

PHILOSOPHY 115: PHILOSOPHICAL METHODS SEMINAR

Philosophical Fragments of Early Greek Thinkers

Department of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego
Spring 2017 T/Th 3:30-4:50pm HSS 8025

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Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) 8009 Drop-in office hours: T/Th 3-3:30 and 5-6pm
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Course Description: The most ancient Greek philosophers, many of whom were writing at a time of transition between oral and literate culture, had a permanent influence on all later developments in philosophy and science, especially in the areas of cosmology, ontology, zoology, anthropology, and epistemology. But none of their works have survived intact. Scholars therefore must discern their ideas by scrutinizing fragments that subsist in later sources. These sources are frequently hostile, and inevitably operate with their own conceptions of the means and ends of philosophy. Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct and criticize the seminal arguments of such writers as Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus.

Course Objectives: (1) Learn to read and interpret the fragments of the early Greek philosophers in translation. (2) Scrutinize the way later sources report earlier philosophical views. (3) Compare and integrate fragments in order to reconstruct philosophical arguments viable in their historical milieu. (4) Appreciate how later philosophical views developed as a response to earlier ones and how the interpretation of the most ancient philosophers remains relevant to the interpretation of the most modern ones. (5) Familiarize yourself with the origin of seminal philosophical concepts like monism, dualism, pluralism, naturalism, materialism, and atomism.

Required Textbook: *Early Greek Philosophy*, Jonathan Barnes. London: Penguin Books, 1997.

Method of Evaluation: Each student will develop a research term paper consisting of a discussion of two or more fragments, from at least two different sources, of one of the early Greek philosophers listed on this syllabus, and a comparison of two or more secondary sources offering different interpretations of the fragments in question. In addition, each student will present various aspects of their research at various points in the term, leading up to a substantial presentation and discussion at the final exam. A final exam will test the ability to recognize, interpret, and criticize the language and arguments of the early Greek philosophers. Attendance is mandatory and contribution to discussion will be graded.

Schedule

April 4: Overview of early Greek philosophers and the sources

April 6: Issues, themes, and developments in early Greek philosophy

April 11: Precursors (Barnes, pp. 55-60)

April 13: Class cancelled: Professor at the American Philosophical Association conference

Note: Each student will meet one-on-one on April 10, 11, or 12 with the Professor to discuss plans for the research paper. Appointments will be made during week 1.

April 18: Anaximander (*EGP*, pp.71-76)

Due: scholar assignment.

April 20: Xenophanes (*EGP*, pp.93-100)

April 25: Heraclitus (*EGP*, pp.100-128)

Due: bibliography assignment.

April 27: Heraclitus

May 2: Parmenides (*EGP*, pp.129-142)

Due: translation comparison assignment.

May 4: Parmenides

May 9: Empedocles (*EGP*, pp.161-201)

May 11: Empedocles

May 16: Anaxagoras (*EGP*, pp.226-239)

Due: rough draft of term paper.

May 18: Anaxagoras

May 23: Democritus (*EGP*, pp.244-288)

May 25: Democritus

May 30: Democritus

June 1: Final (In-class) Exam

June 6: Presentations

Due: final draft of term paper.

June 8: Presentations