



## PHI 310: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy.

Fall 2016.

Kipton Jensen, PhD. Associate Professor of Philosophy.

Department of Philosophy and Religion, Sale Hall, 108a.

[kipton.jensen@morehouse.edu](mailto:kipton.jensen@morehouse.edu)

Class Schedule: MW(F) @ 13:00. Sale 110.

**Course Description:** According to the catalogue description, this course aims at a judicious “survey of thinkers and philosophical schools from the pre-Socratics to Augustine” (AD 354-430). At its most extreme, one could quip – as Whitehead quipped – that “Western philosophy consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” But when it comes to exploring the pre-Socratic philosophers, the conventional canon of ancient philosophy is narrowed to the Milesians, through fragments, and subsequent commentaries, with vague allusions to Plato’s interest in Pythagoras. But ancient philosophy did not, as we shall see, spring forth full-grown from the head of Plato (nor did it emerge miraculously with Socrates or even the canonical pre-Socratics). The ancient Mediterranean was bustling with cosmopolitan influences, or periods of intellectual and spiritual exchange, times that pre-date the Persian influence prior to the Peloponnesian Wars, prior to Socrates and his philosophical or religious contemporaries during the Axial Age: e.g., Confucius and Laozi in China, the Buddha in India, the proliferation of the Vedas, Mahavira the Jainist, the exile and return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, in the time of Cyrus, and Zarathustra in Persia.

This course aims to serve as a critical or revisionist supplement to the ‘traditional western canon of ancient philosophy’ within the Axial age (i.e., the canonical literary and oral traditions of pre-Socratics, which typically includes Thales and Empedocles, Parmenides and Heraclitus, Anaximander and Anaxagoras, Democritus, perhaps Pythagoras, which culminated in Socrates and Plato as well as Aristotle, the Roman philosophers, Plotinus and the Christian St. Augustine).<sup>1</sup> And

---

<sup>1</sup> "Fundamental ideas," wrote Jaspers, "rose everywhere in the Axial Age" (1951: 135); "If there is an axis in history, we must find it empirically in profane history, as a set of circumstances significant for all men, including Christians. It must carry conviction for Westerner, Asiatics, and all men, without the support of any particular content of faith, and thus provide all men with a common historical frame of reference. The spiritual process which took place between 800 and 200 B.C.E. seems to constitute such an axis. It was then that the man with whom we live today came into being. Let us designate this period as the "axial age." Extraordinary events are crowded into this period. In China lived Confucius and Lao Tse, all the trends in Chinese philosophy arose... In India it was the age of the Upanishads and of Buddha; as in China, all philosophical trends, including skepticism and materialism, sophistry and nihilism, were developed. In Iran Zarathustra put forward his challenging conception of the cosmic process as a struggle between good and evil; in Palestine prophets arose: Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Deutero-Isaiah; Greece produced Homer, the philosophers Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato, the tragic

certainly, these philosophers are central if not decisive to the shape of ancient philosophy, especially as appropriated by Christianity and canonically codified within the medieval world. But if we follow instead Peter Kingsley's reading of ancient philosophy, and his way of tracing things back to the non-Western roots of Western civilization, a strategy that he shares with Bernal, though they go about it differently, then the traditional canon of ancient philosophy will seem relatively provincial in scope and geographical imagination. (William James once told his students that "it [was] high time to urge the use of a little imagination in philosophy"; I wish to encourage you, as students of ancient philosophy, to do the same thing – i.e., to diligently exercise a little imagination when it comes to studying ancient philosophy.) With a bit of philosophical imagination, I believe, it is not terribly difficult to re-imagine or re-read if not also revise the canon of ancient philosophy as a cross-cultural accomplishment that reaches well beyond the shores of Greece and stretches the traditional timeline farther back to philosophical traditions that predate the western "pre-Socratics" by at least two millennia. An alternative cross-cultural canon of ancient philosophy would ideally reach back at least as far as the Maxims of Ptahhotep (ca. 2414-2375 BC) and then trace the history of inter-cultural influences that shaped philosophical discourse within the ancient world; less ideally, but as a step in the right direction, it would seem helpful to have a cross-cultural canon for the period covering the Axial age. (For an argument in favor of stretching the geographical or topological boundaries beyond the conventional canon of ancient western philosophy, and extending the timeline of ancient philosophy to philosophical traditions that precede the Pre-Socratics, an admittedly bold hypothesis, see "An Apologia for a Cross-Cultural or Cosmopolitan Anthology of Ancient Philosophy.")

We will give special attention to the history of ancient philosophy in Africa, especially Kemet and Cush. We will read Asanti and Obenga on the Egyptian philosophers, certainly, but we will also read Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers* as well as portions of Charles Finch's *The African background to medical science: essays on African history, science & civilizations* (Karnak House, 1990) and Paul Ghalioungui's *The House of Life (Per Ankh): Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt* (M. Israel Press, 1973). Selections from Bernal's *Black Athena* and Peter Kingsley will also read and discussed. We will have guest lectures from our colleagues in Africana Studies, including Drs. Livingston, Hewitt, and B. King. In addition to reading and discussing primary as well as secondary sources on ancient philosophy, we will also spend time learning the basics of several ancient languages (e.g., hieroglyphics, Hebrew, Greek, and Chinese).

**Required Curriculum Materials:** Our textbook, *Ancient Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, written by Julia Annas, is available at the Morehouse Bookstore, but the electronic textbook is available through our AUC Woodruff library: [click here](#).

#### **Recommended Curriculum Materials:**

We will give special attention this semester to the writings of Ayi Kwei Armah, primarily but not exclusively: *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*, *The Healers*, and *Stars of Deep Beginnings*. These materials will be made available electronically via Blackboard.

---

poets, Thucydides and Archimedes. All the vast development of which these names are a mere intimation took place in those few centuries, independently and almost simultaneously in China, India and the West.'

### Tentative Reading Schedule:

1. The Conventional Map and Timeline.
2. *The Book of Coming Forth* and Ptahhotep's "Maxims": "Is it true because it is in the tradition, or is it in the tradition because it is true?"
2. Plato's Jailhouse Dialogues, viz, *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and the *Phaedo*.
3. "Humans and Beasts: Self-knowledge"\* [AP, Annas: C1]
4. Timeline Exercise I: The Geography of the Axial Age: Stretching Annas' "Timeline" (see AP, Appendix).
  - Guest Lectures: "Cush and Kemet" (Dr. Livingston, Dr. Hewitt).
5. Why do we (still) read Plato's *Republic*?" [AP, C2; also read *Republic*, I, II, and VII].
6. Timeline Exercise II: An Apologia for a Cross-Cultural Canon: Charting a Less Conventional Map of Ancient Philosophy.
7. "The happy life, ancient and modern" [AP, C3].
8. Timeline Exercise III: Bernal's *Black Athena* and the 19<sup>th</sup> c. socio-historical construction of Africa.
9. "Reason, knowledge and Skepticism" [AP, C4]
10. Timeline Exercise IV: Chinese Philosophy.
  - Guest Lectures: "Confucius and Taoism" (Dr. Shen, Dr. Herman, and Mr. Moore).
11. "Logic and Reality" [AP, C5]
12. Timeline Exercise V: Indian Philosophy.
13. "When did it all begin? And what is it anyway?" [AP, C6]
14. Timeline Exercise VI: Judaic Philosophy.
  - Guest Lecture: "Philosophy amongst the Palestinian Prophets" (Dr. DePalma).
15. Timeline Exercise VII: Persian Philosophy, see Kingsley Appendix.
16. The Contention and Confluence of Influences on Ancient Philosophy: Final Paper Presentations.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

These are the stated learning outcomes for philosophy majors:

1. Philosophy majors will demonstrate competence in critical and analytical thinking.
2. Philosophy majors will demonstrate proficiency in constructing and evaluating argumentative essays.
- 3. Philosophy majors will be able to competently explain the global significance of philosophical ideas.\***
- 4. Philosophy majors will be able to identify key non-Western as well as Western philosophical schools of thought.\***
5. Philosophy majors will demonstrate knowledge of major themes, problems and issues in the history of philosophical thought.
6. Philosophy majors will be able to demonstrate familiarity with the theoretical problems of contemporary ethics, theory of knowledge, and metaphysics.

\* This semester, in this course, learning objectives 3 & 4, above, will be significantly enhanced and deepened. Students will be asked to think about and formulate an answer to the question concerning, the importance of ancient African thought for establishing – quoting Angela Davis’s “Lectures on Liberation” – “a continuum from the past to the present” but also for discovering “the genesis of problems that continue to exist today, to discover how our ancestors deal with them” ([1969] 2010: 66).<sup>2</sup>

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Please note that this is only a cursory outline of the major assignments; in class you will receive more information about each one. If you foresee any problems with assignment due dates, please let me know in advance.

1. Midterm Exam (20%).
2. Final Paper (30%).
3. Weekly Modules or Exercises (30%).

---

<sup>2</sup> On the function of teaching the history of philosophy, Davis writes: “We ought to approach the content of this course not as frozen facts, as static, as meaningful only in terms of understanding the past. We are talking about philosophical themes, recurring philosophical themes. Philosophy is supposed to perform the task of generalizing aspects of experience, and not just for the sake of formulating generalizations, of discovering formulas, as some of my colleagues in the discipline believe. My idea of philosophy is that if it is not relevant to human problems, if it does not tell us how we can go about eradicating some of the misery in this world, then it is not worth the name of philosophy” (Angela Davis, “Lectures on Liberation,” [1969] 2010: 66).

4. Attendance and class participation constitute **20%** of your overall course grade. Please see the statement below regarding the attendance policy. Regarding class participation, it is expected that you will complete each reading assignment and contribute regularly, and thoughtfully, to classroom discussion.

## **HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR WORK**

All written work must be submitted electronically via the course Blackboard page: Assignments.

## **GRADING**

Each assignment will be graded on a scale of 0 to 100. These individual assignments will be weighted as indicated above such that your final course grade will also be determined on a scale of 0 to 100. The final letter grade will be based on the following scale: 93+ = A; 90+ = A-; 87+ = B+; 83+ = B; 80+ = B-; 77+ = C+; 73+ = C; 70+ = C-; 67+ = D+; 63+ = D; 60+ = D-; 59-0 = F.

## **LATE WORK**

Late work will not be accepted. Extensions will be granted only under extreme circumstances, with at least 48 hours advance notice, with appropriate documentation, and in consultation with Student Services and your academic advisor.

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Because this course is based on textual interpretation and discussion, it is essential that you attend each class meeting. According to the Morehouse College attendance policy, you are allowed three unexcused absences. Students with more than three unexcused absences will be referred to the Office of Student Success and may be administratively withdrawn from the course. Failure to meet minimum attendance requirements may result in the loss of the student's financial aid in accordance with federal financial aid requirements.

## **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you plagiarize any portion of any written assignment, you will fail the course and your case will be reported to your dean. One of the best ways to avoid plagiarism is to avoid secondary sources on the Internet. I encourage you to stick to assigned and recommended texts only. While many primary texts are available via the Internet, online secondary sources are rarely reputable, and even the more legitimate websites may discourage you from developing your own thoughts and interpretations. If you get any ideas or take any passages from the Web, just as if you get any ideas or take any passages from printed sources, you must cite your sources. Here are official Morehouse College statements on plagiarism and academic dishonesty:

**From the Course Catalog:**

Morehouse is an academic community. All members of the community are expected to abide by ethical standards both in their conduct and in their exercise of responsibilities toward other members of the community. The College expects students to understand and adhere to basic standards of honesty and academic integrity. These standards include but are not limited to the following:

- In projects and assignments prepared independently, students must never represent the ideas or the language of others as their own.
- Students must not destroy or alter either the work of other students or the educational resources and materials of the College.
- Students must not take unfair advantage of fellow students by representing work completed for one course as original work for another or by deliberately disregarding course rules and regulations.
- Unless directed by the faculty member, students should neither give nor receive assistance in examinations.
- In laboratory or research projects involving the collection of data, students must accurately report data observed and not alter data for any reason.
- When an instructor concludes that the above standards have been disregarded, it is his or her responsibility to make the evidence available to the student and also to report the incident to the Dean of Men. The instructor is free to assign any academic penalty, including failure in the course, for violations of the academic honesty regulations.

**From the Faculty Handbook:**

- Plagiarism is the submission of another person's work as one's own without acknowledgment in the written work. There are basically four ways in which research papers use or incorporate written materials, and each of these requires footnoting.
- Direct quotations: These should be marked off with quotation marks, with a footnote to indicate your source. It is not necessary to place in quotation marks every word in your paper that appears in a source you are using. If your paper concerns Napoleon, for example, you need not place 'Napoleon' in quotation marks merely because your sources use the name. Similarly, there are phrases of some length such as 'on the other hand' or 'it is evident that' which are common property and act in effect as single words. You must place in quotation marks, however, any striking word or phrase, or any sequence of four or more words that communicates a meaning developed by the author of your source.
- Paraphrase: Where your own language follows closely the language of a written source, or where your line of argument follows a source, you need not use quotation marks. But you are obliged to indicate the source in a footnote.
- General Indebtedness: Where the ideas in a paper closely resemble and were suggested by the ideas in a source, a footnote should be used to indicate this.

- **Background Information:** In any area of inquiry there are matters of fact commonly known to everyone with a serious interest. Such information need not be footnoted one fact at a time. Instead, a general footnote toward the beginning of the paper, naming the sources where such general information was obtained, is sufficient.

For more information on the College Academic Integrity Policy, see page 233 of the Course Catalog. Please note that you are not allowed to submit the same work for credit in multiple classes. As I will explain when I assign the first paper, you will be asked to document sources with parenthetical references and a works cited page (following the APA style). Plagiarism is serious stuff! Please let me know if you have ANY questions about this.

## **CELL PHONE AND LAPTOP POLICY**

Our purpose in the classroom is to discuss and reflect upon a series of authors and ideas that, if taken seriously, can change your life. We spend only a few hours in the classroom each week, and we simply cannot afford to let ourselves get distracted by text messages, emails, and other temptations of the digital age.

## **EEO AND DISABILITY STATEMENT**

Morehouse College is an equal opportunity employer and educational institution. Students with disabilities or those who suspect they have a disability must register with the Office of Disability Services (“ODS”) in order to receive accommodations. Students currently registered with the ODS are required to present their Disability Services Accommodation Letter to faculty immediately upon receiving the accommodation. If you have any questions, contact the Office of Disability Services, 104 Sale Hall Annex, Morehouse College, 830 Westview Dr. S.W., Atlanta, GA 30314, (404) 215-2636.

## **SYLLABUS IS NOT A CONTRACT**

A syllabus is not a contract between instructor and student, but rather a guide to course procedures. The instructor reserves the right to amend the syllabus when conflicts, emergencies or circumstances dictate. Students will be duly notified.

## **INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY**

In the event of inclement weather, the College will announce any closures via the emergency notification system and/or through local news outlets. Absent an official closure, students are not excused from attending class due to weather and any absences will be considered unexcused.