

Humanities 115 (Section 03): Philosophical Perspectives

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Office Hours: Tues. 2:00-3:00, Thurs. 12:00-1:00

Classes: Mon., Wed. 1:30-2:50

Room: 430 Cobb

Given the inevitability of suffering and death, what makes a human life worth living? What is the best kind of life to lead? What kind of person should I admire or strive to be like? What do I owe to my community and to my friends? What makes me responsible for my actions? How far should I question the traditions and authorities of my society? This course investigates some of the most ancient reflections on death and happiness, human limitations and human excellence, the individual and the group. We begin where Greek thought begins, with Homer's *Iliad*, and discuss some important works of Greek literature in the light of these ethical questions; then we turn to philosophical responses and arguments in the works of Plato and Aristotle. A continuing thread will be the evolving and contested figure of the 'hero', whose character and life are in some way exemplary for all of us.

Readings:

The texts required for the course are:

Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. R. Lattimore (University of Chicago Press)

Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, trans. P. Meinecke and P. Woodruff (Hackett Pub.)

Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, in *Sophocles II*, trans. D. Grene, ed. D. Grene and R. Lattimore (University of Chicago Press)

Plato and Aristophanes, *Four Texts on Socrates*, trans. Thomas and Grace West (Cornell University Press)

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Sir David Ross (Oxford World's Classics)

All texts will all be available at the Seminary Coop Bookstore (5757 S. University Ave.). Do *not* use other translations of these works: since translations vary enormously, you will risk being seriously misled and losing track of class discussions. Further readings will be made available as photocopies, including those marked with a \* in the Schedule.

### Course Requirements:

First Paper (due Oct. 16; 4-5 pages double-spaced; suggested topics will be distributed Oct. 4): 25%

Second Paper (due Nov. 8; 4-5 pages double-spaced; suggested topics will be distributed Oct. 25): 35%

Third Paper (due Nov. 29; 5 pages double-spaced; suggested topics will be distributed Nov. 15): 40%

Regular attendance and participation in class are expected, and bonus marks (up to 3% of the final grade) are available for strong participation. There may be further brief assignments on the readings, designed to facilitate discussion: these will be required, but will not be graded. Students are expected to attend any seminars on writing conducted by the writing intern, and to consult with the intern (or professor) as needed on the writing of the papers. Late papers will be accepted only with prior permission. One letter grade will be deducted for the first day a paper is late (i.e., a B+ will become a B), and another for every day or two days after that (i.e., a B+ will become a B- if the paper is two or three days late).

### Tentative Schedule:

Week 1 (Sept. 25, 27): Introduction; the *Iliad*: 'the warrior ethic', virtue and honour

*Readings:* Homer, *Iliad* Books I-IV

Week 2 (Oct. 2, 4): The *Iliad*: gods, heroes and communities; questioning the warrior ethic

*Readings:* Homer, *Iliad* Books VI, IX

Week 3 (Oct. 9, 11): The *Iliad* concluded: death and pity

*Readings:* Homer, *Iliad* Books XVI, XIX, XXII, XXIV

Week 4 (Oct. 16, 18): The 5th century: tradition and argument in ethics

*Readings:* Gorgias, *Helen*;\* Aristophanes, *Clouds*

Week 5 (Oct. 23, 25): Sophoclean tragedy: heroic suffering and responsibility

*Readings:* Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Philoctetes*

Week 6 (Oct. 30, Nov. 1): Socrates and Plato: the philosopher as hero

*Readings:* Plato, *Apology* and *Euthyphro*

Week 7 (Nov. 6, 8): Socrates at work on virtue and reason

*Readings:* Plato, *Euthyphro* and *Crito*

Week 8 (Nov. 13, 15): Platonism in ethics and politics

*Readings:* Plato *Crito* and *Republic* excerpts\*

Week 9 (Nov. 20, 22): Aristotle on happiness and human nature, virtue and responsibility

*Readings:* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Books I-III (selections)

Week 10 (Nov. 27, 29): Aristotle on the highest virtues and the best life

*Readings:* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Books IV-X (selections)