

Honours and Postgraduate Workshop: 'The ethical theories of the Greek Sophists.'

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1. Workshop outline

In his dialogues, Plato frequently portrays Socrates in debate with various Sophists. The Sophists as a class were professional educators, who taught—or *claimed* to teach—virtue, rhetoric, and all the skills that a young Athenian man of the late fifth-century BCE might need in a successful political career. These Sophists, thanks largely to Plato's depiction of them, have been viewed largely as second-rate thinkers, or as manipulative charlatans (or both).

The aim of this workshop is to examine the ethical theories of several of these Sophists. Our primary focus will be on the role of law (*nomos*) and of nature (*phusis*) in Sophistic ethical theory. Law and nature were much discussed by the Sophists; this has subsequently been a chief focus of secondary literature on Sophistic ethics.

2. Workshop structure

The workshop will consist of between three and five two-hour seminars. I presume I'd open each seminar with a little lecturing, which would be followed with focussed discussions based on participants' interests.

I have recently submitted my MA thesis on this topic ('Nomos and phusis: Their role in Sophistic ethical theory'). Hence, I've organised the workshop in similar ways to how I organised my MA, and along similar themes. However, I hope not to repeat word-for-word the conclusions reached in my MA.

3. Why take part in this workshop?

If:

- You have an interest in ancient philosophy, esp. Plato
- You have an interest in ethical theory, esp. naturalism and contractualism
- You are interested in the history of ideas

... then hopefully you'd enjoy this workshop.

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4. Seminar overview

I. The Sophists: an introduction.

Who were the Sophists? Our sources of information on the Sophists. Their influence, immediate and historical. Sophistic ethical theory. Contemporary analyses of Sophistry.

II. Protagoras.

Protagoras, and Plato's *Protagoras*. Virtue, nature, and law in Protagoras' Great Speech. Protagoras on free-riding: secret injustices.

III. Thrasymachus and Glaucon.

Thrasymachus and Glaucon in Plato's *Republic*. Thrasymachus' critique of justice, and Socrates' responses. Glaucon: ancient social contract theory. Thrasymachus and Glaucon on prudence and nature.

IV. Antiphon.

The fragments of Antiphon's work. Was Antiphon a cosmopolitan? Was Antiphon a hedonist? When, and why, would Antiphon advocate illegal actions? What is Antiphon's criticism of law?

V. Callicles.

Callicles: the first defender of 'natural justice'. Callicles' praise of politics and his rejection of philosophy. Is Callicles a hedonist? Callicles and Thrasymachus.

Summary and close.

NB. I am currently working on papers on Callicles and on Antiphon—with workshop participants' permission, I'd like to work through some of the arguments I'm testing out. Also, note that you might want to do the reading for Protagoras (see below) before the first class, since we might get through 'The Sophists: An introduction' and move onto 'Protagoras' in the first workshop session.

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5. Reading list.

Please note the following.

(i) I will leave one bound copy of some essential readings—a Course Reader—in the School Office, for photocopying.

(ii) I will attempt to have some other works placed on Reserve in the Matheson Library; I will also provide information on where to find articles and books, as best as I can. I'll give more information on this ASAP.

(iii) A note on terminology: Plato's works are referred to by Stephanus page. So, *Resp.* 327a is the first page of the *Republic*; *Prt.* 362a is the final page of the *Protagoras*. Don't bother reading any translation that doesn't contain Stephanus numbers, which are printed next to the text. Similarly, some Presocratic and Sophistic sources are referred to by Diels-Kranz numbers, so DK80B4 is a fragment from Protagoras on the existence of the gods. There are several translations of Diels-Kranz; decent sourcebooks of ancient philosophy which use a different ordering system will give a concordance with DK numbers.

(iv) I am happy to suggest other works, or to have them suggested, during the workshop.

I. The Sophists: an introduction.

The best scholarly accounts of Sophistic ethical theory are G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (1981), pp. 111-130, 139-162, or W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (1971), pp. 55-134. [First published as *A History of Greek Philosophy, III.a, The Sophists* (1969).] Please read either Kerferd **or** Guthrie; they give the background against which we'll be reading Sophistic ethical theory, and will be referred to throughout the workshop (especially Guthrie). Also, I have included in the Course Reader an essay of mine, 'Law against Nature?', that gives a good introductory overview of Sophistic views of *nomos* and *phusis*. (Please do **not** cite my essay.)

Of non-essential readings: Aristophanes' *The Clouds* (any trans.) gives a droll depiction of sophistry—give it a skim if you're inclined. For a good survey of Greek theory prior to the Sophistic movement, try the first few chapters of G. E. R. Lloyd., *Early Greek Science from Thales to Aristotle* (1982). A. A. Long's essay, 'Law and Nature in Greek Thought', in M. Gagarin and D. Cohen, *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Law* (2005), is good but covers a lot. (It's in the Law Library!)

II. Protagoras.

Please read Plato's *Protagoras* 309a-328d, in the Course Reader. Also, please read **either** M. B. McCoy, 'Protagoras on Human Nature, Wisdom, and the Good: The Great Speech and the Hedonism of Plato's *Protagoras*'. *Ancient Philosophy* 28.1 (1998), pp. 21-39 (in the Course Reader), **or**, G. B. Kerferd, 'Protagoras' Doctrine of Justice and Virtue in the 'Protagoras' of Plato', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 73 (1942), 42-45 (from JSTOR).

For more reading, an excellent work is M. Nill, *Morality and Advantage in Protagoras, Antiphon, and Democritus* (1985). That should be in the Matheson, I think. An **excellent** essay on ancient social contract theories is C. H. Kahn, 'The origins of social contract theory in the fifth-century BC', in G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophists and their legacy* (1981).

III. Thrasymachus and Glaucon.

Read the selection from Plato's *Republic* (336a-362d), in the Course Reader. Also, please read G. B. Kerferd, 'The Doctrine of Justice in Plato's "Republic"', *Durham University Journal* 9.1 (1947-1948), pp. 9-27 (in the course reader), **or** R. Barney, 'Callicles and Thrasymachus', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/callicles-thrasymachus>>

There is a **lot** of scholarly work on Thrasymachus: for keen readers, I liked F. E. Sparshott, 'Socrates and Thrasymachus', *The Monist* 50.3 (1966), 421-459; T. Scaltsas, 'Fairness in Socratic Justice—Republic I', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 93 (1993)247-262. Commentaries on the *Republic* will also talk about Thrasymachus and Glaucon a lot: try J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (1981).

IV. Antiphon.

Read the fragments of Antiphon, DK87B44, in the Course Reader. Please also read M. Ostwald, 'Nomos and Phusis in Antiphon's *Peri Alētheias*', in M. Griffith and D. J. Mastronarde (eds.), *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer* (1990), also in the Reader.

For additional reading, you could try J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers, Vol. II: Empedocles to Democritus* (1979) [also available in a single volume (1982)] which has a chapter, 'Conduct Unbecoming', that discusses Antiphon. G. J. Pendrick, *Antiphon: The Fragments* (2002) has a **very** detailed commentary and identifies other sources; also see Nill [above, sec. II].

V. Callicles.

Read Plato's *Gorgias* (480c-501e) in the Course Reader.

For additional reading, I'd try 'C. H. Kahn, 'Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983), 75-121. Also try Barney [above, sec. III].