

Philosophical Perspectives I

Instructor:

Office hours:

Writing intern:

Office hours:

Acknowledgement

Our work at the University of Chicago takes place on unceded land that formed the original homelands and traditional territory of the Myaamia, Illinois, and Potawatomi people, whose relationships with that land continue to this day.

Overview

This is the first course in the Philosophical Perspectives Core sequence, in which we will examine conceptions of the good life in ancient Greek philosophical thought. For many ancient Greeks, the question of how to live was intimately connected to questions about what it is to be a human and a citizen. These themes develop in the early dialogues of Plato, thought by many to express the views of the historical Socrates, in the Greek tragedies of Sophocles, and finally in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. We will also spend time on one contemporary perspective on the same issues, expressed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

The texts we read can be challenging. We will acknowledge the challenge by proceeding slowly. We will not seek a comprehensive assessment of everything these texts have to say, but a growing understanding of the main ideas and themes that animate them and that bring them into conversation, and conflict, with each other. There will be no presumption of previous acquaintance with any of the readings or topics discussed, or indeed with any academic philosophy at all.

The primary skills this course aims to encourage are analytical reading, creative thinking, productive conversation, and clear writing. These will be developed partly in the classroom, where we will observe the norms of civil and respectful dialogue laid out in [the Philosophy Department's statement of norms of conduct and discussion](#), and partly in a series of writing seminars, described below.

Readings

The following books contain most of our readings, and except for *The Republic*, are available at the Seminary Co-op. If you wish to purchase copies elsewhere, make sure to get the versions listed below. All other readings are available on Canvas.

- Plato, *Five Dialogues* (Hackett Publishing, tr. Grube)
- Plato, *The Republic* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought; ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, tr. Griffith)

- Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford World's Classics, tr. Ross)
- Sophocles, *Theban Plays* (Hackett Publishing, tr. Meineck and Woodruff)

Assessment

The following table provides a summary of assignments, due dates and assessment:

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE	PORTION OF FINAL GRADE
Participation	every class	15%
Two critical responses (2-3 pp)	before 11.4, before 12.2	10%
Paper 1 (3-4 pp)	10.21, 6.30pm	20%
Paper 2 (5-7 pp)	11.18, 6.30pm	25%
Paper 3 (6-8 pp)	12.11, 6.30pm	30%

PARTICIPATION Regular attendance in class is a condition for receiving a passing grade. Attendance records will be kept in order to facilitate contact tracing in the event of COVID-19 infection, so please inform the instructor if you must miss a class.

Participation also includes submitting *short* reactions to individual readings in the Discussion section of Canvas no later than noon on the day of each class. These reactions should state, in no more than a paragraph or so, the aspect of the text that you are most interested in discussing in class. This could be a claim that you find particularly compelling, objectionable, challenging or confusing; a question about the historical context or about the author; an implication of the reading; a connection to other texts or ideas (possibly from outside the course); etc. Please also be sure to read the other students' reactions before the beginning of class.

CRITICAL RESPONSES provide your thoughtful reactions to particular readings. You should focus in on one or two key claims, questions or arguments that you find particularly compelling, thought-provoking, or challenging; provide your own interpretation of the author's position, justifying your interpretation with appropriate textual references; and then explain your reaction to the position, making connections to other parts of the text or to other things we have read, as appropriate.

PAPERS will be based on prompts provided on Canvas. The first will ask you to choose one of several passages from texts we have read and explain and react to the argument that the passage represents; the second and third will ask you to engage with ideas in the text and construct arguments of your own.

Late papers will be docked a single grade step (e.g., B+ to B) unless you have received an extension ahead of time from one of the course instructors.

Writing seminars

Students will develop their expository skills in a series of writing seminars that will take place during weeks 3, 7 and 10, with specific times to be determined later. *Participation in these seminars is required to receive a passing grade.*

Accommodations

Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and who need reasonable accommodations to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by

SDS for using them. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the procedures for requesting accommodations that are described on [the SDS website](#).

Academic integrity

Acting with academic integrity means, in brief, not submitting the statements, work, or ideas of others as one's own. Students are expected to comply with [University policies on honest work](#). If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please speak with me before turning in your assignments. Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will result in a penalty befitting the violation, up to and including failing the course and further University sanctions. For more information, please consult [the College's website on academic integrity](#) and [the relevant portions of the student manual](#). I do not anticipate any problems with academic integrity, but in the unlikely event that any concerns do arise, I will forward all related materials to the College for further review and action.

Schedule of readings

Week 1	9.30	Le Guin, <i>The Dispossessed</i>
Week 2	10.5	Plato, <i>Meno</i> (up to 86c)
	10.7	Plato, <i>Meno</i> (from 86c)
Week 3	10.12	Plato, <i>Apology</i>
	10.14	Plato, <i>Crito</i> ; King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
Week 4	10.17	Theater of War Productions, <i>Antigone in Ferguson</i>
	10.19	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>
	10.21	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books I-II (up to 376e)
Week 5	10.26	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books III-IV
	10.28	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book V from 472a, Books VI-VII (up to 521b)
Week 6	11.2	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Books VIII-IX
	11.4	Sophocles, <i>Oedipus Tyrannos</i>
Week 7	11.9	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I
	11.11	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Books II-III (especially 6-12)
Week 8	11.16	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book X
	11.18	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Books VIII-IX
Week 9		<i>Thanksgiving break</i>
Week 10	11.30	Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> (up to 506c)
	12.2	Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> (from 506c)