

Phil351: Socrates and Plato
Department of Philosophy, St. Francis Xavier University
Course Outline

Instructor: Doug Al-Maini

Office & Office Hours: NT 717; my schedule is posted at the departmental website.

Email: dalmaini@stfx.ca

Course Description:

This course is designed as a critical evaluation of the philosophy of Socrates and Plato. Socrates is taken up as a founding hero by various philosophical schools in the ancient world; for example, Platonists, Stoics, Cynics, and Sceptics all claim to be his philosophical heirs. Nevertheless, in the course of history Plato became the most famous member of the “Socratic Circle” (the group who followed Socrates, observed how his life unfolded, and started what were to become the various schools of ancient philosophy), and we shall devote considerable attention to his understanding and use of Socrates. The historical Socrates seems to have been interested mostly in ethical philosophy, and we shall begin the course by examining some of Plato’s shorter dialogues that remain faithful to this project. Other dialogues show Plato extending his interest to matters of metaphysics and epistemology, and we shall follow this development later on in the course. This will lead us to questions concerned with how the various fields of philosophy are integrated in the dialogues. Finally, Socrates’ way of life eventually gets him executed by the very democracy that raises him, and his death is a striking example of the conflict that can arise between philosophers and their communities. How Plato handles Socrates’ legacy of civic participation by philosophers will be another major theme of the course.

PLEASE NO LAPTOP OR CELLPHONE USE DURING CLASS TIME

Schedule:

Week	Dialogue	Supplemental Readings	Assignment
1 Sep 11	<i>Laches</i>	Thucydides Readings #1	
2 Sep 18	<i>Lysis</i>	Aristotle, bk. IX <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	
3 Sep 25	<i>Hippias Minor</i>	Guthrie, “The Sophists”	<i>Hi.Mi.</i> Essay
4 Oct 2	<i>Euthyphro</i>	The Myths of Deadalus	<i>Euth.</i> Outline
5 Oct 9	<i>Apology</i>	Thucydides Readings #2	<i>Euth.</i> Essay
6 Oct 16	<i>Gorgias</i>	Ober, “Public Speech & the Power of the People”	<i>Gorg.</i> Outline
7 Oct 23	<i>Gorgias</i>	Wild, “Moral Realism and Natural Law”	<i>Gorg.</i> Essay
8 Oct 30	<i>Crito</i>		
9 Nov 6	<i>Symposium</i>	Thucydides Readings #3	
10 Nov 13	<i>Symposium</i>	Robinson, “The Contest of Wisdom in the <i>Symposium</i> ”	
11 Nov 20	<i>Phaedo</i>	Stanford Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy:	
12 Nov 27	<i>Phaedo</i>	“Plato’s Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology”	Final Outline

Assignments:

A: Three short essays that respond to the following questions, handed in on the date specified. These short essays should be roughly 3 pages in length (although they may be longer) and each will be worth 20% of the final grade. For the latter two shorter assignments and for the final essay you must hand in a completed argument outline the first class of the week before the short essay is due. For a description of what is expected in an argument outline, see the handout, “The Logic of Essays”.

1) First Short Assignment (due Sept. 25th; no outline required for first assignment due to its early due date).

AS I WILL BE DISCUSSING ANSWERS TO THE ASSIGNMENT QUESTION IN THE THIRD WEEK, LATE HAND-INS OF THE ASSIGNMENT WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT A VERY GOOD EXCUSE.

The *Hippias Minor* investigates morality as if it were a craft or art like any other, with its own set of rules and its own base of technical knowledge. Socrates concludes the dialogue by stating it follows then that

one who voluntarily does what is shameful and unjust is none other than the good person. Clearly though, he is unhappy with this result. Is this the only conclusion that the preceding discussion necessarily entails, or do Socrates and Hippias go off-track somewhere in their reasoning? What else might Socrates conclude about the nature of ethical knowledge, and how does the discussion justify a separate conclusion?

2) Second Short Assignment (due Oct. 9th):

Late in the *Euthyphro* Socrates demands an accounting of what are "the many fine things that gods achieve" (14b). It is clear that Euthyphro does not give the answer that Socrates expects, but then the reader is left with the tantalizing question of what *does* Socrates expect here. Supply an answer to this question.

3) Third Short Assignment (due Oct. 23rd):

In the *Euthyphro* at 5a-b, Socrates asks that Euthyphro teach him what piety is so that at his trial Socrates can blame his own impiety on Euthyphro; Socrates seems to believe that teachers can be held accountable for the actions of their students. And yet Gorgias gives a spirited and well-reasoned defence of the claim that teachers should *not* be held accountable for the sins of their students (456c-457c). Immediately after Gorgias makes his defence, Socrates warns that he thinks Gorgias is ripe for refutation, but it is unclear how that refutation works, or even if Socrates really does take on Gorgias' claim not to indict the teacher for a student's offense. Are these positions, Socrates' willingness to give responsibility to the teacher and Gorgias' refusal to do so, compatible, or do we just have a flat contradiction between two mature thinkers? If they really do just differ on this point, how does Socrates refute Gorgias' arguments?

B: A final essay, worth 40%. The essay should be roughly 10 pages in length and answer the following question:

How do the forms ground, enhance, or support one of the particular ethical concepts described in the dialogues we looked at in the earlier stages of this course? In other words why might we be more willing to accept what we're given in the shorter dialogues with the theory of forms in place?

Technical Considerations for Written Assignments:

- 1) All written assignments must be typed (black ink, please) in "Times New Roman" font and double-spaced on pages with at most 1 inch margins. No line spaces between paragraphs. Indent the first line of a paragraph. Printing on both sides of a sheet of paper is quite acceptable.
- 2) Please no title pages. Also no "Works Cited" or "Bibliography" pages referring to one work; do bibliographic references in a footnote if you must. No enormously large-fonted things like titles, names, dates, course numbers, student numbers, phone numbers, or due dates that take up half a page of space. Your title, name, and student number at the top of the first page is quite sufficient. Please visibly number any multiple-page assignments. If you hand in the assignment to the office, please include my name at the top of the assignment as well.
- 3) No duo-tangs, folders, binders, or paperclips.
- 4) Under no circumstances will emailed assignments be accepted. Please hand in your assignments at the start of class on the day they are due.
- 5) Below lies the evaluation form that will be used in the assessment of your writing. This evaluation form provides the clearest explanation of my requirements for an essay. Please, study it carefully before you write your work.
- 6) Many of the above requirements are arbitrary demands on my part, but they really do facilitate the assessment of your work. If you do not follow these guidelines, **YOUR MARK FOR ORGANIZATION ON THE EVALUATION FORM WILL SUFFER DRASTICALLY.**
- 7) Plagiarism is completely unacceptable. If you make use of an idea that is not of your own devising, you must cite the source of that idea.

8) My late policy is a 3% reduction per day late, excluding weekends. You now know the due dates for your assignments, and this is the start of the semester. Plan accordingly! This provides you with ample time to complete your work, so last minute excuses will be met with some skepticism.

10) Please keep a spare copy of their completed assignments for themselves. It hasn't happened yet, but I might lose an assignment once handed in; if you keep a copy on file somewhere, this will not be problem.

EVALUATION FORM
(Late assignments will receive no comments)

Style:

Grammar: Are the sentences understandable? Are there any spelling mistakes? Is the diction clear and concise? Can the thought behind each sentence easily be grasped?

/10

Organization: Do the ideas logically follow each other, or were they haphazardly strewn together? Do the ideas flow from each other, with explicit premises deductively producing conclusions? Are the arguments connected at all, showing a chain of reasoning?

/10

Content:

Argument Outline: Are proper arguments as laid out in the handout used? Are the arguments valid? Is there a variety of argument types in the outline? Are the arguments labeled and symbolized?

/10

Thesis: Does the assignment give an answer to a question or problem put forward? Is the answer more than a simple "yes" or "no"? Is the answer insightful, being an interpretive idea itself? Is the thesis explicitly stated?

/10

Arguments: Are there arguments presented in the paper? Are the arguments interesting or banal? Are the arguments incisive or superficial? Do the arguments explicitly outline broad premises that act as guides to understanding and reveal the unquestioned perspectives adopted in the paper?

/20

Originality: Does the student provide input into the conceptual debates the text engages in? Is there evidence of insight on the student's part into the topic? Are there any new ideas being explored in the assignment? Is the student able to go beyond ideas raised in class discussion?

/20

Evaluation: Does the student give a fair summation of the ideas contained in the texts used? Does the use of these ideas meaningfully contribute to the thesis of the essay, or is the use of material a mere addenda to the main arguments of the paper?

/20

TOTAL /100