

Phil 301: Ancient Philosophy
Plato & Aristotle
Prof. Jeremy Reid
Spring 2024

1. Course and Contact Information

Meeting times: T Th 11:00am–12:15pm

Location: Humanities 207

Email: jwreid@sfsu.edu

Office hours: By appointment—sign up for a slot on my door (Humanities 360).

2. Course Description

The purpose of this course is to provide students with a solid foundation in some of the big questions of ancient Greek ethics and epistemology, as discussed by two of the most important Greek philosophers: Plato and Aristotle. We will start by looking at Plato's portrayal of his teacher, Socrates. Why was Socrates wise if he didn't claim to know anything important? Given that the jury that condemned him to death made a bad decision, why didn't he escape prison when he had the chance to? What did Socrates think the point of philosophy was?

We then turn to some of the big questions in Greek philosophy: Can you learn to be a good person? What does it even mean to be a good person? What does it mean to have knowledge, and is there a connection between being a good person and knowing particular things? Why is it that knowledgeable people don't get listened to and don't get voted for in democratic contexts? What's the difference between trying to persuade somebody and trying to give a philosophical argument? What is the relationship between knowledge, pleasure, and happiness?

For this course, we will focus on Plato's *Apology*, *Crito*, *Meno*, and *Gorgias*, and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

3. Expectations

- You should plan to attend every lecture and be on time. Lectures are the main place to learn course material and to ask questions about it. You cannot do well in this course without coming to lectures. I know SF public transit is a pain, but in life you are expected to show up at the specified start times.
- You should do the readings before class. Trust me, you *really* need to do the readings for this class. If you need help working out how best to read these texts, I would be more than happy to share some strategies with you. Just as you

should not expect to do well in an upper-level calculus course without doing any exercises, you should not expect to do well in a philosophy course without doing the readings. Similarly, if there's a math problem you didn't get right and you don't know why, you will need to talk with your prof and others in the class; so too, if there's a passage of text you don't understand, you need to talk with your profs and others in the class. Philosophy is best done in community!

- I will not be posting PowerPoints or lecture notes so you will need to take your own notes in class, or pay close attention to what is being said. If you are confused or want to talk more about the class material, arrange a time to meet with me to talk more. I won't have time to meet with everybody who misses class to go over the material again, so class attendance is very important.
- There will be no use of electronics in my classroom unless you require an exemption. Even having a phone or laptop on the desk will be distracting for you and those around you—put it away.
- If you're aiming to get an A for this course, you should come to talk with me in office hours to prep for the exams, outline your papers, and (ideally) send me a draft. Notice this means not doing work at the last minute.
- Thinking critically and rational disagreement are the bread and butter of philosophy, so I encourage you to challenge the positions that come up in class. But (as you will see) a central tenet of Socratic philosophizing is an awareness of your own cognitive limits and the desire to learn from others. Be respectful of the texts, be respectful of your teachers, and be respectful of others in the class.

4. Assessment

5%	Syllabus & Referencing Quiz – Quiz closes Fri Feb 9 at 11:59pm
10%	Paper 1 – Due Fri Feb 16, 11:59pm
15%	Exam 1 – Thu Feb 29, during class
20%	Paper 2 – Due Fri Mar 22, 11:59pm
20%	Exam 2 – Tue Apr 30, during class
30%	Paper 3 – Due Fri May 24, 11:59pm

Letter grades are assigned as follows: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 60-69; D: 63-66; D-: 60-62; F: 0-59.

There is no extra credit and there are no make-up assignments for this course. You should be working consistently throughout the semester, speaking with me before exams to discuss course content and before papers are due to discuss your drafts. Philosophy is not done well quickly or at the last minute; the deadlines are there to stop you falling behind.

Papers are due and exams close at 11:59pm. **Late assignments and assignments that are not within the word count will receive a 0.** If you know you will have scheduling conflicts or will not be able to submit an assignment by the due date, contact

me as soon as possible so that we can organize extensions. Extensions will not be given within 48 hours of the deadline. So plan ahead, drafting your papers in advance of the deadline and submitting well before the final minute.

If you want to appeal a grade, wait 24 hours after the grade has been posted, then ask for written feedback why you got the grade you did. If you still think the grade you have received is unfair, I will submit your paper with my justification to another professor. What grade they determine is final—this means *your grade could go up or down*.

5. Texts

All assigned texts can be accessed as pdfs on the course website. **Do not use a different translation (this is very important).**

Note: these texts are both old and difficult, so you will need to read slowly and repeatedly. They have also inspired people for over two millennia and I love them deeply. Because my job is to help you understand and critically engage with these texts, *reading is not optional*. You cannot do well in this course without doing the readings and citing them extensively in your papers. My lectures are interpretations, and those who challenge my readings with good textual support and philosophical arguments will be handsomely rewarded.

6. Schedule of Readings and Paper Topics

Week 1: Tuesday, Jan 30

Intro [no reading, but please bring your copy of Plato's *Complete Works*]

Week 1: Thursday, Feb 1

Plato, *Apology*, start to 28b

Week 2: Tuesday, Feb 6

Plato, *Apology*, 28b–end

Week 2: Thursday, Feb 8

How to write an ancient philosophy paper [no reading]

Syllabus and referencing quiz closes Fri Feb 9, 11:59pm

Week 3: Tuesday, Feb 13

Plato, *Crito*, beginning to 50a

Week 3: Thursday, Feb 15

Plato, *Crito*, 50a–end

Paper 1 Due – Friday Feb 16

Prompt: *The Oracle at Delphi said that nobody is wiser than Socrates. (1) Why did Socrates initially think the Oracle was wrong, and how did he come to realize the sense in which the Oracle was right? (2) What reasons does Socrates give for thinking that he consistently benefitted the Athenians and did not harm them? (1000–1500 words)*

Week 4: Tuesday, Feb 20

Plato, *Meno*, beginning to 79e

Week 4: Thursday, Feb 22

Plato, *Meno*, 79e–86c

Week 5: Tuesday, Feb 27

Plato, *Meno*, 86c–end

Week 5: Thursday, Feb 29

Exam 1, in-class (on the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Meno*)

Week 6: Tuesday, Mar 3

Plato, *Gorgias*, beginning to 461b

Week 6: Thursday, Mar 5

Plato, *Gorgias*, 461b–481b

Week 7: Tuesday, Mar 12

Plato, *Gorgias*, 481b–486d

Week 7: Thursday, Mar 14

Plato, *Gorgias*, 486d–506c

Week 8: Tuesday, Mar 19

Plato, *Gorgias*, 506c–end

Week 8: Thursday, Mar 21

Plato summary [no extra reading, but listen to [this](#) from 46:10 to the end]

Paper 2 Due – Friday Mar 22

Prompt: *The Athenian democracy involved people making speeches and then having large groups of people vote for policy on the basis of those speeches. What kind of speeches does Socrates think are likely to be the most persuasive to a large group of people? Why does Socrates think knowledgeable experts who are genuinely trying to benefit people*

would not be persuasive to most people? Why does Socrates think that orators end up being influenced by the crowd rather than the other way around? (1500–2000 words)

[Spring break—no class]

Tuesday, Apr 2

[no class—extra week of break]

Thursday, Apr 4

[no class—extra week of break]

Tuesday, Apr 9

Aristotle intro [no reading]

Thursday, Apr 11

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, chapter 13

Tuesday, Apr 16

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 6

Thursday, Apr 18

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2

Tuesday, Apr 23

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 3, chapters 6–12

Thursday, Apr 25

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 3, chapters 1–5

Tuesday, Apr 30

Exam 2, in-class (on the Aristotle we have covered so far)

Thursday, May 2

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, chapters 1–5 & 7

Tuesday, May 7

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, chapters 8–12

Thursday, May 9

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 10

Tuesday, May 14

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8

Thursday, May 16

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 9

Paper 3 Due – Friday May 24

Prompt: Explain Aristotle's views on pleasure and the relation of pleasure to (a) virtue and (b) happiness. What practical advice would Aristotle give to help us become better people and live happier lives? (2500–3000 words)

7. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Liberal & Creative Arts will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

8. Disability Access

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/415-338-2472, video phone/415-335-7210) or by email (dprc@sfsu.edu).

9. Student Disclosures of Sexual Violence

SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Title IX Coordinator by completing the report form available at <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>, emailing vpsaem@sfsu.edu or calling 338-2032.

To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

- The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/
- Counseling and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208; <http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/>

· For more information on your rights and available resources:
<http://titleix.sfsu.edu>