

**Introduction to Ancient Philosophy**  
**Philosophy 2200F (002)**  
The University of Western Ontario

**Class Days and Hours:** Tu 10:30 – 12:30, Th 10:30-11:30 (TC-342)

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course studies three main areas of Ancient Greek philosophy: Atomism, Platonism, and Aristotelianism. The Atomists (Democritus, Leucippus, Epicurus) developed a systematic and comprehensive natural philosophy that tried to account for the origins of everything in terms of the interaction of atomic (literally, ‘uncuttable’) bodies, which strike against one another in an infinite void to form compound material substances. There is no room for divine intervention or intelligent design in this world-view as everything results from purely mechanical interactions between bodies. Plato, arguably the most lively and engaging literary figure in the history of philosophy, was the first to truly engage in the rigorous and systematic examination of ethical, political, metaphysical, and epistemological issues. In this sense philosophy can be called his invention. However, Ancient Greek philosophy—and some say, philosophy itself—reached its zenith with Aristotle, who is perhaps the most influential and prolific thinker in the history of human thought. His ideas revolutionized practically every area of inquiry from logic to biology to psychology to metaphysics. This course will provide students with an introduction to the major themes and issues confronted by these thinkers. We shall examine such questions as: What is the underlying nature of reality? Is the fundamental state of the universe motion or stability? Is knowledge possible? If so, how do we acquire it? Can we have knowledge of a changing world or does knowledge require eternal, unchanging objects (e.g. Plato’s Forms)? What is philosophy and how should it be practiced? What is the nature of happiness and how does one attain it? How many kinds of friendship are there? Is friendship necessary for happiness?

**WHY STUDY ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY?**

Students will find Ancient philosophy worth studying from both an historical and contemporary perspective. On the one hand, the theories and explanations offered by the Ancients are fascinating and worth understanding in their own right, even where their ideas no longer have contemporary relevance. In many cases those ideas helped set the agenda for much of the subsequent development of the history of Western philosophy and science. This course will thus offer philosophy students an insight into the foundations of their discipline. On the other hand, many of the problems raised by the Ancients continue to be *our* problems. In some cases the student of Ancient philosophy will find solutions that have not yet been appreciated by contemporary philosophers. And even where students disagree with the Ancients, reflecting on *why* they disagree can point them towards their own solutions to these enduring problems. In this way, studying the history of philosophy can be useful in helping burgeoning students develop positive philosophical views of their own.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

This course has two objectives. The first is to give students of philosophy an introduction to the origins and foundations of their discipline, including the problems that define it. The second is to help students develop their ability to read and understand difficult philosophical texts and to reflect on the ideas and arguments they offer us. These are basic skills that every well-rounded philosopher should have. Class discussions, writing assignments, and exams will provide the main vehicle for assessing a student's success in these areas.

### REQUIRED TEXTS:

Coursepack.	Available at <u>Inprint</u> . [appx. \$10.00]
Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of the Universe</i>	Available at UWO Bookstore. [appx. \$14.00]
Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> .	Available at UWO Bookstore. [\$5.20]
Plato, <i>Protagoras</i> .	Available at UWO Bookstore. [\$8.35]

\*Students may find helpful Peter Adamson's podcasts on the history of philosophy ("History of Philosophy without any gaps"), which is available at [www.historyofphilosophy.net](http://www.historyofphilosophy.net) or on iTunes (search: King's College London History of Philosophy).

### REQUIREMENTS:

Essay (2,500 - 2,700 words) due Oct. 13.	45%
Cumulative final exam.	45%
Participation.	10%

### AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.