I. Catalog Information

PHIL 20A  
History of Western Philosophy: Ancient Greece  
4 Unit(s)

(See general education pages for the requirement this course meets.)

Advisory: English Writing 1A or English as a Second Language 5.

Four hours lecture.

(CAN PHIL 8)

An introduction to the major philosophers in the Western tradition from the pre-Socratics through Plato and Aristotle. Focus will be on these philosophers’ ideas about the nature of knowledge, what it means to be a human being, and the roots of the idea of philosophy as it is understood in the Western tradition.

II. Course Objectives

A. Explore the nature of philosophy as a discipline and look at the place of the history of western philosophy in it.

B. Summarize, analyze, and critically engage with the philosophical views of the Presocratic Greek philosophers.

C. Summarize, analyze, and critically engage with the philosophical views of Socrates.

D. Summarize, analyze, and critically engage with the philosophical views of Plato.

E. Summarize, analyze, and critically engage with the philosophical views of Aristotle.

F. Assess the importance of major ancient Greek philosophers on western culture.

III. Essential Student Materials

None

IV. Essential College Facilities

None

V. Expanded Description: Content and Form

A. Explore the nature of philosophy as a discipline and look at the place of the history of western philosophy in it:

1. The relationship between historical and philosophical forms of inquiry.

2. The place of western philosophy in the discipline.

3. Methods of analysis used in philosophy as a whole and in western philosophy.

4. The ways that women have been left out of the tradition and the non-European influences have been minimized.

B. Summarize, analyze, and critically engage with the philosophical views of the Presocratic Greek Philosophers.


2. Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism. relationship between philosophy and mathematics, notions of the divine and the relationship between humanity and divinity.


7. The work of female Pythagoreans, such as Perictione.

8. Investigate the ways that knowledge about the Presocratics has been gathered and interpreted.

C. Summarize, analyze, and critically engage with the philosophical views of Socrates.
1. The relativism and skepticism of the Sophists- Protagoras, Thrasymachus, Gorgias, et al.
2. Socrates’ rejection of the proto-natural science of various Pre-Socratics and the views of the Sophists.

D. Summarize, analyze, and critically engage with the philosophical views of Plato.
1. Plato and Socrates.
3. Political theory including views on gender and natural hierarchy.
5. Influence on western philosophy and science.

E. Summarize, analyze, and critically engage with the philosophical views of Aristotle.
1. Ethical views.
2. Metaphysical views including the theory of universals, the unmoved mover, matter and form, and the relations of this distinction to the masculine/feminine distinction.
3. Political and economic theories, including his view on natural hierarchy and the domestic sphere.
4. Influence on western philosophy and science.
5. Logic - the formulation of the study of methodology.
6. Influence on Muslim renaissance

F. Assess the importance of major ancient Greek philosophers on western culture.
1. Debates over the roots of ancient Greek philosophy
2. Debates over the history of how the importance of the Greek legacy has been evaluated in western societies.

VI. Assignments
A. Verbal: Students will participate in class discussions and in small problem solving groups. The class may involve some oral presentation, individually or in groups.
B. Written: Students will write answers to weekly homework problems. Students will write short papers. The course will involve multiple choice, identification and/or essay tests.
C. Reading: Students will carry out daily reading assignments.

VII. Methods of Instruction
Lecture and visual aids,
Discussion of assigned reading,
Discussion and problem solving performed in class,
Collaborative learning and small group exercises

VIII. Methods of Evaluating Objectives
A. Students will be evaluated on their participation in small group discussions.
B. Students will be tested, including essay exams. The class will require a final examination.
C. Students will be assigned to write papers.

IX. Texts and Supporting References
A. Examples of Primary Texts and References

B. Examples of Supporting Texts and References