



**O G L E T H O R P E**  
U N I V E R S I T Y

**GO Rome**  
PHI 210

Foundations of Roman Thought:  
Pursuing the Beautiful, the Divine, Freedom and Empire

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**Course Description**

The aim of this course is to introduce students to the ideas, questions, and problems that occupied the Roman philosophical tradition. Many of the ideas and questions that developed within this tradition are still present for us today and our thinking about them is largely due to the influence of the Roman philosophical tradition. So, in addition to introducing students to the Roman philosophical tradition, which is important and interesting in its own right, this course aims to illuminate the questions developed within the tradition as fundamental and perennial questions and concerns.

Students will be introduced to the Roman philosophical tradition via an examination of primary texts that were influential in the development of Roman philosophical thought and represent the various ways in which Roman philosophers were articulating and addressing the questions and concerns with which they were occupied. These texts include works by Plato, Plotinus, Virgil, Livy, Tacitus, Plutarch, and Machiavelli.

The course is divided into two units. The first unit extends throughout the first two weeks of the course and in it we will focus our examination on the complicated relationship between beauty and the pursuit of both philosophical wisdom and the divine. In the second unit of the course we will focus our examination on questions that broadly pertain to the structure and aims of political life. (\*Note: a further description of each of these units is given in the course schedule). As was the case for Roman philosophical thought itself, our examination will go outside the texts and beyond the classroom. We will take seven trips into Rome and we will examine the way in which various pieces of art reflect the philosophical thinking we are examining. These trips are intended to help us continue to reflect on the questions and ideas we read and discuss and ideally our discussions and reading of the texts will illuminate the art and the art will further illuminate our understanding of the themes and questions raised by the texts.

**Learning Outcomes**

From our studies you will understand and be able to articulate particular ideas, questions, and problems that were at the center of the Roman philosophical tradition. In addition, you will develop the skills requisite for successful philosophical analysis. By the end of the semester each of you will

- Be familiar with the central themes and arguments of the Roman philosophical tradition;
- Be able to read primary texts in their historical and philosophical context, so that you can grasp more accurately the arguments that these texts contain;

- Have improved your philosophical writing and speaking and you will be able to present and discuss philosophical arguments clearly and accurately;
- Have learned to engage the philosophical arguments critically, considering their strengths and weaknesses, presenting objections, and considering replies.

### **Methods of Instruction**

Our classes (within the context of the traditional classroom setting AND when we are viewing art in Rome) will be a mixture of lecture and discussion with the majority of each class devoted to the latter. There will be regular reading and writing assignments as well as regular oral presentations. What you get from this course and how well you do in it depends on the time you devote to preparing for class and the thoughtfulness with which you approach the material. To succeed in this course you not only need to read the assigned reading and do the assigned written work, you must also actively engage yourself with the material and come to class prepared to participate fully in class discussions and in-class activities.

### **Required Texts**

The following texts are required for this course. Electronic forms of each text can be found online, **free** of charge.

Plato, *Symposium* (Free of charge at Project Gutenberg [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org))

Plotinus, *Enneads* (Free of charge at [www.sacred-texts.com](http://www.sacred-texts.com))

Virgil, *Aeneid* (Free of charge at Project Gutenberg)

Titius Livius (Livy), *History of Rome* (Free of charge at Project Gutenberg)

Plutarch, *Lives* (Free of charge at [www.classics.mit.edu](http://www.classics.mit.edu))

Tacitus, *Annals* (Free of charge at [www.classics.mit.edu](http://www.classics.mit.edu))

Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (Free of charge at Project Gutenberg)

### **Methods of Assessment**

A. Participation and Attendance: 15%

B. Post Trip Visits Reflective Presentations: 35%

C. Two 5-7 page papers: 25% each (50%)

### **A. Participation and Attendance**

#### **Participation/Attendance**

A portion of your final grade depends on your attendance and participation in this course. In short, to succeed and get the most from this class, you must come to class and you must come prepared, ready to participate in discussions, and ready to engage with the text in a serious and meaningful way.

Participation: You are expected to be a regular and active participant in discussions and you are expected to contribute to those discussions in meaningful and positive ways. Not all participation is equal: to say something just to say something is not a meaningful contribution to the discussion. Participation in discussion is the best way for you to dig into the text and to decipher your own questions and thoughts concerning it.

Here is a general description of how I will evaluate participation:

A: Participates voluntarily and frequently. Shows a good grasp of the material and good preparation.

B: Participates voluntarily with less frequency but still makes an important contribution to the class discussion.

C: Participates voluntarily but shows a lesser grasp of the material or little preparation.

D: Participates only when asked to do so.  
F: Does not participate or is frequently absent.

Attendance: You are expected to come on time to every class and there is a ZERO absence policy for this class. This means that you are not allowed to miss a class and for every class you do miss, 10 points will be deducted from your final grade.

### **B. Post Trip Visits Reflective Presentations**

As was stated in the course description and overview, we will extend our examination of Roman philosophical thought beyond the classroom and we will look at its appearance in various pieces of art. We will be making a total of seven trips to examine art. For each trip, you will be required to write up a reflection on the ways in which the texts illuminated the art, the ways in which the art illuminated the texts, and what sort of questions or ideas emerged as a result of examining the art. You will then present your reflections to the class at the beginning of the next class period. Each of your post-trip reflections should be 1-3 pages in length and you should be prepared to give at least a 5 minute presentation on your reflections.

### **C. Two 5-7 page papers**

You will have two papers to write for this course. For each paper, I will give you a question or topic to explore. You should consider these papers as learning opportunities in which you will not only deepen your thinking on a particular question or issue but also continue to sharpen your abilities to read critically, think critically, and communicate your thoughts in a clear, well-reasoned manner. Your grade for the essays will be based on the quality of your insights about the topic, your use of the text in supporting these insights, and the coherence of your argument and presentation.

### **Course Policies and Classroom Ethics**

Classroom Ethics:

- Respect yourself and one another in the classroom. The obvious aim of this course is to provide you with an opportunity to examine the Roman philosophical thought and to seriously engage the doctrines, arguments, and questions that are raised in the texts. A classroom environment that is conducive to such learning must be one in which each person feels comfortable to freely express their thoughts, to ask questions, to make mistakes, to disagree in a non-combative way, and to learn from and with one another. In short, use neither disrespectful speech nor any other form of disrespectful behavior towards one another.
- Cell phones and all other electronic devices (laptops, tablets, music devices, etc.) may NOT be used in the classroom. They are unnecessary and distracting.
- Do not leave the room during class unless it is absolutely necessary. Leaving the room while class is in session is disruptive to your learning and to the learning of others.
- Enjoy yourself!

Course Policies:

- **Honor Code.** You are expected to adhere to standards of personal and academic integrity and to uphold the Oglethorpe University Honor Code. For a complete account of the Honor Code, review Section 10 in the 2012-2014 *Bulletin*. All work you hand in should carry the Honor Code pledge (I pledge that I have acted honorably \_\_\_\_\_-signature) You are required to refrain from engaging in acts that do not maintain academic and personal integrity. These

include but are not limited to plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, aid of academic dishonesty, lying, bribery or threats, and stealing. Each of these violations can be thought of as a form of cheating. Oglethorpe University defines cheating as “any willful activity impacting or connected to the academic enterprise and involving the use of deceit or fraud in order to attempt to secure an unfair advantage for oneself or others or to attempt to cause an unfair advantage to others.” **Any violation of academic integrity is grounds for failing this course.**

**Students with Disabilities.** I will work with Oglethorpe University to provide reasonable accommodations for every student with a learning disability or special learning needs.

## Course Schedule

### **UNIT ONE: *Beauty and the pursuit of philosophical truth and the divine***

In ancient philosophy, particularly in the philosophy of Plato, beauty played a significant role in the philosophical pursuit of wisdom, in the pursuit of Truth itself. But beauty's role in the pursuit of truth and its relationship with philosophy was complicated by numerous questions: what is the role of sensible forms of beauty (beautiful images) in arriving at knowledge of Beauty itself and knowledge of Truth itself?; Can one move from the contemplation of beautiful images to knowledge of beauty in the intelligible sense? Do images and sensible forms of beauty contain in them forms of truth itself that simply must be unlocked and illuminated by an attentive mind? Plato's articulation of these questions and his understanding of the relationship between beauty and the pursuit of wisdom and the divine formed the foundations of the neo-platonic movement of Plotinus, whose own philosophical work was the catalyst for what has come to be known as the Renaissance neo-platonist school. This school began with the founding of the Florentine Academy and significantly contributed to the intellectual and artistic movements in Italy.

#### **WEEK ONE:**

Monday

Plato's *Symposium* (selections)

Tuesday

Plato's *Symposium* (selections)

Trip visit: Examination of Raphael's "School of Athens" at the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City

Wednesday

Presentation of Post-Trip Reflections

Plato's *Symposium* (selections)

Trip Visit: Titian's "Sacred and Profane Love" at the Galleria Borghese

Thursday

Presentations of Post-Trip reflections

Plato's *Symposium* (selections)

Trip Visit: Michelangelo and neo-platonic allegories in the Sistine Chapel

#### **WEEK TWO:**

Monday

Presentations of Post-Trip Reflections

Plotinus, *Enneads*: First Ennead, Ch 6 "On Beauty"; Third Ennead, Ch 8 "Contemplation"

Tuesday

Plotinus, *Enneads*: Fourth Ennead, Ch 8; Sixth Ennead Ch 9  
Trip Visit: Michelangelo's Dying Captive

Wednesday

Presentation of Post-trip Reflections  
Plotinus, *Enneads*: Fifth Ennead, Chapters 1-4

Thursday

Plotinus, *Enneads*: Fifth Ennead, Chapters 5-9  
Trip Visit: Botticelli  
\*First Paper Due

**UNIT TWO: *The structure and aims of political life***

Rome's development as an empire prompted new questions about the structure and aims of political life. Through an examination of Rome's development and identity we will examine questions that pertain to the nature of empires, the virtues and vices of empire, and whether and to what extent republics are necessary for the freedom human beings desire.

**WEEK THREE:**

Monday

Presentation of Post-trip reflections  
Virgil, *Aeneid* Books 1-3

Tuesday

Virgil, *Aeneid* Books 4-6

Wednesday

Virgil, *Aeneid*, Books 7-9

Thursday

Virgil, *Aeneid*, Books 10-12  
Trip Visit: Sculptures in the Garden of Maecenas at the Capitoline Museum

**WEEK FOUR:**

Monday

Presentations of Post-trip reflections  
Livy, *History of Rome* (selections)

Tuesday

Tacitus, *Annals* 1-11

Wednesday

Tacitus, *Annals* III-IV  
Trip Visit: the Capitol and the Capitoline museum, which houses "republican art"

Thursday

Presentation of Post-Trip Reflections  
Plutarch, *Lives*: Caesar and Cato the Younger

**WEEK FIVE: REASSESSING ROME**

Monday

Machiavelli, Discourse on *Livy* (selections)

Tuesday

Machiavelli, Discourse on *Livy* (selections)

Wednesday

Machiavelli, Discourse on *Livy* (selections)

Thursday

Machiavelli, Discourse on *Livy* (selections)

\*Second Paper due