

Syllabus
PHIL 330W-0 (3 Cr.)
Ancient Philosophy
Fall 2024

Instructor: Dr. Kristopher G. Phillips

Office: Pray Harrold 702-B

Student Hours: M: 10a-12p, T: 1p-4p, R: 10a-12p (zoom) & also by appointment

Office Phone: 734.487.0451

Email: kphill50@emich.edu

Class Meets:

MW: 12:30p -1:45p Pray-Harrold 402

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is focused on Greek philosophy from antiquity. We will specifically discuss the nature of metaphysics and epistemology and their relation to human flourishing and the pursuit of the good life. We will begin with some of Plato's dialogues which represent the historical Socrates, then move on to Platonic dialogues which use Socrates as a mouthpiece for Plato himself. In doing so, we will attend to the nature and practice of philosophy as a way of life, the role of education in liberating oneself from custom and habit, and the obligations philosophers have to their interlocutors. Following our discussion of Plato, we will turn to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and conclude the course with a discussion of Epicurean, and Stoic views on the nature of the life well lived. My hope is that you will leave this class not only with a basis in ancient philosophical thought, but a new understanding of what it means to live philosophically.

This course fulfills Section II of the required knowledge areas as well as the *writing intensive* designation for the philosophy major.

Course Learning Outcomes:

- **Critical Thinking:** The successful student will begin to be able to differentiate between good and bad reasons for holding philosophical beliefs and will be able to seek out and identify the assumptions that lie at the basis of philosophical positions.
- **Inquiry and Analysis:** The successful student will begin to be able to break complex philosophical problems into their components, and will be able to identify the consequences and implications of philosophical positions.
- **Writing:** The successful student will be able to express some abstract and complex philosophical ideas in clear, precise, and logical prose.
- **Reading Comprehension:** The successful student will be able to analyze and charitably interpret abstract and difficult philosophical writing.

Learning outcomes will be evaluated through self-reflections, focused subject papers, a term-paper, and discussions both in-class and on Canvas.

TEXTS: Plato: *Theaetetus*, Levitt (trans.). Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 978-0872201583

Plato: *Republic*, Grube (trans.). Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 978-0872201361

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Irwin (trans.). Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 978-1624668159

Epictetus: *The Encheiridion*, White (trans.). Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 978-0915145690

Epicurus: *The Epicurus Reader*, Inwood (trans.). Hackett Publishing, ISBN: 978-0872202412

These can be found at the College Bookstore, and are *required*. Any other required texts will be made available on Canvas.

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SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

This list of readings is tentative. Specific reading assignments will be given on a day-to-day basis.

Week 1 **Introduction**

Nathan L. King: *Why Good Thinking Matters* (Canvas)
Virtues Self-Evaluation & Meetings

Weeks 2-6 **Plato**

Labor Day – No class Sept. 2
Plato: from *Theaetetus* (143d-147c; 148e-162e; 166d-168c; 169d-177c2; 210a-end)
Plato: *Apology* (Canvas)
Plato: *Republic* books I, II, V-VII
[Plato Paper]

Weeks 7-11 **Aristotle**

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I
Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book II
Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book III
Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VI
Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VIII
Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book X
[Aristotle Paper]

Weeks 12-15 **Epictetus and Epicurus**

Epictetus: *Encheiridion* (all)
Epicurus: *Extant Letters*
Epicurus: *Testimony from Cicero, Lucretius, Plutarch*
Epicurus: *Fragments and Testimonia from Uncertain Works*
[Epictetus/Epicurus Paper]

ASSIGNMENTS, EVALUATION, POLICY:

“Extrinsic motivation, which includes a desire to get better grades, is not only different from, but often undermines, intrinsic motivation, a desire to learn for its own sake” – Alfie Kohn (1999), *Punished by rewards: The trouble with gold stars, incentive plans, A’s, praise, and other bribes*. Rev. ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Let’s Talk Motivation: In recent years I have become increasingly unhappy with grades as a measure of anything at all. I often tell my students that it’s probably easy to get an A in my class – you can relatively easily “hack” my grading system and figure out the “formula” for writing a paper for me. Once you figure it out, getting an A on papers in my classes is easy. But I don’t want you to get an A by “hacking the system.” I want you to push yourself to learn new things because you found something you’re excited about and wanted to try to go beyond what’s comfortable and familiar. I’ve long thought that an A- or a B+ that was the result of taking risks was worth more than a safe, but well-written A paper.

In short, grading is not a good measure of learning, and the focus on grades distracts from the real goal of education. If you’re aiming for a specific grade, you’re not aiming to get the most out of your educational opportunities.

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Evaluation: Here's what we will do. I will ask you to fill out a brief survey to help us both better understand where your strengths are and where you can improve with regard to various intellectual virtues. I will then ask you to write a self-evaluation considering the following questions:

- (a) What are your reasons for taking this class?
- (b) What do you hope to get out of this class?
- (c) Where and how do you think you can improve on your academic work?
- (d) What do you think I hope you'll take away from the class?
- (e) Which of the listed virtues do you consider to be the most important? Why?
- (f) On which of them do you want to focus this semester?

You and I will meet one-on-one at the start of the semester to establish concrete goals for the class. I will ask you to do a mid-semester check-in reflection paper where you will discuss the efforts you've put in, any progress you've made, and offer insights into how we can continue the upward trajectory or improve things in the second half of the term.

We will meet up again at the end of the semester to discuss what progress have you made with regard to our goals.

The idea is that we will **collaboratively** come to a determination about what sort of progress you've made, where you think you can continue to improve (and how to best do so). As such, I will not provide you with numerical or letter grades on individual assignments. I will provide *qualitative* feedback on your work (discursive comments regarding clarity, precision, critical engagement, etc.), but the gradebook will only note whether you turned the assignment in. I'll inquire into the amount, and nature of feedback you would like on your written work.

You are responsible for working with me to determine your final grade in this class. We will come to an agreement based on formal self-assessments, the collected feedback you received from me over the course of the semester, and a final discussion. It's really important that you develop a clear sense of the quality of your own work and how to evaluate it. It's a difficult skill to master and requires tremendous self-awareness. That's why we're going to work together to ensure that the assessment reflects the work you've done over the course of the term.

I reserve the right to adjust the final grade, but I will not do so without discussing such a change with you first.

Assignments:

- **Introductory Self-Reflection Paper** (Due **Sept 1, 11:59p**).
- **Introductory Goal-Setting Meeting.** Sign up for a 15 minute meeting (zoom or office) where we will discuss your goals, motivations, etc.
- **Plato paper** (Due **October 6**).
- **Mid-point Reflection Paper** (Due **Oct 11**).
- **Aristotle paper** (Due **Nov. 3**)
- **Term paper** (Due **Nov. 24**)
- **Epictetus/Epicurus paper**(Due **Fri Dec. 8**)
- **Final Meeting** (During finals week). We will meet to discuss your progress toward your goals over the semester, and determine your final grade. I will post the Calendly link as we get closer.

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- **Participation** Philosophy is best done in open, careful dialogue with one another. I know not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of their peers, but I want to encourage you to genuinely engage one another regarding the ideas in the class. There are a number of ways one can be an active participant in the course. Whether that is asking questions in class, organizing discussion boards, setting up study groups, visiting during student hours, or something else you come up with, I'd like to see you really engage with both the material and one another. That said, it's virtually impossible to engage meaningfully with the course material unless you **attend class regularly**.

Three Short, Focused Papers: As we work through each figure's philosophical views, I want you to keep an eye out for a topic, argument, passage, or subject that requires careful attention. You'll have total freedom to pick whatever you want, but you'll need to write a short, focused paper on that topic that is grounded in the texts we've been reading. You're welcome to employ secondary literature if you like, but that is not required. The key here is to cultivate close reading, charitable interpretation, and clear writing skills. These papers should be roughly 1000-1200 words in total.

Standard Term Paper: You will be expected to complete a term paper on any topic relevant to ancient philosophy. You are not limited to topics that we discuss explicitly in class, and you are welcome (and encouraged) to do research (whether secondary or primary) beyond the books we read. Your paper should be between 2000-3000 words. For standard approaches to writing papers in the history of philosophy, please see the "Some Basic Structures for Historical Papers" file on the Canvas homepage. You are welcome to expand one of your previous short papers, but if you do so, I expect to see *substantial* revision, new research to bolster your thesis, and that you meet with me one-on-one to discuss your proposed revisions.

Late Work: There is no grade penalty for turning in late work (as there are no numerical scores for any individual assignment). That said, I still have a late-work policy:

I get that life happens and things sometimes take longer than we anticipate. As a result, I will accept late **papers** for up to 24 hours after the deadline with no questions asked.

Still, I ask that you do your best to meet the deadlines – please consider that I too am a busy person with a life outside of school, and that I have to budget and schedule my time carefully. If too many people turn in papers late, it throws off my plans and creates more work for me. As a general rule, please try to be mindful of the work you create for others. If you are going to need more than 24 hours, you must contact me so that we can discuss how to move forward in a way that meets your needs but that does not create an impossible burden for me.

Revisions: You are more than welcome to revise your written work at any time and as frequently as you would like in order to take full advantage of my feedback. This is not a requirement for the course, but those students who do take the time to thoughtfully respond to my feedback and revise their work will get the most out of the class and will develop the most as writers and thinkers.

OTHER IMPORTANT POLICIES & RESOURCES

University Policies: In addition to the articulated course specific policies and expectation, students are responsible for understanding all applicable university guidelines, policies, and procedures. The [EMU Student Handbook](#) is the primary resource provided to students to ensure that they have access to all university policies, support resources, and student's rights and responsibilities. Changes may be made to the EMU Student Handbook whenever necessary, and shall be effective immediately, and/or as of the date on which a policy is formally adopted, and/or the date specified in the amendment. Electing not to access the link provided below does not absolve a student of responsibility. For questions about any university policy, procedure, practice, or resources, please contact the Office of the Ombuds: 248 Student Center, 734.487.0074, emu_ombuds@emich.edu, or visit the website at www.emich.edu/ombuds. [CLICK HERE to access the University Course Policies](#)

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Classroom Conduct: The classroom constitutes a community of which we are each an important part. The very foundation of philosophy as a discipline is the ability to charitably listen, understand and represent the views of ourselves and others. Philosophy as a discipline requires careful dialogue. As such, respect for your fellow student, your instructor, and the course is of critical importance. We can, should, and will disagree with one another often, but this *MUST* be conducted with respect. As such threatening behavior, offensive language (including “hate speech”) will not be tolerated.

Academic Dishonesty Academic dishonesty of any kind is expressly prohibited. Engaging in academic dishonesty of any kind will result in failure of the course, a referral to the [Office of Wellness and Community Responsibility](#) for disciplinary action, and a deeply uncomfortable conversation. You’re already paying an awful lot of money to take this class, and I am committed to helping you develop the philosophical, intellectual, and personal skills to the best of your ability. Engaging in any form of cheating really cuts against the whole purpose of the whole education thing.

A Note on AI, Large-Language Models, and Their Use Using AI tools appropriately is a big part of our cultural development at this point in our history. This class is focused on building your philosophical skills, especially interpreting, designing, and critiquing arguments and theories. AIs can sort of do some of these things (though not well), and there are myriad reasons *not* to employ them in place of doing the work yourself. One such reason is that allowing an AI to do **ANY** part of the coursework for you is not just cheating yourself out of the opportunity to get better at philosophy, it is failing to do what the assignment is asking you to do – display and develop *your* philosophical abilities. If there is good reason to believe an AI did the work for you, any of the following may well occur: you will be asked to meet to discuss the work, you will be asked to redo the work (possibly by hand), or I may significantly lower your final grade – including possibly failing the course. After all, the point is to develop as a thinker, improve reading comprehension, and practice verbal and written communication. Having AI do that for you is tantamount to simply not doing the work. In class we will discuss further reasons to refrain from having AI do the work *for* you.

Recording Class I will not record class meetings and I ask that you also please refrain from recording the class meetings without prior, explicit, written permission both from me and from your classmates (except as necessary as part of a university approved accommodation. Students with such accommodation must inform me prior recording *any* class activity.

University Writing Center The [University Writing Center](#) (UWC) offers writing support to all undergraduate and graduate students. In doing so, we value the diversity of our campus and honor all students and the languages they bring with them to the university.

Holman Success Center Provides [Academic Support](#) through a variety of virtual and in-person services.

Disability Resource Center I warmly welcome any of you who have disabilities. Students with medical, psychological, learning or other disabilities desiring academic adjustments, accommodations, or auxiliary aids must contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC). The [DRC](#) works collaboratively with students, faculty, and staff to create an accessible, sustainable, and inclusive educational environment.

University Library Research support is available to all students, 24/7. This includes getting started with research, identifying sources to search, developing search strategies, evaluating resources, and more. See <https://www.emich.edu/library/help/ask.php> for all of the ways in which you can get help with research. Some University Library services have changed, and may continue to change, in response to the pandemic. Please check for current information at <https://www.emich.edu/library/news/covid.php>

Sexual Misconduct Prevention & Response Office (formerly Title IX Office): Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex under any education program or activity receiving

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federal financial aid. Sexual assault and sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX.
[What you need to know about Title IX](#)

Student and Exchange Visitor Statement The Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) requires F and J students to report numerous items to the [Office of International Students & Scholars](#) (OISS)