

CC.110
Becoming Human: Ancient Greek Perspectives on the Good Life
Lecture: Tuesdays 9:30-11:00
Room 16-160

Recitation I:
Thursdays (Athens: 9:35-10:15; Sparta: 10:20-10:55)
Room 16-160

Prof. Linda R. Rabieh (lrabieh@mit.edu)
Office: 16-177c
Office hours: Mondays and Tuesdays 2-4 pm, or by appointment

Recitations II: Times TBD

TAs:

Simon Alford (salford@mit.edu)
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Sasha Rickard (rickard@mit.edu)
Kathleen Zhu (kathqzhu@mit.edu)

This course addresses the crucial question of what constitutes the good life for a human being. If the need for serious human beings to address this question is apparent, it is far from clear that they should do so by studying ancient Greek philosophy. After all, the philosophers we examine this semester lived in a world very different from our own. Yet, we *must* begin by seriously engaging with them. Why? Not only did the ancient Greeks – as you will see – articulate and illuminate the fundamental human concerns with unparalleled clarity; their distance from our world is in fact an important reason to study them. They pose a powerful challenge to our modern thinking about the good life.

In this course, we will read the writings of ancient Greeks as a means to begin to wrestle with questions such as the following: What is justice? What is virtue? What is true friendship? What is love, and what should we expect from it? Is pleasure what we truly seek? How should we think about God and religion? What about the life of the mind – what is its place in political society and in a well-lived human life? What is genuine knowledge and how do we acquire it? We will examine the answers given to these questions in classical Greece and compare those answers to our own. You will see that

the authors we study are not mere reflections of their times but that they reflected profoundly on the fundamental questions, challenging and transcending the conventions of their own society. **We will find that many of their insights remain valid and that we can learn *from* them and not merely *about* them.**

You may not be able to answer the questions we will study conclusively at the end of this course. If, however, you attend closely to the readings and to class discussion, you will understand how complex and important the questions are, and you will be in an excellent position to begin to address them in your futures, both at MIT and in the rest of your lives.

I encourage you all to continue our class discussions with each other outside of class as well as with the TAs and with me during my office hours (please set up an appointment if you cannot attend during the times listed above). These books are the object of my teaching and scholarship because I continue to learn from them, so I love discussing them and the issues they raise.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Grasp and explore the problem at the heart of each theme we discuss.
2. Learn how to engage a difficult, unfamiliar text.
3. Become aware of and alert to irony in philosophic works.
4. Learn how to ask good questions.
5. Discuss or debate serious, even controversial, questions, in a rigorous but respectful way.
6. Argue by listening to others' objections and responding to them, trying together to arrive at a better, deeper understanding.
7. Write clearly and formulate structured, cogent arguments.

BOOKS FOR PURCHASE (please be sure to purchase or borrow THESE translations)

Four Texts on Socrates (West and West translation) Cornell U Press (978-0801485749)

Plato's *Republic* (Bloom translation) Basic Books (978-0465069347)

Plato's *Symposium* (Benardete translation) U of Chicago Press (978-0226042756)

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Bartlett and Collins translation) U of Chicago Press (978-0226026756)

Aristotle's *Politics* (Lord translation) U of Chicago Press (978-0226921846)

EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS:

Class Attendance and Participation:

Regular class attendance is MANDATORY. Absences from class without a legitimate reason (e.g., illness) can lead to a “no record” grade.

BUT your presence in class alone does not constitute participation. Your most important task for this course is to do each week's reading with care. This means that you should come to class ready to reflect on the portion of the text assigned for that week. Daily exploration, analysis and class discussion of the materials we will read is crucial. You do not learn something well by hearing someone else explain it; active thinking, questioning and discussing are necessary.

Engaging in class discussion does not mean that you have to know the answers before you speak; often – or even usually – the most useful kind of discussion involves a question rather than an answer. The quality of your experience in class, and that of everyone else's in it, depends to a large extent on **YOU**. Your participation grade will be based on the extent to which you are a responsible and active discussant. Being a discussant means taking responsibility for helping the class as a whole investigate and explore whatever question is on the table. For some of you, this may mean learning to speak up more than you have before; for others, this may mean learning to be more judicious and patient.

Weekly Response Questions:

You will receive study questions in advance of each week's reading assignment. These are designed to help you focus your reading, and you should keep the questions in mind as you read each week's assignment. In order to help develop your reading and writing skills, each week you will submit onto our stellar site a **ONE-PAGE** answer to **ONE** of the study questions.

A good response will do two things: a) attempt to answer the question asked and b) raise some difficulty posed by the question you address. You need not, however, be narrowly confined by the study questions. If something else in the assigned text puzzles you or seems interesting or important to you, you may choose to address that issue. You might raise a question, make an objection or raise another possibility not addressed in the text, something that could be the basis for a question or discussion in the seminar.

There will be 12 response papers. Your grade will be based entirely on submitting them on time each week. If you hand in all 12, you will receive an A; if you hand in 10, you will receive a B; if you hand in 8, you will receive a C. If there are fewer than 8 response papers, you will receive no credit for that portion of your grade.

Papers:

During the semester you will submit three papers of approximately 1000 words each. For each paper, you will have a list of suggested paper topics from which to choose. For the second two papers, you may devise your own topic, but please consult with me BEFORE you get started!

Your first paper will be handed in initially as draft. I will then organize conferences with each of you to go over the outline in preparation for your final draft. The outline will count for half that paper's grade.

You must submit both an online and paper version. Papers should follow standard formatting (typed, page-numbered and double-spaced, etc.).

Please familiarize yourself with MIT's policy on academic integrity, which you can find here: <https://integrity.mit.edu>. If you have any questions at all about what constitutes plagiarism (a most serious academic offence), please do not hesitate to speak with me about it.

You will find a document with advice about how to write a paper for this class on our stellar site. Please consult this BEFORE beginning to work on your papers.

Please note well: **no late papers can be accepted**, and extensions of the paper deadlines may be granted only under the most extreme circumstances (e.g., serious illness, family emergency).

Recitations:

Each week you will have two 45-minute recitations.

For the Thursdays recitation, you will be divided into two groups for discussion about that week's reading. Topics for discussion will come from the study questions for that week, but students are encouraged to raise questions that arise from that week's lecture. Two students will sign up each week to be in the "hot seat," which means they will have primary responsibility for helping to develop the discussion. Your preparedness for and contribution to the discussion during your time in the hot seat will count for 10% of your participation grade.

For TA recitations, you will be divided into groups, each of which will meet for a 45-minute session with one of the TAs. The TA for each section will read your response papers for her or his section and will lead discussions either based on your response papers or on a question that the text raises. They will also be available for help with the texts and with your assignments. The TAs are Concourse students who have all taken and excelled in this class. Do not hesitate to seek their advice or their thoughts about the class, the assignments, or any of the issues we discuss.

Grade Distribution

As summarized below, 60% of your grade will depend on written submissions, and the remaining 40% on your class and recitation participation. Your response papers will be due by 9:00 am on Tuesdays. You will also submit three papers during the semester.

Grades are calculated as follows:

Paper 1 (draft):	10%
Paper 1 (polished version):	10%
Paper 2 (1000 words):	15%
Paper 3: (1000 words):	15%
Weekly response papers:	10%

Class Attendance/Participation 40%

Miscellaneous:

Laptops, ipads or any such devices are not permitted in class (this should go without saying, but neither are cell phones – they must be stored away and turned off – or other notebooks/devices).

Late response papers (i.e., received after the class in which they are due) are not accepted unless there are exceptional circumstances.

The TAs and I will be taking attendance for each meeting. If you have more than two unexcused absences (from either the lecture or recitations), you will be in danger of getting a “no record” in the class, which is the freshman fall semester equivalent of failing the class. I realize that this is harsh, but this class requires your physical and mental presence. We want to explore these questions as a group, and regular absences will make this difficult, if not impossible, to do.

You are welcome to bring coffee or water with you to class. If you must eat, please try to do it discreetly so as not to bother (or distract) your classmates. And do please resist the temptation to get up during class— to fill a bottle of water, send a text, or perform the daily ablutions—unless of course Nature herself absolutely demands it.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Weekly Assignment (please have the book or passage with you for each class)

See the document “Study Questions” on the stellar site for each week’s study questions. You are responsible for the WEEK’s reading on Tuesday. If I change the questions at all, I will advise you of this with plenty of advance notice through stellar.

9.6 -- Introduction

Wisdom: Natural and Divine

Reading: (Both readings are in Four Texts on Socrates)

9.11 – Aristophanes, *Clouds*

9.18 – Plato, *Apology*

The Problem of Justice

Reading:

9.25 – Plato, *Republic* (Book I)

October 1 – FIRST PAPER DRAFT DUE (4:00 at my office)

10.2 – Plato, *Republic* (Book II)

10.11 -- Plato, *Republic* (Books III). NOTE: THURSDAY CLASS

10.16 – Plato *Republic* (Book IV)

The Nature of Love

Reading:

10.23 – Plato, *Symposium* (189c-193d; 198a-212a)

October 29 – FIRST (revised) PAPER DUE, 4:00 pm

Happiness and Moral Virtue

Reading:

10.30 – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* NE (Bk I, chs. 1-5, 7-10, 13; Bk II, chs. 1-4, 6-7, 9)

11.6 – Aristotle, NE (Bk III, chs. 1-5)

11.13 – Aristotle, NE (Books, III, chs. 6-9; IV, chs. 1, 3; V. chs. 1-4, 7)

November 21 – SECOND PAPER DUE, 4:00 pm

Friendship

Reading:

11.20 – Aristotle, NE (Book VIII, chs. 1-6, 7-8, 13; IX, chs. 3-4, 7-12)

Politics and the Best Regime

Reading:

11.27 —Aristotle, NE (Bk X, chs. 6-9), Politics (Book I, chs. 1-2)

12.4 – Aristotle, Politics (Book I, chs. 4-7, 8-13);

12.11 – Aristotle, Politics (Book III, chs. 1, 3-13); no response paper due the last week of classes)

December 12 – THIRD PAPER DUE, 4:00 pm