

# PHI 710: Natural Teleology in Ancient Philosophy

(full syllabus will be posted before the start of class)

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course, we will discuss some ancient approaches to natural teleology—the view that characteristics of natural objects are to be explained in terms of their intrinsic purposes. We will consider the origins of this idea in Presocratic thought, its refinement in Plato’s divine theory of divine craftsmanship in the *Timaeus*, Aristotle’s account of teleology without design, the anti-teleological strategy of the Epicureans, and the universal teleology of Stoic providence. In the final section of the course, we will examine some further developments in the Neoplatonists Plotinus and Proclus. For the period up to the Stoics, we will use David Sedley's *Creationism and its Critics* as a guide, but also read other secondary literature. Some questions we will discuss include: Why did ancient philosophers accept or deny that natural objects have ends by nature? What is a final cause, and how are final causes related to the essence of a natural thing? Does final causality presuppose a divine designer, and can final-causal and mechanistic explanations coexist? What are the explanatory benefits or costs of “universal teleology”?

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

All participants in the course are expected to attend seminar sessions regularly, to prepare the required readings, and to come to class ready to ask questions about and to comment on the readings. If you are taking this course for credit, you will be required to write two short papers (ca. 4-6 pages each) on assigned topics and one longer final paper (ca. 15-20 pages) on a topic of your choosing. In addition, you will be expected to give a class presentation (ca. 20-30 minutes) focused on a piece of secondary

literature.