The Republic*, translated by C.D.C Reeve (Hackett Publishing, 2004)
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by C.D.C Reeve (Hackett Publishing, 2014)
- **Recommended:** Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by C.D.C Reeve (Hackett Publishing, 2017)

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Papers (2) – 30% of your final grade
 - Instructions for each paper on canvas.
 - Each paper will be 1000 words.
 - You will be assessed primarily on the structure and clarity of your paper. You will be assessed secondarily on how well you have engaged with the source material. Before finalizing your paper ask yourself: “have I answered the question(s) in the prompt?”, “does my paper exhibit a clear, line of thought?”, “do I make proper use of paragraph structure to advance this line of thought?”, “have I read my paper aloud to see whether it flows?”, “do I accurately characterize the views conveyed in the source material?”, and “does my discussion of this material show that I have engaged with it?”
2. Personal Reflections (5) – 25% of your final grade
 - Instructions for each reflection on canvas.
 - Each reflection will be 750 words.
 - You will be assessed primarily on completion. You will be assessed secondarily on the structure and clarity of your reflection. Before finalizing your reflection ask yourself: “have I answered the question(s) in the prompt?”, “does my reflection exhibit a clear, line of thought?”, “do I make proper use of paragraph structure to advance this line of thought?”, and “have I read my reflection aloud to see whether it flows?”
3. Living Virtuously Project – 25% of your final grade
 - Beginning of Week Reflection – (5% of project grade)
 - Virtue Diary – (10% of project grade)
 - End of Week Reflection – (10% of project grade)
 - More extensive directions will be given in class
4. Participation – 15% of your final grade

How does one participate? There’s the normal way of course – asking questions in class, engaging with others productively when in groups, bringing to class any requested materials (e.g. if we have a workshop day, you will be expected to bring a complete rough draft of your essay or reflection to class). Philosophy works best with your participation since the aim is not

for me to deliver content to you (though I will assist you in helping to understand the readings) but to engage with you in conversation about the topics of the readings.

Your participation grade **will be mostly determined by the discussion board**. The expectation is that you post **4x a week** on the discussion board. Each week has a discussion post associated with it. In this post, you will find the reading questions for that particular week posted at the top. **You are not expected to complete these questions** - the questions are there to **a) help guide your reading** and to **b) test your comprehension of the material**. If you find that after reading the text, browsing the board, and coming to class that you still cannot answer these questions this is a **good sign you should reach out to me** (you can reach out to me anytime during this process - I'm noting that the questions can be useful for self-testing).

I open posts one week in advance (for example, on the first day of class, both Week 1 and Week 2 will be open) and close them on **Saturday at midnight**. So, to count for credit, your posts must be completed before that time. An original post or a reply to one of your classmates, *equally count* for one of your weekly posts. This is an opportunity for you to engage and get to know one another outside class. Since there is not always the space for community-building in class: treat the board as an extension of the work we do in class.

No posts are due on Week 1 or Week 12: there are still reading questions for Week 1 so make sure to look there and feel free to engage with one another about the Homer, Hesoid, and Solon selections - it just isn't expected.

5. Attendance – 5% of your final grade

You are allowed **two unexcused absences** ("unexcused" is defined as you not having emailed me prior to the start of class - exceptions to this rule are made in the case of emergencies). For every unexcused absence *after this second* you sacrifice 1/4 of your attendance grade. When it comes to having to miss class for any reason (job interview, work conflict, or even feeling bogged down) **just shoot me an email before class and all is good**. Communication is key: it's important for me to know where you're all at so I can know how to best help you learn.

Grade Scale

- A (93-100)
- A- (90-92)
- B+ (87-89)
- B (83-86)
- B- (80-82)
- C+ (77-79)
- C (76-73)
- C- (72-70)

- D+ (69-67)
- D (66-63)
- D- (62-60)
- F (59-below)

EXPECTATIONS

What you can expect from me:

- I will grade any and all assignments **within 10 days** of them being turned in.
- I will respond to any and all emails **within 48 hours**.
- I will hold office hours **as scheduled**. If you are unable to attend office hours, you are more than welcome (even encouraged) to set up another time for us to meet.
- I will shift the class schedule as deemed necessary for *your learning*. If we need extra time on a topic or you're collectively interested in pursuing a topic further, I will make any necessary changes to the schedule. **These changes will be communicated via email**.
- I will engage with you – in writing and in person – in a **thoughtful manner**. As I see it, this thoughtfulness has two components. I will be **respectful** of your ideas, and also dedicated to **your improvement** as a thinker and writer. At times, this dedication will require me to be critical in my feedback, which is a sign that I take you seriously.
- I will be **understanding and empathetic** regarding any challenges that you face, either in this class or in your personal lives (to the extent that they bear on your ability to turn work in on time, keep focus, maintain motivation, etc.).

What I can expect from you:

- You will **attend** each class, or notify me of your absence prior to class
- You will attend class having **read** and being prepared to **discuss** the material for that day. My advice is that you a) complete the reading twice and b) make a note of 2-3 questions and 2-3 comments you have. This exercise will cement your understanding of the material and give you a sense of which points you found interesting and/or confusing. Points of interest and/or confusion are the perfect material for discussion.
- You will **complete your work** on time or notify me of your inability to do so.
- You will engage with me and your classmates in a **thoughtful** manner. Show the same dedication to others (and to yourself) that I do to you. For this semester, for three hours a week, you and your classmates are on a journey. The journey will not always be easy, and we will all meet obstacles along the way. Lift each other up.
- You will **not give up on yourself**. At times, the readings and the assignments will be difficult. If you feel like you are slipping or things have stopped making sense, *reach out*. There is nothing honorable about suffering in silence. I am here to help with anything you may require along your journey, but you must always keep pushing.

- You will **stay curious** and **work to improve**. We have a lot to learn from each other and from the material that we will be discussing throughout the class. If you work to maintain your sense of curiosity and desire to improve throughout the course, you will come out of this experience as a better writer and a clearer thinker.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1: The Human Condition

9/8 – Introduction

9/9 – Selections from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*

Week 2: Greek Identity

9/13 – Selections from Hesiod's *Works and Days*

9/15 – The poetry of Sappho, Archilochus, and Solon

9/16 – Selections from Herodotus' *Histories*

Reflection 1 Due: 9/19

Week 3: The Golden Age of Athens

9/20 – Selections from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*

9/22 – Selection from Plato's *Protagoras*; Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*

9/23 – Selections from the *Dissoi Logoi*

Reflection 2 Due: 9/26

Week 4: The Birth of Philosophy

9/27 – Plato's *Apology*

9/29 – Plato's *Laches*

9/30 – Selection from Plato's *Meno*

Week 5: Justice and Happiness

10/4 – Plato's *Republic* I, to 350d

10/6 – Finish *Republic* I; *Republic* II, to 368c

10/7 – *Republic* II, 368c-375d

Week 6: Moral Education in the Virtuous City

10/11 – **No Class (Indigenous People's Day)**

10/13 – *Republic* II, 375e-end; *Republic* III, to 392c, 400c-403c, 412-end

10/14 – *Republic* IV, up to 423b; 427e-end

Reflection 3 Due: 10/10

Week 7: The Tragedy of Vice

10/18 – *Republic* VIII

10/20 – *Republic* IX, up to 580c

10/21 – Closing Discussion of Plato

Paper 1 Due: 10/24

Week 8: Pursuing Excellence

10/25 – Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* I.4-5, 7-9, 13

10/27 – *Nicomachean Ethics* II.1-6

10/28 – *Nicomachean Ethics* II.7-end

Week 9: The Table of Virtues

11/1 – *Nicomachean Ethics* III.6-end

11/3 – *Nicomachean Ethics* IV

11/4 – Continued discussion of *Nicomachean Ethics* IV; Theophrastus' *Characters*

Reflection 4 Due: 11/7

Week 10: The Science of Politics

11/8 – *Nicomachean Ethics* X.9; Aristotle's *Politics* I.1-2, III.1-5

11/10 – *Politics* III.8-13; V.1-4

11/11 – **No Class (Veterans Day)**

Week 11: Attaining the Best Regime

11/15 – *Politics* IV.9, 11-12

11/17 – *Politics* VII.1-4, 8-9, 13-15

11/18 – *Politics* I.3-7, 13

Living Virtuously Project Due: 11/21

Week 12: The Hellenistic Period

11/22 – Closing Discussion of Aristotle

11/24 – **No Class (Thanksgiving Break)**

11/25 – **No Class (Thanksgiving Break)**

Week 13: Turning away from Politics?

11/29 – Epicurus, “Letter to Menoecus”

12/1 – Epicurus, “Principal Doctrines”

12/2 – Epictetus, *Enchiridion*

Reflection 5 Due: 12/5

Week 14: Turning away from Politics?

12/6 – *Enchiridion* (cont.)

12/8 – Closing Discussion

Paper 2 Due: 12/12