



PHIL 1010. Introduction to Western Philosophy: Ancient

Instructor of record: J. Joseph Porter
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Office hours: by appointment

Fall 2026
Hellems (HLMS) E210
M/W 12:20-1:10 PM and F recitations:

Teaching assistant: Dawn Jacob
Email: dawn.jacob@colorado.edu
Office hours: W 2:30-3:30 PM
Hellems (HLMS) N255 and by appt.

1010.001: F, 11:15 AM-12:05 PM, Bruce Curtis (MCOL) E186
1010.002: F, 12:20-1:10 PM, Hellems (HLMS) E1B05
1010.003: F, 1:25-2:15 PM, Eaton Humanities (HUMN) 180

Course Description

What is justice? What is the nature of the good life? What is history? In this course, we will explore these and other fundamental ethical, social, political, and philosophical questions through a survey of great thinkers of the Western tradition from the ancient to the medieval period. We will focus on primary-source excerpts from some of the most influential works of all time, including Homer's *Iliad*, Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Cicero's *De officiis*, and the Bible.

Content Warning: In this course, we will discuss controversial topics which may affect you or your peers personally. Please let me know if you have questions or concerns about any element of the course.

Course Requirements

Perusall	15%	
Engagement	15%	
Assignment 0	5%	Fri., Sep. 4 (in recitation)
Assignment 1	15%	Wed., Sep. 23 (in lecture)
Assignment 2	20%	Thurs., Nov. 19, 11:59 PM
Assignment 3 (Final Exam)	30%	Mon., Dec. 7, 4:30-7:00 PM (in HLMS E210)

Perusall: You are expected to complete the Perusall assignment for each class session BEFORE class (even if you will be absent from class) so that you can come to class ready to discuss it. Completing a Perusall assignment involves actively, carefully, and critically reading (and/or watching) the materials included in it and commenting on them. Perusall is an online social reading platform which allows you to read collaboratively with each other (and us) by commenting on course readings—either anonymously or not—and reading and replying to each other’s comments. You are encouraged to watch [this short video](#) and consult [this annotation guide](#) to learn more about Perusall.

Perusall will provisionally grade your Perusall assignments. **So long as you add substantive comments to assignments and complete them carefully and without rushing, you should receive full credit on them.** At the end of the semester, all your assignment grades will be reviewed (and, if necessary, revised upwards) to ensure that your final overall Perusall grade is fair. However, **it is ultimately your responsibility to ensure that you receive credit on Perusall assignments.** The best way to do that is not to procrastinate on them, skim through them, or add only one or two brief comments on them. (We recommend planning on one hour and three or more substantive comments per assignment.) You can always check your assignment grades on Perusall by clicking on My Scores in the lefthand sidebar. (Note that there may be a slight delay before assignment grades are updated.) If you ever believe Perusall has failed to give you the credit you deserve, please let us know.

Perusall assignments can be completed late for up to half credit (and possibly more if completed excellently and very soon after their respective deadlines). You will have until the final exam to make Perusall assignments up. (Note that you won’t be able to respond to quiz questions after assignment deadlines, but you will still be able to complete and comment on readings.) It is your responsibility to keep track of which Perusall assignments you may need to make up. **A final Perusall grade lower than 50% may result in automatic failure of the course.**

Attendance: Punctual attendance is expected at all class sessions. **Absences and tardies will result in a lower engagement grade, and six or more absences may result in automatic failure of the course.** You can make up absences during the add period and up to two additional absences over the course of the semester. Unless otherwise indicated, you cannot make up any further absences. **It is your responsibility to communicate with us proactively about absences during in-class quizzes and exams.** (It is also your responsibility to ensure that your attendance is recorded whenever a physical attendance sheet is distributed in class.) Unless otherwise specified, you can make up a Monday or Wednesday absence by watching the full recording of the class session from which you were absent and submitting one or more full pages of handwritten notes and/or reflections on it to Dawn by email. Unless otherwise specified, you can make up a Friday recitation absence by submitting two or more full pages of handwritten reflections on the preceding one or two Perusall assignments and/or class sessions to Dawn by email. (Please confer with us if you are interested in making up an absence in another way—for instance, by recording a video reflection.) You will have until the final exam to make absences up. If you believe exigent circumstances (e.g., an extended illness) may entitle you to further accommodations (e.g., the opportunity to make up more absences), please let us know as soon as possible.

Engagement: You are expected to engage with this course both in class—by listening attentively, asking questions, and so on—and outside of class—first and foremost, by engaging with Perusall assignments. Note that **your final Engagement grade will be determined not only by your attendance and punctuality but also by your overall engagement with the course**—including Perusall engagement.

Electronics: Unless otherwise indicated, **the use of electronics is prohibited during class.** Please let me know if you may require an accommodation to use electronics during class.

Extra Credit: You can receive up to three points of extra credit on your final grade. You can do so first and foremost by attending specific approved events in person during the semester. (If you are a Benson Undergraduate Fellow or Freytag Fellow, note that your attendance at an event cannot count both towards your fellowship requirements and towards course extra credit.) You can receive up to one point of extra credit for each event you attend (depending in part on your punctuality and engagement). Information on additional extra credit opportunities may be found [here](#).

Respect: You are always expected to treat your peers (and us) with respect regardless of their (or our) ethical, political, or religious views, sex, ethnicity, or anything else. One important skill we will train in this course is understanding other people's views and taking them seriously even when we think they are incorrect, immoral, or otherwise objectionable. (We ourselves will sometimes play devil's advocate in class and temporarily defend views we think are incorrect.) This skill cannot be developed properly unless we collectively foster an environment of curiosity, open-mindedness, and respect in which all of us can express our views freely.

Assignments: You will be expected to complete three major assignments for this course: one in-class, handwritten essay exam (Assignment 1), an electronically submitted essay (Assignment 2), and an in-person, handwritten final exam (Assignment 3). You will receive more information about these assignments over the course of the semester.

Course Materials

No textbooks are required for this course. Unless otherwise specified, all course readings and other materials may be found on Perusall. The Perusall student platform access fee for this course is \$5.

Grading Scale

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
94+	90-93	87-89	84-86	80-83	77-79	74-76	70-73	67-69	64-66	60-63	59-

Mental Health and Wellness

The University of Colorado Boulder is committed to the well-being of all students. If you are struggling with personal stressors, mental health, or substance use concerns that are impacting academic or daily life, please contact [Counseling and Psychiatric Services \(CAPS\)](#) by coming to their office in the C4C or calling their 24/7 support line at (303) 492-2277. Free and unlimited telehealth is also available through [Academic Live Care](#). The Academic Live Care website also provides information about additional wellness services on campus that are available to students.

[University-mandated Syllabus Statements](#)

Course Schedule

As a reminder, you are expected to read and comment on the Perusall assignment for each class session BEFORE class.

Unit 1. The Greek and Roman World

Friday, August 21: Recitation

Syllabus

Lewis, “On the Reading of Old Books” [selections]

[Selection from Machiavelli’s Letter to Vettori](#)

Pre-semester Survey

Monday, August 24: Homer

Homer, *Iliad*, Introduction and Books I-IV [selections]

Wednesday, August 26: Sophocles

Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* [selections]

Friday, August 28: Recitation

Monday, August 31: Herodotus

Herodotus, *Histories*, Book I.1-92 [selections]

Wednesday, September 2: Thucydides

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* [selections]

*Friday, September 4: **Assignment 0** and Recitation*

[Monday, September 7: NO CLASS]

Wednesday, September 9: Plato

[Selections from the IEP’s “Plato: *The Republic*”](#)

Plato, *Republic*, 357a-424c [selections]

Syllabus

Friday, September 11: Recitation

Monday, September 14: Plato [Guest Lecturer: Benjamin Storey]

Waterfield, *Plato of Athens*, ch. 5

Wednesday, September 16: Plato

Plato, *Republic*, 427c-445b [selections]

Friday, September 18: Recitation

Monday, September 21: Plato

Plato, *Republic*, 544d-580c [selections]

*Wednesday, September 23: **Assignment 1***

Friday, September 25: Recitation

Monday, September 28: Aristotle

[Selections from the SEP's "Aristotle's Ethics," pp. 1-2](#)

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I [selections]

Wednesday, September 30: Aristotle

[Selections from the SEP's "Aristotle's Ethics," pp. 3-4](#)

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II [selections]

Friday, October 2: Recitation

Monday, October 5: Great Works and the American Founding [Guest Lecturer: Oliver Traldi]

Wednesday, October 7: Epicureanism

[Selections from the IEP's "Epicurus"](#)

Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, Book X [selections]

[Selections from Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*: "The Experience Machine"](#)

Friday, October 9: Recitation

Monday, October 12: Stoicism

[Selections on Stoicism](#)

Epictetus, *Discourses*, Book I.1 [selections]

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* [selections]

Wednesday, October 14: Cicero

Cicero, *De officiis*, I.1-60 [selections]

Friday, October 16: Recitation

Monday, October 19: Virgil [Guest Lecturer: Matthew Young]

Virgil, *Aeneid*, Introduction and Books I-II, VI [selections]

Wednesday, October 21: Livy

Livy, *History of Rome*, Books I-V [selections]

Friday, October 23: Recitation

Monday, October 26: Plutarch

Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* [selections]

Wednesday, October 28: Tacitus

Tacitus, *Annals*, Books I, XIV-XV [selections]

Friday, October 30: Recitation

Unit 2. The Jewish and Christian World

Monday, November 2: The Bible

[Selections from the Bible: The Law](#)

Wednesday, November 4: The Bible

[Selections from the Bible: The Prophets and the Writings](#)

Friday, November 6: Recitation

Monday, November 9: The Bible

[Selections from the Bible: The Gospels](#)

Wednesday, November 11: The Bible

[Selections from the Bible: Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation](#)

Friday, November 13: Recitation

Monday, November 16: Augustine

Augustine, *City of God*, Books XIV and XIX [selections]

Wednesday, November 18: Aquinas

Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IaIIae 90-97 [selections]

[ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 11:59 PM](#)

Friday, November 20: Recitation

[\[THANKSGIVING BREAK\]](#)

Monday, November 30: Magna Carta

[Selections on Magna Carta](#)

Magna Carta [selections]

Wednesday, December 2: Review

[\[Friday, December 4: NO CLASS\]](#)

Monday, December 7, 4:30-7:00 PM: ASSIGNMENT 3 (FINAL EXAM)