

Plato and Aristotle

Instructor

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Course description

This course introduces some of the main elements in the thought of Plato and Aristotle—perhaps the two most influential philosophers in the Western tradition—by exploring their differing views on a number of core topics in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of science.

Course learning goals

- To develop an in-depth understanding of some of the main questions, positions, and concepts at play in the writings of Plato and Aristotle
- To reconstruct and evaluate their arguments for/against these positions
- To hone your critical reading skills, and practice how to present and critique your opinions and those of others clearly, crisply, fairly, and cogently in writing
- To enhance your philosophical creativity

Course prerequisites

Successful completion of 730:103 ('Introduction to Philosophy'). As we will be reading English translations, no previous background in Ancient Greek is required.

Course assessments

Your final grade in the course will be based off three components.

One component of your grade will be based on **your engagement with the assigned readings through [Perusall](#)**, which you can launch from the Canvas course website. Each week, we'll use Perusall to collectively 'tear the texts apart' in real time by annotating them with questions and comments, which will then start discussion threads that can be up-voted based on how useful others find them to be. Think of it like a mix between Facebook, a Slack channel, and a run-of-the-mill PDF annotator. It will not be the same as face-to-face discussion, sadly, but it should be both useful and a lot of fun once it gets started. I will soon upload a video with more detailed instructions

about how this will work, but for now I recommend you take a look at [this video](#) on the pedagogical concepts behind Perusall, and [this video](#) for a basic idea of what to expect. This component will be worth **40 points of your final grade**.

Another component of your grade will be **two argument analyses** of a minimum 1500 words in length, one focusing mostly on Plato and the other mostly on Aristotle (**15 points each**). To encourage you to start early and to reap the benefits of peer review on both sides, I may offer bonus points to those willing to upload their drafts to Perusall, and those who make annotations, if there is another interest. In any case, they will be due on **21 October** and **9 December** respectively.

The last component of your grade will be a **final exam** covering both philosophers worth **30 points** of your final grade. The exam will be distributed during the official exam date and time:

Course texts

All course content and correspondence will be carried out on the Canvas course website. Nearly all of the readings for the course will come from the following two collections:

- *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, Hackett Publishing
- *The Complete Works of Aristotle: Volumes I and II*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton University Press

Since I will be posting the relevant texts on Canvas, you are not required to purchase these collections. (That said, any serious home library should have a copy of these, and if you plan to pursue academic philosophy further you will find the purchase worthwhile.)

Provisional course reading schedule

I will post the official reading schedule, with the exact passages we will be focusing on in the texts below, shortly after the first day of class. That said, here is the general plan:

- 6 Sept.** Christopher Shields, "Philosophy Before Socrates", in *Ancient Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (2nd ed.), Routledge, pp. 1-13
- 9 Sept.** C. Shields, "Philosophy Before Socrates", pp. 13-18 and 21-25
- 13 Sept.** *Euthyphro*
- 16 Sept.** *Apology* and C. Shields, "Philosophy Before Socrates", pp. 25-30
- 20 Sept.** *Crito*

- 23 Sept.** *Meno*
- 27 Sept.** *Phaedo* [first half]
- 30 Sept.** *Phaedo* [second half]
- 4 Oct.** *Republic* II-IV [selections]
- 7 Oct.** *Republic* V-VII [selections]
- 11 Oct.** *Parmenides* [126a – 134e] and *Metaphysics* I [selections]
- 14 Oct.** *Theaetetus* [first half]
- 18 Oct.** *Theaetetus* [second half]
- 21 Oct.** Slack day; **PAPER #1 DUE**
- 25 Oct.** *Physics* I [selections]
- 28 Oct.** *Physics* II
- 1 Nov.** *Physics* III [selections]
- 4 Nov.** *Physics* VI [selections]
- 8 Nov.** *Topics* I [selections] and *Posterior Analytics* I [selections]
- 11 Nov.** *Posterior Analytics* II [selections]
- 15 Nov.** *On the Soul* I-II [selections]
- 18 Nov.** *On the Soul* III [selections]
- 22 Nov.** *Metaphysics* II - IV.2 [selections]
- 25 Nov.** *Metaphysics* IV.3-7
- 29 Nov.** *Metaphysics* VII [first half]
- 2 Dec.** *Metaphysics* VII [second half] and VIII [selections]
- 6 Dec.** *Physics* VIII.1-2 and *Metaphysics* XII.6-10
- 9 Dec.** Slack day; **PAPER #2 DUE**

Academic integrity policy

Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic malfeasance come in many forms—if you haven't already, I would recommend familiarizing yourself with the Academic Integrity Policy (<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>) for a list of examples. Any suspected violation—and I am quite talented at detecting these—will be automatically referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs, and can carry penalties up to and including a failing grade in the course or expulsion from the university. Note: ignorance about what counts as academic malfeasance, or carelessness in acting in accordance with this policy, is *not* a defense. Thus, if you have any questions about whether you are toeing the line, please do not hesitate to consult with me *before* you submit your work.

University disability statement

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation. For more info, please visit <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please register by following this link: <https://webapps.rutgers.edu/student-ods/forms/registration>.