Philosophy 4900: Ancient Theories of Nature

Dr. G. McGonagill

Office hours: I am generally available after each class meeting, as well as by appointment. My office is Eccles Conference Center 102C.

This class will compare ancient cosmogonies and other works about nature’s nature from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, and Greece, culminating in Plato’s philosophical cosmogony, *Timaeus*. The main concern will be discovering what each culture’s understanding of the nature of nature was, humanity’s role in it, and the relation of both to the divine. If time permits, we may look at the harmonization of Jewish and Greek conceptions of nature beginning in the first century BC, and perhaps some Christian neo-Platonist views that develop from it.

Texts on order at the bookstore (but maybe more inexpensively available elsewhere):


*A Presocratics Reader*. Edited by Patricia Curd. Hackett Publishing

Other readings will be posted on Canvas or distributed in class.

My hope is that students will do most of the work during class meetings. Participants will sign up to be responsible for leading the seminar on a few texts or sections of a larger text.

Students will write two essays of around 2000 words over the term: one on pre-Greek material, and one on Greek material before Plato. There will be a final examination as well. The pre-Greek papers will be due two weeks after we begin discussing Hesiod, and the early Greek papers two weeks after we begin discussing Plato. The final grade will be based on the papers (55%), the final (30%), and the remaining 15% will reflect the student's seriousness of purpose.

There is help available for academic writing at the Writing Center: [https://writing.usu.edu](https://writing.usu.edu) (Links to an external site.)

Any student who needs or suspects he or she or they might need special accommodations in order to do well in this class should contact the Disability Resource Center as soon as possible: [https://www.usu.edu/drc/](https://www.usu.edu/drc/) (Links to an external site.)

The contemporary university takes plagiarism very seriously. You have signed an honor pledge which will govern your activity in this and every class, which you should review here: [https://usu.instructure.com/courses/172956/pages/honor-pledge](https://usu.instructure.com/courses/172956/pages/honor-pledge)