

## PHIL 356 | THE CONCEPT OF LIFE IN ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND ITS RELEVANCE TODAY

**INSTRUCTOR: IASON XYGKIS**

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**Office hours: Tuesday 12.30pm–01.30pm or 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.

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 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 Goals

**This course will primarily teach students 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 essays which clearly articulate and critically analyze issues of their interest.

### Course Requirements and Assessment

#### **CYA Attendance Policy**

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential, so attendance at all scheduled meetings is required. All absences are recorded and have consequences that may affect your grade.

- **Class Contribution 15%** – Class Contribution includes physical and mental presence in the classroom, arriving on time, preparation, participation in class discussions and group activities. Reading assignments are to be completed before each class session. 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. I expect all of you to come prepared, engage in our discussions, ask questions, and voice your opinions in class. If you are extremely uncomfortable

speaking in front of a large group of students, you may send your opinions or afterthoughts in writing via email.

- **Weekly Reflections 25%** – You will be expected to submit brief (1-2 pages) informal weekly reflections, reflecting on the readings of the week. The reflections should be sent via email one day before the first or second class of the week. These reports won't be graded individually. The grade will be calculated based on their timely submission and overall quality.
- **Midterm Essay 25%** – You will be expected to submit a mid-term paper spanning 3-5 pages (12pt Times New Roman, 1.5 spacing). This essay should demonstrate your comprehensive understanding of the course material up to that point and should showcase critical thinking skills and thoughtful analysis.
- **Final Essay 35%** – At the end of the course, you will be expected to submit a final paper spanning 5-8 pages. This essay serves as a culmination of your learning throughout the semester and should showcase a deep engagement with the course content, along with original insights and interpretations.

### **Policy on Assignments and Make-up Work**

Details about assignments and essays will be given in advance. I will accept no late assignments or make-up exams unless discussed with me in advance. If you are unable to come to class, please let me know beforehand.

### **CYA Policies and Regulations**

#### **Academic Accommodations**

Students are required to submit an official letter from the office at their school that handles academic accommodations (generally the Office of Disability Services), or to have that office send a letter. Students who have submitted such a letter to CYA should also talk to their professors individually to discuss how these accommodations will work in each specific course.

#### **Site Visits and Accessibility**

This course contains specific physical and spatial elements that are crucial to student learning and which cannot be modified. Students should be aware of these before enrolling in the course: Students will be asked to walk twice to Aristotle's Lyceum; the walking is short (10') and is mostly on streets and sidewalks.

#### **ePolicy on Original Work**

Plagiarism is literary theft. As such, it is a serious offense which will not be tolerated either at your home institution or at CYA. Plagiarism on an examination or in a paper will result in an F for the course. You must cite the author of any and all ideas that you use that is neither common knowledge nor your own idea. If you are in doubt, it is safest to cite the source. Your work should be original and reflect your own ideas and thoughts. If you are unsure about what counts as original work, please consult your professor and check the Student Handbook.

#### **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.

#### **Upgrade to 400-level course**

Courses can be upgraded to a 400-level. This constitutes usually 25% additional work on the part of the student. The option to upgrade opens the second week of classes. If you are interested in this option, please talk to your professor.

### **Required Readings**

1. Plato - Apology
2. Plato - Crito
3. Plato - Republic

4. Aristotle - Physics
5. Aristotle - Metaphysics
6. Aristotle - On the Soul
7. Aristotle - Nicomachean Ethics
8. Aristotle - Politics
9. R. Descartes - Meditations on First Philosophy
10. F. Nietzsche - Thus Spoke Zarathustra
11. M. Heidegger - Being and Time
12. H. Arendt - The Human Condition
13. I. Murdoch - The Sovereignty of Good
14. M. Foucault - Society Must Be Defended
15. G. Agamben - Homo Sacer
16. J. Coetzee - The Lives of Animals
17. J. Derrida - The Animal That Therefore I Am
18. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari - A Thousand Plateaus
19. D. Haraway - When Species Meet

**Fall 2024 Tentative Schedule**

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
	<b>Sep 5-7</b>	<b>Field Study   Delphi and Ancient Olympia</b>
1	Sep 10	Introduction
2	Sep 12	Everything is full of Gods: The ensouled cosmos of the early Ionian thinkers
3	Sep 17	The private and public life in Plato's <i>Crito</i>
	<b>Sep 18-21</b>	<b>Field Study   Crete</b>
4	Sep 24	Justice in the soul in Plato's <i>Republic</i> (Bk I) <i>This class will take place at Aristotle's Lyceum</i>
5	Sep 26	Justice in the City in Plato's <i>Republic</i> (Bk II)
6	Oct 1	The division of the soul in Plato's <i>Republic</i> (Bk IV)
7	Oct 3	The Good in Plato's <i>Republic</i> (Bk VI, VII)
8	Oct 8	Nature in Aristotle's <i>Physics</i> (Bk I, II) <i>This class will take place at Aristotle's Lyceum</i>
9	Oct 10	Form in Aristotle's <i>Physics</i> (Bk II) and actuality in Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> (Bk IX)
10	Oct 15	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>
11	Oct 17	The good life as the excellent activity of the soul in Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Bk I)
12	<b>Oct 22</b>	<b>Midterm Week</b> The human excellences/virtues in Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Bk III and the life of the citizen in Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> Bk I, III
13	<b>Oct 24</b>	<b>Midterm Week</b> Watch Robert Bresson's film <i>Au Hasard Balthazar</i> <b>Midterm Essays due by Oct 27 @ Midnight</b>
	<b>Oct 25-Nov 3</b>	<b>Fall Break</b>
14	Nov 5	The soul and body in Descartes <i>Meditations</i> and the human and the animal in Descartes <i>The Passions of the Soul</i>
15	Nov 7	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>Nov 12-15</b>	<b>Field Study   Peloponnese</b>
16	Nov 19	Life as existence in M. Heidegger's <i>Being and Time</i>

Day #	Date/Day	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due / Place (if applicable)
17	Nov 21	Vita activa in H. Arendt's <i>The Human Condition</i>
18	Nov 22	Iris Murdoch, <i>The Sovereignty of the Good</i>
19	Nov 26	Biopolitics in M. Foucault's <i>Society Must Be Defended</i>
	<b>Nov 28-Dec 1</b>	<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>
20	Dec 3	Giorgio Agamben, <i>Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life</i>
21	Dec 5	Claude Lanzmann's Film <i>Shoah</i>
22	Dec 6	Jonathan Coetzee's <i>The Lives of Animals</i> and Jacques Derrida's <i>The Animal that Therefore I am (following)</i>
23	Dec 10	Becoming-animal in G. Deleuze's and F. Guattari's <i>Thousand Plateaus</i> and D. Haraway's <i>When Species Meet</i>
24	Dec 12	Final Discussion
	<b>Dec 17</b>	<b>Final Exam Week</b>
	<b>Dec 19</b>	<b>Final Exam Week</b> <b>Final Essays due by Dec 20 @ Midnight</b>

**Schedule at a glance**

Day #	Date	Session	Venue
	<b>Sep 5-7</b>	<b>Field Study</b>	<b>Delphi and Ancient Olympia</b>
1	Sep 10	Introduction	
2	Sep 12	Presocratics	
3	Sep 17	Plato, Crito	
	<b>Sep 18-21</b>	<b>Field Study</b>	<b>Crete</b>
4	Sep 24	Plato, Republic BK I	Aristotle's Lyceum
5	Sep 26	Plato, Republic BK II	
6	Oct 1	Plato, Republic Bk IV	
7	Oct 3	Plato, Republic BK VI, VII	
8	Oct 8	Aristotle, Physics	Aristotle's Lyceum
9	Oct 10	Aristotle, Metaphysics	
10	Oct 15	Aristotle, On the Soul	
11	Oct 17	Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics	
<b>12</b>	<b>Oct 22</b>	<b>Midterm Week</b> Aristotle, Politics	
<b>13</b>	<b>Oct 24</b>	<b>Midterm Week</b> <b>Film</b> <b>Essays due by Oct 27</b>	
	<b>Oct 25-Nov 3</b>	<b>Fall Break</b>	
14	Nov 5	Descartes	
15	Nov 7	Nietzsche	
	<b>Nov 12-15</b>	<b>Field Study</b>	<b>Peloponnese</b>
16	Nov 19	Heidegger	
17	Nov 21	Arendt	
<b>18</b>	<b>Nov 22</b>	<b>Make-up T TH class)</b>	

Day #	Date	Session	Venue
		Murdoch	
19	Nov 26	Foucault	
	<b>Nov 28-Dec1</b>	<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>	
20	Dec 3	Agamben	
21	Dec 5	Shoah	
<b>22</b>	<b>Dec 6</b>	Coetzee, Derrida	
23	Dec 10	D&G, Haraway	
24	Dec 12	Discussion	
	<b>Dec 17</b>	<b>Final Exam Week</b>	
	<b>Dec 19</b>	<b>Final Exam Week</b> <b>Essays due by Dec 20</b>	

**Course Bibliography (Required and Supplementary Readings)**

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

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Barnes, Jonathan, ed. *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volumes I and II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Calarco, Matthew. *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Cohen, Tom, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Derrida*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Cottingham, John, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

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Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage, 1967.

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Shields, Christopher. *Aristotle*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2014.

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