

Philosophy 315. History of Western Philosophy: Ancient Period.
Fall 2009.
Time: MWF 11:00. VKC 256h

Professor Kevin Robb

First Class (Mon. Aug. 24): Informal orientation session.

Some topics for discussion.

Traditional divisions of the ancient period and a few major figures of interest to philosophers in each period.

Archaic Period: Homer, Hesiod and the early Presocratic Philosophers. Thales, Xenophanes, Anaximander, Parmenides.

Classical Period (and High Classical Period): Old Sophists, Later Presocratic philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle.

The Hellenistic Period: Stoics, Epicureans. The Athenian Philosophical Schools. Philo of Alexandria.

Patristic Period: Greek and Latin Fathers of the Christian Church.

The above classification covered roughly the period from 700 BC to 500 AD. Some knowledge of the major figures was retained in Europe in all periods, especially in Byzantium. Knowledge of the Presocratic philosophers, however, largely depended on Aristotle's treatment of them before Diels's magisterial nineteenth-century contributions, e.g., Aquinas in his On Separate Substances repeats Aristotle.

Starting in the late nineteenth century, a series of astonishing discoveries were made over a period of some seventy-five years or so in the field of archeology and related fields. These added to European "history" the previously unknown earlier cultures of Bronze Age and Dark Age Greece. These are now known as Minoan, Mycenaean, and Dark Age (Geometric and Sub-Geometric) Greece. This classification covers roughly the period from 2000 BC to 700 BC.

These discoveries also revealed for the first time since antiquity the causal factors behind the dominating role that Homer and Hesiod (in origin both were oral compositions) played in early Greek culture. This dominance lasted at least down to the time of Plato and the composition of the Republic.

Problems of sources and of manuscript survival from antiquity. The transmission of Greek literature from antiquity.

Discussion of the areas of emphasis in this course.

The main emphases will be: The surviving words of selected Presocratic philosophers (including Hesiod), and the philosophical thought of Socrates and Plato. For Plato the emphasis will be on

the early dialogues and the Republic, with special attention paid to his social and political philosophy. To a lesser degree, but importantly, we will also examine the historical origin of the Theory of Forms which is at the core of Plato's epistemology.

As they relate to the main emphases of the course, and as time permits, the following may also be discussed:

1. Greece as the first culture to develop from a sophisticated culture of primary orality to one of alphabetic dependency in its major institutions (e.g., law and higher education) and how this fact affected the development of philosophy, science, and logic.

2. Selected aspects of the philosophies later than Plato, such as those of Aristotle, Epicurus, Stoics, and Aquinas.

The formal course requirements are: a pass/fail quiz; 1 full period exam; a final exam; a final paper (15-20 pages).

Assorted topics of interest to students: Types of paper (research or speculative, and examples of each) and paper topics. The importance of class attendance. Incompletes. Office Hours. Citing the Internet. Wicked Wikipedia? Student questions.

Note: The material for the course will be covered in the following order, but with considerable flexibility from week to week.

Week 1-2. Historical introduction. The surviving poems of Homer and Hesiod. The introduction of the alphabet (and reintroduction of writing) into Greece. The cultural dominance of epic in the Archaic period of Greece. The role of the gods and Greek religion as preserved and conveyed in oral epic before the rise of philosophy.

Discussion will be organized around the contributions of Heinrich Schliemann, Arthur Evans, Michael Ventris, Rhys Carpenter, Milman Parry, Eric Havelock.

Required Readings. Havelock, Preface to Plato, Introduction, Chapter 7 and 8 (preferably in that order); McKirahan, Philosophy Before Socrates, chapter 1 (on sources).

Suggested background reading: Finley: Early Greece; CAH² 3.3; G.S. Kirk, The Songs of Homer; idem, Homer and the Epic; Robb, Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece (Introduction, Chapters 1-3).

Week 3. Finish the historical background if necessary. There may be a short Pass/Fail quiz on the historical material when it is completed.

Begin Hesiod and the first philosophers of Greece.

Reading: Handouts, and the chapter in McKirahan on Hesiod, in McKirahan, Philosophy Before Socrates, chapter 2. Havelock, Preface, Chapters 3-6, especially "Hesiod on Poetry."

Weeks 4 - 5. The First Western Philosophers. Thales and Anaximander of Miletus; Xenophanes of Colophon. Xenophanes on the One God Supreme and the Homeric gods of popular Greek religion.

Readings on these philosophers in McKirahan, pp. 23-32; 32-47; 59-68.

Week 6. Parmenides of Elea and the Atomists (Leucippus and Democritus). Readings in McKirahan, pp. 151-178; 304-343.

Week 7. Finish the Presocratic Philosophers (if necessary). Begin Socrates.

There will be an hour exam when the Presocratic material is finished.

In this period, when the reading is light, students should also be reading Havelock, Preface to Plato, and have finished chapters 3-10.

Optional reading (on Heraclitus)

Robb, "Preliterate Ages and The Linguistic Art of Heraclitus" in Robb, Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy; idem, "Psyche and Logos in the Fragments of Heraclitus: Origins of the Concept of Soul" and idem "The Witness in Heraclitus and Early Greek Law," in The Monist, all available in the Hoose Library.

Week 8 - 9. Socrates and The Socratic Literature; the Socratic Problem; the issues in the trial of Socrates; the dialogue form; the argument of the Euthyphro. The Euthyphro Dilemma.

Readings: Euthyphro is required, and Apology and Crito are suggested. All are found in Defense of Socrates.

Suggested readings. McKirahan on early Greek ethics and the Sophists (pp. 353-389); K. Robb, "Asebeia and Sunousia: Issues Behind the Indictment of Socrates," in G. Press, ed. Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations; K. Robb, "Orality, Literacy and the Dialogue Form," in R. Hart and V. Tejera, Plato's Dialogues: The Dialogical Approach.

Week 10. Republic, Book I. Begin Book 2

Readings: Republic, Book 1

Weeks 11-15 Republic, Books 2 - 10, or as much of the dialogue as time permits.

Reading: Republic, Book 2 - 6, minimum.

Havelock, Preface to Plato, remaining chapters.

Also, as time permits, we may discuss such still relevant topics as the development of the concept of God in Greek thought, or the development of the Greek concept of human arete (virtue, excellence) from Homer to Aristotle, etc. Or read: Hippolytus

Note: The material covered in the final weeks can vary depending on when class discussion of the Republic is concluded. Additional topics or readings (if any) will be announced in class well in advance.

For the course paper, any standard style format may be followed, but some format (e.g., Chicago Manual of Style, Turabian, etc.), especially for citations, should be adopted, and consistently followed. Important classical authors (e.g., Homer, Plato) must be cited in the standard or professional manner.

Term paper due: To be discussed

Last day of classes: Dec. 4.

Date of final exam: See schedule of classes. Exam period: Dec. 9 -- 16. It will also be announced in class. Other relevant dates: Labor Day holiday, Monday, Sept. 7; Thanksgiving break, Nov. 26-28.

There are three main components to the grade: a midterm exam, a final exam, and a course paper.

Books

McKirahan, Philosophy Before Socrates

Havelock, Preface to Plato

Plato, Defense of Socrates, Apology, Crito. Published by Oxford University Press

Plato's Republic. Translated by Grube. Published by Hackett

Hesiod: Theogony.

Recommended Reading

Any standard history of Greek philosophy can be useful, although these tend to take a conventional approach often with lingering debts to the treatment of Aristotle in Metaphysics Alpha. Also possibly useful and available in the Hoose Library are:

R. Nettleship, Lectures on the Republic of Plato (Oxford U. Press)

K. Robb, Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece (Oxford U. Press)

K. Robb (ed.), Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy

G. Press, (ed.), Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations