

## **PHIL-356 The Concept of Life in Ancient Greek Philosophy and its Relevance Today**

**Semester or Session/ Year and Location(s):** Spring Semester 2024, Athens

**Course Instructor(s):** Iason Xygkis

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**Class Times (days, hours):** Monday-Wednesday, 3.30pm-5.05pm

**(Office) Hours Available:** By appointment

### **Course Description**

During this course we will explore the concept of life in ancient Greek philosophy and its relevance to contemporary philosophical debates. In the first part of the course we will examine the notion of life in the context of Plato's and Aristotle's metaphysical, psychological, political and ethical writings. Our primary aim will be to understand how Aristotle's explicit treatment of life challenges Plato's dualistic, metaphysical theory of Forms and leads to a distinct conception of ethics and politics. Through the comparison of the relevant doctrines and views we will seek to get a better understanding of the crucial role that the concept of life plays in the formation of the ancient Greek philosophy of ethics, politics and culture. In the second part of the course we will try to appreciate the extent to which this philosophy of life informs the inception and critique of modern thought, while also providing a potential alternative to the challenges it faces. By studying modern and contemporary thinkers, we will see how the treatment of the concept of life by ancient Greek philosophers has become a primary focus in contemporary debates concerning pressing ethical and political challenges posed by late modernity, notably those pertaining to totalitarianism, the Holocaust and the issue of animal rights.

### **Course Approach**

The goals of this course are: a) to provide a clear overview of the treatment of the concept of life by ancient Greek philosophers b) to highlight the concept of life as the link between Aristotle's and Plato's grand metaphysical schemes and their specific ethical and political considerations c) to demonstrate convincingly the relevance and importance of the notion of life in contemporary philosophical discussions and debates d) to inspire the students to engage in critical thinking and, importantly, respectful, thought-provoking, and productive philosophical discussions with their peers.

These goals will be pursued through: a) 24 in-class meetings involving minimal lecturing and thorough discussion of the views and arguments of ancient, modern and contemporary philosophers b) weekly reading and writing assignments c) the compilation of a mid-term and a final essay whose topic will be specified upon consultation with me.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the course the students will be able to:

- Identify, understand, and reflect on the ethical and political issues and challenges raised within the context of philosophy of life.
- Discuss and interpret key concepts and aspects of classical ancient Greek philosophy.
- Critically compare the different views held by ancient, modern and contemporary philosophers on the nature and logic of life and its ethical and political implications.
- Analyze, compare and contrast the logical structure of philosophical arguments.
- Apply and deepen the acquired understanding, knowledge and skills by compiling two well-balanced and theoretically informed academic essay which clearly articulate and critically analyze issues of their interest.

## Course Requirements

Successfully completing this course involves reading and written work:

- **Reading:** The students are expected to complete on average 50-80 pages of weekly reading. The reading assignments will consist of a selection from ancient Greek, modern and contemporary philosophy texts and optional reading of secondary literature. The texts will be either available at the CYA library or accessible in PDF form on Moodle.
- **Written work:** The students are expected to submit weekly informal (1-2 pages long) reflections based on the week's readings delivered to my email one day before the first class or second class of the week. The reports will not be graded separately. The grade will be calculated based on their timely submission and overall quality. Additionally, the students are expected to submit on specified dates a 3-5 pages long mid-term paper and a 5-8 pages long final paper. These should be written in an academic formal style and should consist of:
  1. An introduction which clearly raises the guiding question, states the position and describes how the position will be argued.
  2. A brief section which defines the key terms of the discussion and situates the problematic within a wider context.
  3. 2-4 well balanced, logically structured and straightforwardly interconnected sections that argue in favor of the position. The relevant arguments should be supported by the literature while also anticipating and refuting possible objections.
  4. A conclusion that summarizes the position and the relevant argumentation while also specifying possible objectives of further research on the topic.

## Evaluation and Grading

The evaluation of the students' overall academic performance will be based on:

- Class participation.
- Commitment to the reading assignments.
- The timely submission and overall quality of the weekly reports.
- Development of research and writing skills.
- The quality of the mid-term and final paper.

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

Class participation:	15%
Weekly reports:	25%
Mid-term essay:	25%
Final essay:	35%

## Evaluation Criteria - Course Assignments

- **Class participation and weekly reflections:** comprehensive and clear presentation of arguments, solid understanding of the readings, respectful and productive engagement in discussion.
- **Mid-term and final essay:** originality of ideas, well defined thesis, straightforward structure, clearly elaborated and logically structured arguments, serious consideration of secondary sources, writing style (flow, clarity, transitions, grammar, paragraph and sentence structure etc.).

## CYA Regulations and Accommodations

### Attendance Policy

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential. Absences are recorded and have consequences. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office.

### Academic Accommodations

If you are a registered (with your home institution) student with a disability and you are entitled to learning accommodation, please inform the Office of Academic Affairs and make sure that your school forwards the necessary documentation.

### Policy on Original Work

Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be provided (Check the Student Handbook, pg. 7).

### Use of Laptops

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

## Class Schedule

Week	Day/Date/Place (if applicable)	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due
1	M 01/29	Introduction
	W 01/31	Everything is full of Gods: The ensouled cosmos of the early Ionian thinkers
	F 02/02	The private and public life in Plato's <i>Crito</i>
2	M 02/05	Justice in the soul in Plato's <i>Republic</i> (Bk I)
	W 02/07	Justice in the City in Plato's <i>Republic</i> (Bk II)
3	M 02/12	The division of the soul in Plato's <i>Republic</i> (Bk IV)
4	M 02/19	The Good in Plato's <i>Republic</i> (Bk VI, VII)
	W 02/21	Nature in Aristotle's <i>Physics</i> (Bk I, II)
5	M 02/26	Form in Aristotle's <i>Physics</i> (Bk II) and actuality in Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> (Bk IX)
	W 02/28	Soul as the actuality of the body in Aristotle's <i>On the Soul</i> and the human and the animal in <i>The Movement of Animals</i>
6	M 03/04	The good life as the excellent activity of the soul in Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics Book I</i>

	<b>W 03/06</b>	<b>The human excellences/virtues in Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book III and the life of the citizen in Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> Book I, III</b>
7	<b>M 03/11</b>	<b>Course progress and direction overview</b>
	<b>TBA</b>	<b>Watch Robert Bresson's film <i>Au Hasard Balthazar</i></b>
	<b>W 03/13</b>	<b>The soul and body in Descartes <i>Meditations</i> and the human and the animal in Descartes <i>The Passions of the Soul</i></b>
8	<b>W 03/20</b>	<b>The affirmation of life, the overman and life as will to power in Nietzsche's <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> and <i>Will to Power</i></b>
9	<b>W 03/27</b>	<b>Life as existence in M. Heidegger's <i>Being and Time</i></b>
10	<b>M 04/01</b>	<b>Vita activa in H. Arendt's <i>The Human Condition</i></b>
11	<b>M 04/08</b>	<b>Iris Murdoch, <i>The Sovereignty of the Good</i></b>
	<b>W 04/10</b>	<b>Biopolitics in M. Foucault's <i>Society Must Be Defended</i></b>
12	<b>M 04/15</b>	<b>Giorgio Agamben, <i>Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life</i></b>
	<b>W 04/17</b>	<b>Jonathan Coetzee's <i>The Lives of Animals</i> and Jacques Derrida's <i>The Animal that Therefore I am</i> (following)</b>
13	<b>M 04/22</b>	<b>Claude Lanzmann's film <i>Shoah</i></b>
	<b>W 04/24</b>	<b>Becoming-animal in G. Deleuze's and F. Guattari's <i>Thousand Plateaus</i> and D. Haraway's <i>When Species Meet</i></b>
14	<b>W 05/08</b>	<b>Final discussion</b>

## Course Bibliography

Agamben, G., *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Daniel Heller-Roazen (trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Arendt, H., *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

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Cooper, J. M. (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997.

Deleuze G., Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi (trans.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

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Descartes, R., *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, Desmond M. Clarke (trans.), London: Penguin, 1998.

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Foucault, M., *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France (1975–76)*, David Macey (trans.), New York: Picador, 2003.

Haraway, D., *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Heidegger, M., *Being and Time*, J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (trans.), Oxford: Blackwell, 2001.

Murdoch, I., *The Sovereignty of Good*, New York: Routledge, 1970.

Nietzsche, F., *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (trans.), New York: Vintage, 1967.

Nietzsche, F., *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Andrian Del Caro (trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.