

Why the Greeks Matter: Plato and the Greek Heritage

LSHV-413-30

Spring 2008

Prof. F. Ambrosio

1. Objective of course:

In 2003, Thomas Cahill published the fourth volume in his “Hinges of History” series entitled, *Why the Greeks Matter*. In it he explores the multiple and profound ways in which Greek civilization is embedded in the genetic coding of the society in which we live.

The objective of this course is to introduce the student to the ways in which the Greek cultural heritage continues to shape the world in which we live today. The course will provide the student with a basic introduction to Greek philosophy in general and to the thought of Plato in particular by showing how philosophy both preserved and transformed all the basic elements of the Greek culture that preceded it. In this context we will discuss the relevance to philosophy of the evolution of early Greek religion and the great myth cycles, the Homeric epics, the rise of the so-called “mystery religions,” and the work of the tragic poets, as well as the influence of the Ionian theories of the physical cosmos and the Sophistic movement. Plato emerges not simply as the first great philosophical writer but as the mediator between the Greek heritage and its future contribution to western civilization.

The thesis will be argued that Greek philosophy sprang from the same roots as the myths, epics, tragedies and speculation regarding the cosmos, and that not only Plato’s thought but the philosophical tradition as a whole is best understood as providing one of the two cornerstones of the culture in which live today (the other being the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition), shaping not only our intellectual framework but all of the same elements of our culture as those from which it originally sprang: our religions, literature, science, morality, politics and art. Throughout the course the connection between some of the most urgent contemporary cultural and societal issues we face today will be traced back to patterns of thinking and acting that the Greek tradition shaped in decisive ways 25 or more centuries ago.

2. Readings:

1. Plato, The Collected Dialogues, Princeton University Press
2. Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter, Thomas Cahill, Doubleday
3. The Greek Philosophers, W.K.C. Guthrie, Harper
4. The Oresteia, Aeschylus, University of Chicago
5. The King Must Die, Mary Renault, Vintage Books

3. Assignments:

- § Midterm paper, 1500 words. 35%
- § Final paper, 2500 words, Undergraduates; 4000 grad students. 65%

4. Attendance:

Failure to attend more than two class meetings (except for documented medical reasons) will result in a grade deduction of one-half grade for each additional absence.

5. Class Schedule and Assignments:

***** N.B. Please Note Reading Assignment For First Class.**

Class 1,	Introduction; Read Guthrie, chpt. I, and Cahill, Introduction, prior to class meeting.
Class 2,	The Homeric Epic (selections); Read Cahill Chapters I and II (pp. 15-76); S. Weil, "The Iliad, or The Poem of Force."
Class 3,	Plato, Apology; Guthrie, chpt. IV; Cahill, chpt. IV
Class 4,	Plato, Crito;
Class 5	Aeschylus, The Oresteia;
Class 6,	Plato, Meno; Guthrie, Chpt. II; Cahill, chpt.V; ****Mid-term paper due
Class 7,	Plato, Phaedo; Guthrie, Chpt. III,
Class 8	Phaedo; Renault, <i>The King Must Die</i>
Class 9,	Plato Symposium; Cahill, chpt. III & VI
Class 10	Plato Symposium
Class 11	Plato, The Republic (selections)
Class 12	The Republic (conclusions)

6. Disabilities Statement:

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable

accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.