

Introduction to Philosophy

PHI 182A (Spring 2020)

Professor: Dr. Christopher Eliot, Associate Professor of Philosophy
Office: 104F Heger Hall (516-463-4516)
Office hours: Mon 10:40–12:40, Wed 2:30–3:30 and by appointment
Email: Christopher.Eliot@hofstra.edu (or Christopher.H.Eliot@hofstra.edu)
Texts: 9781585103621 Plato, *Socrates and the Sophists*
9780872206335 Plato, *Five Dialogues*
9780872205871 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*
9780872202412 *The Epicurus Reader*
9780812968255 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations: A New Translation*
other readings linked from <https://chreliot.github.io/phi182a/>
Course time & place: Mon/Wed 12:50–2:15 in Heger 101

Course website:

The course website is <https://chreliot.github.io/phi182a/>

Important dates:

First essay due: Mar 6
Second essay due: Apr 10
Third essay due: May 13

What we're doing here:

We will engage with representatives of three major, ancient philosophical traditions of the Mediterranean region that have continued to be influential to the present. We will focus on their views of how it's best to live, situating those in relation to their views about the nature of human beings and the nature of the world.

My goals for this course are that you:

1. become familiar with three major, ancient philosophical traditions and some of their core figures;
2. develop your skills at and comfort with formulating productive questions;
3. develop your skills at participating comfortably and productively in academic discussion;
4. develop your skills at identifying the arguments in sophisticated texts;
5. develop your skills at writing clearly and persuasively;
6. develop your sense of what role philosophical inquiry—both academic and informal—might play in living a good life.

Course requirements:

1. You will need to **access the texts** and figure out your strategy for reading them and making notes on them.
2. You are expected to **read, and be prepared to discuss**, the assigned texts. You will receive a participation grade which figures in both your contributions to class and the apparent preparedness reflected in them. Participation is not mere attendance; it involves volunteering contributions. I may even call on you and expect you to have

something relevant to say. Though presentations will help explain the readings, you cannot expect to understand our discussion without reading yourself. Much of the point of our meeting in person is that you bring you be able to engage *your independent scholarship* with that of other scholars—your peers and me. Obviously, that requires having both read and digested the text. Do it.

3. You are expected to **attend** the class sessions. I will be taking attendance regularly, at or after each session. Arriving late counts as half an absence. Absences beyond 2 will reduce your grade by .1/4 More than 2 sessions of missed attendance will be factored into your participation grade. You *do not* need to contact me about being absent! However, if you have doctors' notes or excuses from Hofstra officials, keep them on file until the end of the semester, in case you need to show why you had more than 2 absences.

Also, since you will be responsible on tests for knowing what happened in class even if you did not attend, it may be helpful to figure out someone in the class you can ask. I can tell you what topic we discussed in class, but I can't repeat the lecture or discussion or email notes. I don't have notes that would make sense to you. Others might.

4. You will need to figure out a strategy for taking **taking notes**.
5. There will be three out-of-class **writing assignments**. Each one will require writing as much as 1500 words and must be submitted through a Turnitin link on the course Blackboard site.
6. Finally, I always hope this goes without saying and am occasionally disheartened to find that it doesn't: I ask you to **be respectful** of the business of the class during class sessions. In this course it is acceptable drink or eat quietly during class, but please do not distract yourself and others by watching video, loudly chomping Doritos, etc. Especially as this will be a small discussion course, I expect polite engagement from you. That involves not nodding off and not engaging in distracting side-conversations, but also being sensitive to the need to make room for as many students' contributions as possible.

Evaluation:

I would prefer to teach entirely without grades, but their existence has various kinds of value for you. So we have them. Here is where yours come from:

To the degree it is practically feasible, I evaluate your work anonymously, to eliminate unconscious biases and approach objectivity. (Obviously, under certain circumstances, it is not practically feasible.) Your grades will be calculated according to the University's standards, relative to course expectations, and relative to other members of the class. This does *not* mean your grade will be "curved" to a mean score, but it may be adjusted upwards depending on overall class performance. That is, you will earn at least the score you deserve according to University standards, but also one related to how other students performed. Writing assignments and exams will be graded using a 4-point scale. "Incomplete" status will also not be given automatically, nor in the absence of a compelling, written request.

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Participation	25%
First Essay	25%
Second Essay	25%
Third Essay	25%

I will circulate partial/preview grades for participation at the one third and two thirds marks, so you have a clear sense of how I think you're doing. Grades for writing assignments, quizzes, and tests will be converted to Hofstra's 4-point scale before calculation.

- 4 = **A** represents exceptional work.
- 3 = **B** represents superior work.
- 2 = **C** represents satisfactory work.
- 1 = **D** represents below-satisfactory work.

Instructor's own academic honesty policy:

Representing someone else's work as your own, or any other form of scholastic dishonesty (as defined by the University), will automatically earn you an F for the course, beyond the required dishonesty form. So this is the key point you should internalize now: If you ever find yourself in circumstances where it seems like a good idea to be dishonest, please come talk to me about what we can do about the circumstances instead. You will find that while *after* I've detected scholastic dishonesty, the outcome is severe and automatic, *beforehand* I try to be as helpful as possible.

Syllabus adjustments:

Unexpected events can lead to changes in the schedule and syllabi. However, it's important to me that you not feel that the rules have changed on you mid-stream, so, if any changes are necessary, I will make them as fair as possible.

Contacting me:

The best way to contact me is by email; I check it regularly. If you have a quick question, often we can take care of it by email. But if you need more help, don't hesitate to visit my office hours, listed above, or ask (in person or by email) to set up another mutually-convenient time. Phoning is not a reliable way to reach me.

General university policies:

The page at this URL describes university policies about academic honesty, student access services, university-wide deadlines, incomplete grades, discriminatory harassment, relationship violence, sexual misconduct, and absences for religious observances: <http://www.hofstra.edu/about/administration/provost/provost-hofstra-policies.html>

Final thought:

Inevitably, grades are a function of performance, not of effort in itself. I can't reasonably assess effort. What's challenging varies from student to student. You will need to figure out what *you* need to do to perform well. I will try to help you with what's hard for you, if I know you need help. In the end, you are responsible for your education, however, and if you are confused, you should ask a question, or I will assume you understand. Unless you discuss them with me in person or by email, I will also likely not be aware of any dissatisfactions you have with any aspect of the course. I hope you will not be dissatisfied. I think this material is useful and fun, and believe an important part of my job is to try to show you why it is.