

PROVISIONAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophy, to an Athenian of the 5th-4th century BC, meant higher education: it was founded on the thesis that, in order to rule a city well or to participate in ruling it well, or even to manage your own household or your own life correctly, you need some kind of training beyond what was provided by the traditional Greek disciplines of gymnastics, music including the study and performance of the poets, and grammar (reading and writing). Different philosophers put forward different disciplines as the content of this higher education. Plato takes over from the "sophists" (esp. Protagoras, Gorgias, Antiphon) the belief that some such higher discipline is necessary, but he rejects their candidates for such a discipline (political virtue, rhetoric, natural history) as inadequate, and tries to provide something better. We will look both at their proposals and at his criticisms and counter-proposals, noting the political context to which their proposals appeal, and noting the different philosophers' analysis of the "arts" or disciplines, of how the discoveries of the arts were first made and of how we can come to make more such discoveries, and of how we can turn more domains of experience and conduct into learnable and teachable arts. We will spend some time on medical texts, since many of our philosophers take medicine as the model of such an art, which they try to imitate in constructing a "medicine of the soul." In the process we will read a number of background texts (from the sophists, the poets, and the medical texts attributed to "Hippocrates") and a good number of Platonic dialogues. The stress will be on close and careful reading and discussion of the texts; a fair amount of reading will be assigned, and it will not be the easiest reading, and it is absolutely necessary to do each day's assigned reading before class and to have the texts with you for class discussion. Students will be required to prepare handout analyses of assigned texts twice during the term, and to participate in discussion; to pass the course you *must* do the assigned readings on time and be prepared to answer questions about them (not necessarily correctly, but thoughtfully and in a way that contributes to class discussion). There are no specific prerequisites, but this is not intended as a first course in philosophy: you should have experience with how philosophers evaluate arguments and how they critically read and interpret philosophical texts. You must be able to read the Greek alphabet, or learn within the first week of term (it is easy, and helpful handouts will be provided; I will test on this, and you must pass the test to remain in the class), and you must be prepared to listen to discussions of the meanings of Greek words, and to get used to some of them as technical terms borrowed into English for the purposes of the class. No further knowledge of Greek language, culture or philosophy is presupposed, although naturally any such knowledge could only be an advantage.