

ITAL 5384/ COML 5384 - Plato and Aristotle in the Renaissance

Eva Del Soldato

W 3:30-6PM (EST)

Office hours: R 3–5PM (EST) or by appointment (evadel@upenn.edu)

In one of the most evocative frescoes of the Renaissance, Raphael juxtaposes Plato and Aristotle. The pairing would seem obvious since the two thinkers had been through the Middle Ages symbols of philosophy and wisdom in the Mediterranean world. But only the revival of Plato, begun in the mid-fifteenth century, had allowed Latins to gain a better understanding of Platonic philosophy and, therefore, to compare Plato's doctrines directly to those of Aristotle. Were master and disciple in harmony? And if not, which of the two should be favored? Such questions were less innocent than one might think, and the answers to them had implications for philosophy, theology, speculation on the natural world, and even politics. The course will offer an overview of early modern philosophy and culture by focusing on the different ways in which Plato and Aristotle were read, interpreted and exploited between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Latinate world. The course will be conducted in English; a basic knowledge of Latin is desirable but not required.

Material from the Rare Books and Manuscript Library will be used throughout the course. The Italian Component is offered to declared and prospective Majors/Minors in Italian Studies, who will, upon request, be able to read course materials and write assignments in Italian. The course counts toward the Minor in Global Medieval Studies and the Graduate Certificate in Global Medieval and Renaissance Studies.

Materials

All materials will be available on-line through Canvas and provided by the instructor.

Course Requirements

Regular attendance and participation in class discussions are required. All absences must be justified. After two absences students' participation grade will be lowered. Students will be assigned weekly readings that they will analyze at home to prepare for discussion in class.

Students will be called to collaborate on the "Inventing Aristotle" exhibition, which will be inaugurated in September 2025. Each student will choose two books from the "Inventing Aristotle" exhibition inventory and write for them short entries (no more than 300 words each), which will be published in the exhibition's online catalog. The inventory will be made available to students at the beginning of the course via GoogleDoc, and the selection of the books will be based on a "first-come, first-served" principle.

Additionally, students will prepare a class presentation on a topic of their choice, which will be submitted to the instructor for approval. The same topic will be further researched and discussed in depth in the final paper (**8 pages** for undergraduate students, **18 pages** for graduate students), which is due by **Monday, May 12 at 6pm (EST)**. **Students will submit an outline of the chosen topic in advance (by March 19), which will be approved by the instructor.**

All written assignments must be sent **as e-mail attachments** as **.doc/.docx** in 12 Times New Roman, double spaced, 1" margins, following MLA style.

A good paper includes,

- A strong thesis statement.
- A cogently expressed argument—one relevant to the field, and one that requires thought and research.
- Sufficient and well-documented evidence.
- An exploration of possible alternative explanations—particularly those which address the other side of an active debate in the field.
- A clear and easy-to-read prose style, with no egregious errors of grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
- A well-informed discussion of the relevant literature.

Academic Dishonesty Definitions

Activities, that have the effect or intention of interfering with education, pursuit of knowledge, or fair evaluation of a student's performance are prohibited. Examples of such activities include but are not limited to the following definitions:

1. Cheating: using or attempting to use unauthorized assistance, material, or study aids in examinations or other academic work or preventing, or attempting to prevent, another from using authorized assistance, material, or study aids.

Example: using a cheat sheet in a quiz or exam, altering a graded exam and resubmitting it for a better grade, etc.

2. Plagiarism: using the ideas, data, or language of another without specific or proper acknowledgment.

Example: copying another person's paper, article, or computer work and submitting it for an assignment, cloning someone else's ideas without attribution, failing to use quotation marks where appropriate, etc.

3. Fabrication: submitting contrived or altered information in any academic exercise.

Example: making up data for an experiment, fudging data, citing nonexistent articles, contriving sources, etc.

4. Multiple submission: submitting, without prior permission, any work submitted to fulfill another academic requirement.

5. Misrepresentation of academic records: misrepresenting or tampering with or attempting to tamper with any portion of a student's transcripts or academic record, either before or after coming to the University of Pennsylvania.

Example: forging a change of grade slip, tampering with computer records, falsifying academic information on one's resume, etc.

6. Facilitating academic dishonesty: knowingly helping or attempting to help another violate any provision of the Code.

Example: working together on a take-home exam, etc.

7. Unfair advantage: attempting to gain unauthorized advantage over fellow students in an academic exercise.

Example: gaining or providing unauthorized access to examination materials, obstructing or interfering with another student's efforts in an academic exercise, lying about a need for an extension for an exam or paper, continuing to write even when time is up during an exam, destroying or keeping library materials for one's own use, etc.

AI programs, e.g. ChatGPT [source: Holly Fernandez-Lynch]: please note that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Beware that use may also stifle your independent thinking. You may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material generated by an AI program, it should be cited like any other reference material (with due consideration for the quality of the reference, which may be poor). Creative uses of AI programs must be discussed with the instructor

Final Grade

Participation	30%
Catalog entries	15%
Oral presentation	20%
Final paper	35%

Schedule

Week 1, January 22

Plato and Aristotle: with or without you (Introduction to the course; readings: Plato, *Phaedrus*; Aristotle, *De anima*, book 1 and 3)

Week 2, January 29

Teacher and Disciple (readings: Plato, *The Banquet*; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, books 1, 3 and 10)

Week 3, February 5

From Augustine to Thomas: Reading Plato and Aristotle in the Middle Ages (readings: Plato, *Timaeus*; Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, book 1; Averroes, *Decisive Treatise*; further texts by Augustine and Thomas will be discussed in class)

Week 4, February 12

Anti-Aristotelianism Means Filo-Platonism? Petrarch, Valla and Bruni (readings: Petrarch, *On His Own Ignorance*; Valla, *Praise of Thomas*; Bruni, *Life of Aristotle*)

Week 5, February 19

Plato Returns: Pletho, George and Bessarion (readings: Plato, *Republic*, book 5; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1 and 2; Pletho, *On the Differences*; George of Trebizond, *Comparison of Plato and Aristotle*; Bessarion, *Against the Calumniator of Plato*, book 1, 2)

Week 6, February 26

Soul and Human Dignity: Marsilio Ficino and Pietro Pomponazzi (readings: Ficino, *Platonic Theology*; Pomponazzi, *On the Immortality of the Soul*)

Catalog entries due!!!!!!!!!!

Week 7, March 5

Philosophers in Love: Love Treatises in the Renaissance (readings: Cavalcanti, *Donna me prega*; Ficino, *On Love*; Ferrand, *Treatise on Lovesickness*). Special guest: Matteo Pace

Week 8: Spring Break!!!

Week 9, March 19

Comparing Philosophers: Religious Issues and Universities (readings: Pico, *On One and Being*; Pendasio, introduction to a course on Physics; de' Vieri, *Compendium*)

Due: Final presentation outline

Week 10, March 26

Language Issues: Plato, Aristotle, Latin and Vernacular (readings: Aristotle, *On interpretation*; Dante, *Convivio*, book 1; Speroni, *Dialogue*)

Week 11, April 2

Plato, Aristotle and the Arts (readings: Plato, *Republic* 10; Aristotle, *Poetics*; Physics, book 2; Castelvetro, *Poetics*)

Week 12, April 9

Special guest: David Lines

Week 13, April 16

Die Hard: Plato, Aristotle and Galileo (readings: Bruno, *Ash's Wednesday Supper*; Galileo, *Dialogue*; Campanella, *A Defence of Galileo*)

Week 14, April 23

Presentations

Week 15, April 30

Presentations

Final essay due by May 12, 6pm (Philadelphia time) via e-mail.

