

Provisional Syllabus
PHIL 353: Presocratic Philosophers

Instructor: Léa Derome
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MWF 8:35–9:25 (ET)

Course overview

This course is an introduction to early Greek philosophy (600–450 BCE). We will read and discuss the surviving fragments and testimonies associated with the central figures of this period, including Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras and Democritus. These thinkers pioneered a new kind of inquiry into nature and engaged with a wide range of fundamental questions in the realms of cosmology, metaphysics, and epistemology: How did the world as we know it come into existence? What are the structural principles of reality? What is true knowledge and how can humans attain it? The chief objective of this course is to provide students with a historical and critical understanding of the primary texts.

Mode of delivery

Two pre-recorded lectures will be uploaded on myCourses every week. On most weeks, the Friday lecture will be delivered live on Zoom and will sometimes be replaced by a group discussion or review session. A detailed schedule will be posted on myCourses at the beginning of the term.

Required course materials

The Presocratic Philosophers. 1983. Edited by G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schofield, 2nd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Physical copies will be available at the Word Bookstore: 469 Milton Street, (514) 845–5640. The Word takes cash and personal cheques.

The e-book can be purchased online, including on the website of Cambridge University Press: <https://www.cambridge.org/ca/academic/subjects/classical-studies/ancient-philosophy/presocratic-philosophers-critical-history-selection-texts-2nd-edition?format=AR&isbn=9780521274555>

* If you buy a used copy, make sure it is the 2nd edition.

All additional readings will be provided electronically via myCourses.

Means of evaluation

Three discussion questions: 10%
Two small writing assignments (250 words each): 20%
Midterm exam: 30%
Final paper (1500 words): 40%

Grading criteria

To do excellent work in this course, you need to be able to do more than reiterate what was said in class. An “A” indicates that you not only understand the material, but that you have also thought critically about it, grasping at least some of its subtleties and implications. A “B” reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; “B” work does not capture the complexity of the issues. A “C” suggests a struggle with the material that results in basic comprehension but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A “D” indicates only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. An “F” indicates no understanding either of the assignment or of the material.

Extensions

No extension will be granted without the appropriate documentation. Late work will be penalized at the rate of a third of a grade per calendar day past the due date. For example, a paper that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a grade of B-; the same paper, if two days late, would receive a C+.

Emails

I endeavour to answer your emails within two business days. Questions that cannot be answered in a short email should be raised during office hours.

Language policy

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Academic integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (visit www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

Copyright and intellectual property

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