



# Ancient Social Philosophy

Philosophy Department  
PHI 201, Spring, 2009  
Section 001: Old Main G24, 10:20-11:10MWF  
3 Credit Hours  
Instructor: Dr. Andrew Fitz-Gibbon  
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Office Hours: Old Main 140-C, MW 2:00-3:30

## Course Description

Catalog Description: (S-C) Explores ancient social philosophy as part of the social, political and historical development of Western Civilization from its origins in Greece, emphasizing Plato and Aristotle to the Epicureans and Roman Stoics and comparing them to developments in other parts of the world. Analyzes the Greeks' understanding of the human person in society and how that has influenced our thinking today. Covers such topics as democracy, justice, friendship and the family. Fulfills: LASR. (3 cr. hr.)

## Learning Outcomes

The student will be expected to understand issues such as the following:

- How ideas the Greeks developed with respect to science, politics, art, and the relationship of the citizen to the political or natural world are distinctly different when compared to earlier Mesopotamian approaches.
- How the geological and economic context in the Mediterranean area affects the rise of western civilization and Greek thought.
- How the Greeks' attitude about themselves' being superior to people of all other cultures developed and how it influenced the history of Western Civilization.
- How Greek philosophy's emphasis on the power of reason to discover truth affected modern philosophy and the social institutions of modern Europe and North America.
- How the notion of republican government rests on the tradition of the Roman republic and its attending concepts of the citizen's rights and obligations.

The student will be expected to develop the following philosophical skills:

- Be able to read and understand major texts of ancient social philosophy.
- Conduct a thoughtful and respectful dialogue on important philosophical and social issues.
- Synthesize and reflect upon primary sources and secondary texts in written and verbal form.
- Construct a reasoned philosophical argument.
- Challenge assumptions and unquestioned beliefs.
- Think more critically and reflectively about the nature of the human condition.
- Apply the concepts and theories covered in the course to areas of contemporary social concern.

## Required Texts

Plato *The Republic*, tr. Desmond Lee (London and New York: Penguin, 1955, 1974, 1987).

Aristotle *The Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. J.A.K. Thomson, rev. Hugh Tredennick (London and New York: Penguin, 1955, 1976, 2004).

Epicurus *The Essential Epicurus: Letters, Principal Doctrines, Vatican Sayings, and Fragments*, tr. and ed. Eugene O'Connor (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1993).

Seneca *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca: Essays and Letters*, tr. Moses Hadas (New York: W.W. Norton, 1958, 1968).

## Course Requirements

The course has a large discussion requirement, based on the required texts. Set reading and class participation are essential. Classes missed without prearrangement or a medical excuse will have negative consequences on final grade.

Each student will be required to write four 4-5-page papers and take part in a student presentation with a 3-4-page presentation.

Final grade will be based on the following:

Class participation/attendance	10%
Class presentation	20%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	20%
Final papers	30%

## Papers Due On

Presentation paper is due on the day of your presentation

Mar 2

Mar 30

Final papers due last day of class, May 4

## The Syllabus

Discussions in class are based on the readings. The readings are essential and must be read before class.

### Week 1 Reading Plato Parts I-II

Jan 21 General introduction and Expectations

Jan 23 Introduction to Plato

### Week 2 Reading Plato Parts III-IV

Jan 26 Video: The Greeks, part one

Jan 28 The Platonic Canon, and the Republic

Jan 30 Cont.

### Week 3 Reading Plato parts V-VI

Feb 2 Video: The Greeks, part two

Feb 4 Class Structure: Guardians and Auxiliaries

Feb 6 Cont.

### Week 4 Reading Plato Parts VII-VIII

Feb 9 Discussion of Plato reading to date

Feb 11 Plato, Women and Children

Feb 13 Cont.

### Week 5 Reading Plato parts IX, X, XI

Feb 16 What Shape Society?

Feb 18 Rounding up Plato

Feb 20 Cont.

### Week 6 Reading Aristotle Books I-II3

Feb 23 Group Presentation #1

Feb 25 Introduction to Aristotle

Feb 27 Cont.

Week 7 Reading Aristotle Books III-IV

- Mar 2 The Aristotelian Canon and the Nicomachean Ethics
- Mar 4 The meaning of life and goodness
- Mar 6 Cont.

Week 8

- Mar 9 Spring Break: No class
- Mar 11 Spring Break: No class
- Mar 13 Spring Break: No class

Week 9 Reading Aristotle Books V-VI

- Mar 16 Aristotelian Justice
- Mar 18 Group Presentation #2
- Mar 20 Cont.

Week Ten Reading Aristotle Books VII-VIII

- Mar 23 Discussion on Aristotle reading to date
- Mar 25 Pleasure and Friendship
- Mar 27 Cont.

Week 11 Reading Aristotle Books IX-X

- Mar 30 Group Presentation #3
- April 1 Eudaimonia
- April 3 Cont.

Week 12 Reading Epicurus

- April 6 Rounding up Aristotle
- April 8 Introduction to Epicurean philosophy
- April 10 Video The Romans.

Week 13 Reading Seneca pp 1-136

	April 13	Discussion of Epicurus
	April 15	Cont
	April 17	Scholars Day
Week 14		Reading Seneca pp 137-261
	April 20	Introduction to Stoic philosophy
	April 22	Discussion of Seneca
	April 24	Video The Romans
Week 15		
	April 27	Loose Ends
	April 29	Presentation #4
	May 1	Loose Ends
Week 16		
	May 4	Conclusion

## Class Presentations

Your group task is to look at one of the following issues:

- Plato's ideal state
- Plato, sexuality, marriage and family
- Aristotle's justice
- Aristotle and friendship

In your presentation, you need to incorporate:

- An understanding of philosophical principles in the text
- A grasp of the issues: What is the argument? What is at stake in this issue?
- Application to today's society
- Personal experience
- Secondary sources and critique

Each person in your group should prepare a separate area of research that should last about four to five minutes. As a group, you should design discussion questions for the other groups. You may want to use creative means to get your points across (Movie clips, creative use of PowerPoint, an appropriate skit, poetry, a mock debate between two opposing members of your group etc.)

Your presentation should last the class period.

Each person in the group is required to complete a 3-4-page paper outlining the process of the research and what you personally received in the process.

## Paper Requirements

During the semester, you are required to write:

- a) A 3-4-page paper accompanying your group presentation
- b) One 4-5-page paper from the Plato section.
- c) One 4-5-page paper from the Aristotle section.
- c) A final take home examination, which consists of one 4-5-page paper from the general section and one 4-5-page paper from either the Plato or the Aristotle sections.

Note: You cannot write one of the main papers on the subject of your presentation

In all of your papers you are required to demonstrate sound philosophical arguments and a grasp of the principles we discuss in class. Good writing, grammar and are rewarded. Errors, mistakes and carelessness will be penalized. The best papers will demonstrate an understanding of the text and use secondary sources.

### Plato Section

1. Write a critique of Plato's understanding of justice.
2. Contrast Plato's ideal society with modern America. What are the similarities and differences? Which would you choose and why?
3. Critique Plato's understanding of education.
4. "The Republic leads toward totalitarianism." Discuss.
5. What is Plato's view of women?
6. Explain the place of sexuality, marriage, the family and children in Plato's scheme.

### Aristotle Section

7. Discuss Aristotle's understanding of justice.
8. Explain Aristotle on friendship. How important a concept is it?
9. Is *eudaimonia* an adequate understanding of the purpose of human life?
10. Explain Aristotle's understanding of "the golden mean." Demonstrate your understanding in applying Aristotle's ideas to virtues other than those he discusses.

11. In what sense is Aristotle an elitist?
12. "There is no place for women, children and slaves in Aristotle's scheme." Discuss.

### **General Section**

13. Compare Aristotle and Epicurus. What are the similarities and differences?
14. Compare Plato and the Stoics. What are the similarities and differences?
15. What attracts you to Stoic philosophy and why? What repels you and why?
16. Make a reasoned argument for a contemporary Epicurean philosophy.

## **Policies and Information**

1. SUNY Cortland is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act 1973.

If you are a student with a disability and wish to request accommodations, please contact the office of Disability Services located in B-40 Van Hoesen Hall or call (607) 753-2066 for an appointment. Any information regarding your disability will remain confidential. Because many accommodations require early planning, requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible. Any request for accommodations will be reviewed in a timely manner to determine their appropriateness to this setting.

2. No late work will be accepted unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor. Such arrangements will be made only under unusual circumstances.

3. Plagiarism. All work submitted must be your own. Ideas either borrowed from others, directly, or through paraphrase, must be well documented through endnotes or footnotes. If plagiarism is suspected the student will be reported to the Provost and can either accept the charge or defend her or himself in the Grievance Tribunal.

4. If you are absent, you are responsible for finding out what went on in class, whether any assignments were given, and for keeping up with your work.

### **SUNY Cortland Conceptual Framework**

The mission of teacher education at SUNY Cortland is to build upon the foundation of liberal learning in the development of teachers who have exceptional pedagogical knowledge and skills. The foundation of liberal learning informs the professional education strand in an innovative thematic approach that emphasizes personal responsibility, global understanding and social justice. Graduates of SUNY Cortland's teacher education program will be prepared to think critically, utilize technology, communicate effectively, understand and value diversity, contribute to their communities, and make a difference in the lives of their students.