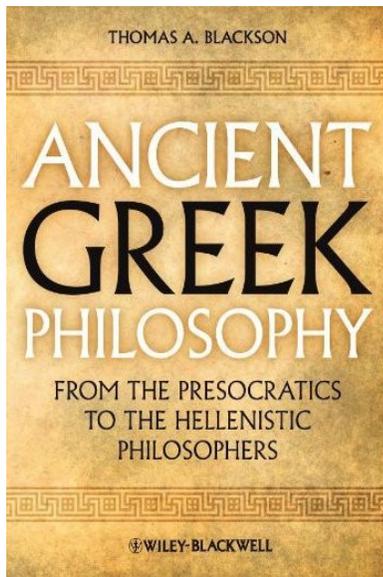


# History of Ancient Philosophy

PHI 328 (Summer 2015, Session A, 6 Weeks, Combined i- and o-course)

Thomas A. Blackson  
School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies  
Arizona State University

PHI 328 satisfies H (historical awareness) and HU (humanities, arts and design) of the University Undergraduate General Studies Requirement. It also satisfies a requirement for the Philosophy Major.



## Course Description

The ancient Greek philosophical tradition begins in 585 BCE with Thales of Miletus. It ends in 529 CE when the Christian Emperor Justinian prohibited pagans from teaching in the Schools. This thousand year period in the history of philosophy subdivides into the three periods of unequal duration and importance: the Presocratic Period, the Period of Schools, and the Period of Scholarship. The focus in this course is on the first two periods, or roughly the first five hundred years of ancient philosophy. Within this focus, the concentration is on Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic philosophers (the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Academic Sceptics). This focus and concentration is standard in the sequence of history courses required for the philosophy major in most American universities.

The history of ancient philosophy is a study in history. The aim is to understand what the ancients philosophers thought, why they had these thoughts, and how these thoughts figured in major areas of human development. The method is to consider what they wrote and what others wrote about them.

At the completion of this course, students will be familiar with the institution of philosophy in the ancient world and with some of the most important developments in the institution from its beginnings in 585 BCE with Thales and his fellow Milesian inquirers into nature to the end of the Period of Schools in 100 BCE, when the critical attitude that united the Hellenistic philosophers gave way to a resurgence of interest in non-skeptical forms of Platonism and to the eventual rise and dominance of Christianity. Students will know how ancient philosophy influenced the development of physics, beginning with the Milesian revolution in the Presocratic Period and continuing with the theory of “nature” (φύσις) in the work of Plato and Aristotle in the Period of Schools. Students will know how ancient philosophy influenced the development of psychology, beginning with Socrates' conception of the “soul” (ψυχή), its reinterpretation first in Plato and then in Aristotle, and with the attempt in the

Stoics to clarify and develop the Socratic conception. Students will know how ancient philosophy influenced ethics and politics, beginning with the subversive forms of education and conceptions of the good life associated with Socrates and the Sophists, with Plato's interpretation of the Socratic conception and the way this interpretation figures in his theory of justice, with Aristotle's attempt to remove the excesses from and preserve the insights in the Platonic interpretation, and finally with the interpretations of the good life and happiness in the Epicureans and the Stoics.

This knowledge in the history of ancient philosophy is valuable in several important ways. It provides essential background for more advanced studies in the field philosophy. It illuminates many present-day institutions and ways of thinking because so much of modern life has its origins in the pioneering and now long-lived work of the ancient philosophers. In addition, because so many modern ways of thinking about human beings and their place in the world have their origins in ancient philosophy, a historical understanding of these developments in antiquity puts one a good position to consider whether some of these ways of thinking have outlived their usefulness and have become a burden and no longer help us understand ourselves, what we do, and our place in the world.

## Reading

The primary text for this course is *Ancient Greek Philosophy: From the Presocratics to the Hellenistic Philosophers*, by Thomas A. Blackson (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). We will also read selected passages from the source material for the period of study. For the most part, they are available for free in translation on the internet in the Perseus Digital Library and the MIT Classics Library.

In addition to this reading, I have developed an extensive website for the course (<http://tomblackson.com/Ancient/syllabus.html>). The pages on this site highlight some of the more important points in the course. The website supplements the reading. It is not intended as substitute for reading either the text or the ancients themselves.

## Grading

The final grade (A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, D, E) is determined by your grade on 5 quizzes, 10 writing assignments, and 5 debriefing sessions. There is a quiz for each major unit of the course (Presocratics, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Hellenistic Philosophers). Each quiz consists of ten multiple-choice questions. Each quiz is worth 10% of your total grade. There are writing assignments for each of the major units of the course. Each assignment should be one to two pages in length and is graded on a pass/fail basis. Each writing assignment is worth 4% of your total grade. There is a "debriefing" session for each of the major units of the course. In the debriefing sessions, you share your experiences in the course with the class. Each debriefing session is worth 2% of your total grade.

The 5 quizzes (10 points each), 10 writing assignments (4 points each), and 5 debriefing sessions (2 points each) sum to 100 points. The point total determines the final letter grade: A+ (100-97), A (96-94), A- (93-90), B+ (89-87), B (86-84), B- (83-80), C+ (79-77), C (76-70), D (69-60), E (59-0).

There is no possibility for extra credit, but I am more than happy to help students with independent projects. Late work will not be accepted without good reason. Incompletes are given only to accommodate serious illnesses and family emergencies, which must be adequately documented.

## Schedule

### Unit 1: Introduction (*AGP*, introduction)

- The major figures and lines of thought in the period of study
- Methodology in the History of Philosophy

### Unit 2: The Presocratic Period (*AGP*, chapter 1)

- The social and political conditions in the Mediterranean Basin in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC
- Enlightenment thinking, the Milesian Revolution, the beginnings of physics and philosophy
- Parmenides and the methods for knowledge, reason versus experience
- The inquiry into “nature” (φύσις), Democritus and ancient atomism
  
- Reading from the *Hanover Historical Texts Collection*
  
- Quiz, two writing assignments, debriefing

### Unit 3: Socrates, the historical figure and the character (*AGP*, chapters 2 and 3)

- The Age of Pericles
- The trial and execution of Socrates
- The Sophistical movement
- Socrates, “love of wisdom” (φιλοσοφία), the “soul” (ψυχή), and “happiness” (εὐδαιμονία)
- Socrates against the Sophists
  
- Reading from the *Perseus Collection: Greek and Roman Materials*
  
- Quiz, one writing assignment, debriefing

#### Unit 4: Plato and the Academy (*AGP*, chapters 4 and 5)

- The Peloponnesian War and the end of the Golden Age
- Plato's interpretation of Socrates
- A new conception of the soul, its relation to the body, and the good life
- The theory of justice in the *Republic*
- The renewed interest in nature in the *Timaeus*, the teleological perspective
  
- Reading from the *Perseus Collection: Greek and Roman Materials*
  
- Quiz, three writing assignments, debriefing

#### Unit 5: Aristotle and the Lyceum (*AGP*, chapters 6 - 9)

- The rise of Macedon, Alexander the Great, a new school is established in Athens
- The first great Platonist and the first great Platonic critic
- Physics is second philosophy, becoming like the unmovable first mover
- The soul is the form of the body
- Ethics and the good life in the *Nicomachean Ethics*
  
- Reading from the *Perseus Collection: Greek and Roman Materials, ASU online Library*
  
- Quiz, three writing assignments, debriefing

#### Unit 6: The Hellenistic Philosophers (*AGP*, chapter 10)

- The ancient world after the death of Alexander in 323 BCE to the death of Cleopatra in 30 BCE
- Epicurus and the Epicureans
- The Stoics
- The Academic Sceptics
  
- Reading from the *Perseus Collection: Greek and Roman Materials, MIT Classical Library*
  
- Quiz, one writing assignment, debriefing

### **Contact Information**

Thomas A. Blackson  
Philosophy Faculty  
School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies

Lattie F. Coor Hall, room 3356  
PO Box 874302  
Arizona State University  
Tempe, AZ. 85287-4302  
blackson@asu.edu, tomblackson.com, www.public.asu/~blackson