

Spring 2021

**CLA 526 /HLS 527 /PHI 522:
Problems in Greek and Roman Philosophy:
Early Greek Poet-Philosophers
Th 9.00 am – 11.50 am
Link to meeting: see on Canvas**

Instructor: Mirjam E. Kotwick

Office hours: virtual (or, if possible, in person): by appointment

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Course description

In this seminar, we will examine early Greek philosophers who wrote in verse or used poetic means of expression in prose. Empedocles will be a focus of the class, but we will also engage with Parmenides, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Hesiod.

This course has three aims: First, to read these authors in their own right, (i) by discussing their views on topics prevalent in their works, such as cosmology, theology, epistemology, psychology, biology, and ethics, (ii) by analyzing how they express their arguments, and (iii) by trying to understand in which ways these two – the what and the how – are intrinsically and often inseparably connected. Second, we read these authors as in dialogue with each other as well as embedded in various historical and cultural contexts, such as, for instance, archaic epic poetry (esp. Homer), Orphic religious practices, or early science. Third, we will on the basis of these texts interrogate some of the conceptual tools that we habitually use when dealing with early Greek philosophy. We will ask about the history of distinctions such as between philosophy and poetry, philosophy and religion, myth and reason, irrationality and rationality, and their applicability to the texts we are discussing.

Our discussion will be sensitive to matters of textual transmission, especially to the fact that most of these texts have been preserved in fragments only. We will read the texts in the recent edition of *Early Greek Philosophy* by André Laks and Glenn Most (Loeb Classical Library). But we will also make use of the former standard edition by Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz (*Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 1951), the commentaries in the Phoenix Presocratic series, and other select secondary literature.

This seminar will be conducted as an open conversation among all its participants whose shared goal it is to reach collectively a better understanding of these fascinating texts.

Grading

Oral presentation(s) - 20%

Class/precept participation - 30%

Term paper(s) - 50%

Assignments:

If you take this class as P/F, you will not need to write a term paper, but participate in all other aspects of the class.

Presentation: Each student will give one presentation of a reading/session of their choice. Please let me know which reading you would want to present. Each presentation should be about 20 minutes long. It should, first, provide a brief overview of the reading as a whole and then, second, focus on (a) specific text(s) or question(s) that you want to bring up for discussion.

Class discussion: We will run this class as an open conversation among all its participants whose shared goal it is to reach collectively a better understanding of these fascinating texts. I assume that we all bring different interests and perspectives to this class, and I hope that this seminar will be shaped by your interests. My aim is that we together can create a collegial atmosphere in which we share our thoughts and learn from each other.

Reading response: Every student is expected to post at least 24 hours before class a brief response to the readings in the “discussions” section on Canvas. The response could be a series of questions that you had while reading or a brief comment on what you found most interesting or anything you would want to be taken up by our discussion.

Paper (only relevant for those who take course for letter grade): Papers are due on **May 19th**, 2021. They should be at least 5,000 words in length. To facilitate your writing process, I ask you to inform or discuss with me your paper topic by **April 1st**. I further ask you to submit to me by **April 15** an outline or abstract (1-3 pages) of your paper project that clearly formulates the thesis you want to defend or the question you want to answer and provides an example of at least one argument that you will work out in their paper. Please also attach to your outline or abstract a bibliography with at least 3 items.

Reading schedule (subject to change)

[for readings see course bibliography on Canvas]

Week 1 (Feb. 4): **Beginnings with the Muses** (Introduction, class procedure, sources)
Readings: Homer, *Il.* 2.484-93, 761-2 and 16.112-13; Hesiod, *Theogony* 1–115
(focus 1–52), *Works and Days* 646–662; Empedocles (D7 LM = B 131 DK,
D44 LM = B3 DK, D47 LM = B4 DK)

- Week 2 (Feb. 11): Human vs. Divine Knowledge**
Primary Readings: Xenophanes (all fragments, focus passages are D49–53 LM / B 34–36, B 38, B18 DK); Empedocles D6–D9, D 42 LM / B114, B131, B132, B133, B2 DK; Heraclitus D1, D74 LM / B1, B78 DK
Secondary Readings: Leshner 1992: 149–186; Tor 2017: 104–154
- Week 3 (Feb. 18): Gods and Cosmos**
Primary Readings: Hesiod, *Theogony* 116–1022; Xenophanes D7–21 LM; Empedocles D93 LM (+ context in Ammonius and Tzetzes = CTXT 91a-b Inwood); Heraclitus D82–91 LM;
Secondary Readings: Sassi 2016: 32–63
- Week 4 (Feb. 25): Heraclitus, the Obscure**
Primary Readings: all D-fragments in LM
Secondary Reading: commentary on fragments in Kahn, 1979
- Week 5 (March 4): Parmenides' Proem and its Contexts**
Primary Readings: Parmenides D1–D6 LM; Hesiod, *Theogony*, 736–754; Orphic fragment 237 F Bernabé, Gold Tablets 1 (Hipponion), 3 (Thurii 1) 5 (Thurii 3);
Secondary Readings: Tor 2017: 250–77, 347–59, Palmer 2009: 51–63.
- Week 6 (March 11): Parmenides**
Primary Readings: all D-fragments in LM
Secondary Readings: Palmer 2020.
- Week 7 (March 18): Empedocles, *On Nature* (Basics, Strasbourg Papyrus)**
Readings: Empedocles, D41–D77 LM
- Week 8 (March 25): Empedocles, *On Nature* (Testimonia on Cosmic cycle; Living beings)**
Primary Readings: Empedocles, D78–D259 LM
Secondary Readings: Primavesi 2016
- Week 9 (April 1): Empedocles, *Purifications***
Readings: Empedocles, D 4–40 LM (cf. CTXTs 1–10 Inwood)
- Week 10 (April 8): The Empedoclean Question**
Primary Readings: all D-fragments in LM
Secondary Readings: Laks 2005
- Week 11 (April 15): Empedocles' Similes**

Readings: Empedocles, D201, D215; sample similes from Homer (e.g. *Od.* 5.424-435)

Week 12 (April 22): Review and final discussion