

Philosophy 9032B
The *Sophist* and the Sophists
Course Outline



“The Son of Protagoras” graffiti artist MTO, Belfast

Seminar: Winter 2018
Wednesdays 2.30-5.30
StvH 1145

Instructor: John Thorp
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Office Hours: Mondays 1.30-3.30

Description and Course Objectives:

The Sophists of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE can't seem to shake their bad reputation, a reputation for moral relativism on the one hand, and argumentative legerdemain – sophistry – on the other. Plato's savage lampooning of them, especially in the dialogue called *The Sophist*, seems to have fixed them in ignominy for all time. George Grote in the 19th century, and both Deleuze and Lyotard in the 20th, sought to rehabilitate them, casting them as progressive reformers of a sleepy intellectual tradition, but their efforts have not had lasting impact. This seminar will reassess the question, giving close study to the Sophists' extant writings, from Protagoras to Anonymus Iamblich.

Method of Instruction & Texts:

The weekly seminars will consider assigned readings of primary texts, working to draw out their thematic implications. The texts will be made available online.

Work Required:

Eight short exegetical exercises (1-2 pp) due at various dates throughout the term: 20%
Two conference-style papers (max. 3000 words) due early March and early May: 70%
Class participation: 10%.