

Initial Lecture

Welcome to the study of Ancient and Mediaeval Philosophy. This course is intended for philosophy majors and is one of three required courses for all philosophy minors. This course is also the first in a series of three “history” courses required for all philosophy majors. As such, I shall presume in designing the content for this course, that you are either a philosophy major or minor or have some deep interest in the subject matter. Although this course does not have any prerequisites, and this is regrettably unfortunate, I must gear the content towards the philosophers. So, for the non-philosophers, the initial learning curve will be strenuous. You should seriously consider whether or not you are able to keep up with the challenge.

Another concern I have, in designing the content for this course, is how this course sequences into History of Modern Philosophy (PHI 255) and History of Contemporary philosophy (PHI 256). In selecting representative figures from this rather vast period of time (approximately 600 BCE to 1500 CE), I must take into consideration not only the relative importance of that thinker during his or her lifetime, but also whether that thinker had any enduring impact on the overall development of philosophy *per se*. In addition, not all philosophical texts have been preserved. This is unfortunate, because some of the more intriguing ancient thinkers’ writings only exist in fragmentary forms, if at all. One last concern that directly impacts selection of content is the cost of the texts. There are a wide variety of translations and critical apparatus available. Some are inexpensive but vastly inaccurate; others are extremely valuable, but extremely costly. I think it is safe to say that even for a text like the *Republic*, these range from the cheap but useless to the grotesque in cost. The earlier considerations factor here as well.

Three principles guided my selection process here. First, if complete texts exist, and inexpensive but extremely accurate translations exist, then these take precedent over selections or other fragmentary works. Second, if complete texts do not exist, and the thinker plays a pivotal role in shaping or influencing the development of philosophy, and there are extremely accurate, inexpensive translations available, then they are preferable to selections of these texts or simply commentary. Finally, if a number of original source materials are available, and there are accurate, inexpensive or affordable translations available, then a single representation complete text is preferable to tiny slices of many texts. The fruits of this selection process are our readings. My intent is that these texts will form the basis of your philosophical library.

For the philosophy major, and, for that matter, the philosophy minor, once you work through this and the other history sequence courses, you should have a rather substantial collection of the primary texts of philosophy.

So, I should also address some of the thinkers that have been left off the list. For the earliest period, the so-called pre-Socratic philosophers, only those that influenced later thinkers are represented. This means that we will not be able to look at a number of important male figures and practically all of the pre-Socratic women philosophers. The reason for their latter omission is due to cost. There is, or was, a fine collection of the surviving fragments of these thinkers, but this text has not been in print for years. Amazon lists this book’s price at \$250.00

per copy, which makes it impractical for our purposes. The same can be said for the other Socratic philosophers other than Plato. What is left of their thought is also too expensive for our use. Two periods or movements that we will not examine are the Sophistic movement of the 5th century BCE (too fragmentary, and expensive) and the neo-Platonic movement (2nd Century BCE to 5th Century CE) because there are too many texts and none are representative of the whole system.

As we move into the Mediaeval period, matters become worse. There are no fewer than 9 distinct major philosophical movements or traditions during this period. [neo-Platonic, Christian; neo-Aristotlean, neo-Platonic, Greek Christian; neo-Platonic, Jewish; neo-Aristotlean, Jewish; neo-Platonic, Muslim; neo-Aristotlean, Muslim; Byzantine; Dialectic, and Nominalist traditions]. To properly address all of these traditions would require an entire semester itself. By invoking the historical sequence principle, that is, how this course prepares you for the history of modern philosophy, I artificially restricted the readings to the Latin West. I do need to say that I am not entirely satisfied with this choice. Several extremely important philosophers will not be addressed because of this selection, and this is not to be perceived as any sort of value judgment on my part about those not represented. In fact, on a personal note, I prefer many of these thinkers to those on the list. But if I am to prepare you, in the end, for René Descartes, then we *must* do the Latin West. With the exception of Baruch Spinoza, none of the Modern philosophers make use of these other traditions. Spinoza was clearly influenced by Moses Maimonides. However, depending on who is teaching PHI 255, you may not encounter Spinoza.

So, in the end, there is a reasonable sequence to the number and order of the thinkers we will be examining. For those not represented, no value judgment is being made about the overall importance of their work. If any value judgment is being made, it is one concerning the cost of textbooks and the pace these courses must maintain. Ideally, each of the History sequence courses could be doubled without even beginning to exhaust the vast variety and richness of the Western philosophical tradition. So, if we cannot do everything, we'd better do the most influential, and in that sense, most important elements of the Western tradition.

So, to establish some common ground to our investigations, let's start with some definitions. theoretical, practical, and productive sciences.

metaphysics or ontology, epistemology, cosmology, method

ethics, politics, theology

aesthetics, rhetoric, poetry and music

Return to these definitions throughout this semester.