

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

Instructor: Doug Al-Maini
 Office & Office Hours: NT 717
 Email: dalmaini@stfx.ca

Course Description:

This course is designed as a critical evaluation of the philosophy of Socrates and Plato. We shall begin by examining the rise of philosophy in ancient Greece, both the causal factors involved and their effect on the flavour that philosophy takes in its earliest formulation. The pivotal figure of our period is Socrates, and, after our analysis of the rise of philosophy in Greece, we shall turn our attention to him. Socrates is taken up as a founding hero by various philosophical schools in the ancient world (for example, the Stoics, Cynics, and Skeptics all make a claim to be his rightful philosophical heirs). Nevertheless, in the course of history Plato has become 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 of the effect of Socrates on the relationship between philosophy and society. Socrates’ way of life eventually leads to his death at the hands of the very democracy that raises him, and his death provides a striking example of the conflict that can arise between philosophers and their communities. One of the legacies he bequeaths to his circle is the question of how philosophers are to interact with their culture. Socrates’ participation in the Athenian community seems to doom him and his unpopular ideas, and we might ask if philosophers of the Socratic type can participate in the community in any meaningful way without endangering themselves as Socrates did. It is Plato’s analysis of the nature of this problem that will drive the majority of our course.

Schedule:

Week	Topic	Readings	Due (all due Monday)	
1 Sep 13	Intro & Context	<i>Hymn to Demeter</i>		
2 Sep 20		Pre-Socratics	Arg. Outline #1	
3 Sep 27	Plato	<i>Euthyphro</i>	Short Essay #1	
4 Oct 4		<i>Gorgias</i>	Arg. Outline #2	
5 Oct 11		<i>Gorgias</i>	Short Essay #2	
6 Oct 18		<i>Apology</i>	Arg. Outline #3	
7 Oct 25		Debates	<i>Laches, Charmides</i>	Short Essay #3
8 Nov 1			<i>Hippias Minor, Lysis</i>	
9 Nov 8		<i>Gorgias, Symposium</i>		
10 Nov 15		<i>Republic</i>		
11 Nov 22		<i>Crito</i>		
12 Nov 29		<i>Phaedo</i>		
13 Dec 6	Catch up		Final Essay	

Assignments:

A: Three short essays that respond to the following questions, handed in on the date specified. These short essays should be at least 2 pages in length (although they may be longer) and each will be worth 10% of the final grade. 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) For Anaximander, why can water not be the fundamental element of the universe?

2) 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, "What *does* Socrates expect here?" Supply an answer to this question.

3) At *Apology* 36d Socrates suggests that his penalty be free dining at the Prytaneum. This seems like a joke, but, given what we have discussed and learned about the workings of the polis in this class, how might Socrates make the case that his behaviour has been absolutely in line with the fundamental requirements that a polis has for its citizens?

B: Two debates, each worth 15%. Students will form teams of three and teams will debate each other in the "Mace" style. Each speaker will be given four minutes to make their opening arguments, and then, after a question period, three minutes to rebut any points they find arguable in their opponents' arguments. Participants in the debates must fill out by hand (legibly) an argument outline that encapsulates the arguments they are going to make, and then distribute copies of their outline to all members of the class. This means that each team will have three argument outlines completed, all with the same overall conclusion (for example, "Temperance is minding one's own business"), but with three different sets of arguments supporting that conclusion. In the rebuttal phase, students must make clear what premise from the other side they are taking issue with; a direct reference to another's argument outline is called for here.

Students not participating in any particular debate have the responsibility of evaluating it. An evaluation form will be passed out at the start of class with criteria for grading. This will be discussed before the debates take place. Students who miss evaluating someone else's debate will have their own overall debate mark reduced by 10%. The debate topics are as follows, and debaters will be expected to make some use of the arguments that Plato presents in the dialogues mentioned after the debate topics.

Oct. 25th

"Courage is knowledge of what is to be feared and what is to be hoped for." *Laches* ~194c-199e

Oct. 27th

"Temperance is minding one's own business." *Charmides* ~161b-164c

Nov. 1st

"Only a good person performs an injustice voluntarily." *Hippias Minor* ~373c-376c

Nov. 3rd

"Good people are friends with each other." *Lysis* ~214a-216b

Nov. 8th

"It is better to suffer than to commit injustice." *Gorgias* ~473a-475e

Nov. 10th

"Love is ugly." *Symposium* ~199c-201c

Nov. 15th

"Philosophers should be rulers and rulers should be philosophers." *Republic* ~484a-487a

Nov. 22nd

"Private property should be abolished." *Republic* ~416d-420b

C: A final essay, worth 40%. The essay should be no less than 10 pages in length, and must take up the question of one of the debates that the student has participated in. The essay must make reference to all of the *main* arguments (at least) made in the debate on that topic, plus add some new reasoning of its own, adjudicating the issue. This means students will need to keep track of the argument outlines they receive during the debates. Students are not compelled to advocate the same side in the essay that they argued for in the debate. The essay is due in class on Dec. 6th.

Technical Considerations for Written Assignments:

- 1) All written assignments must be typed (black ink, please) and double-spaced on pages with at most 1 inch margins. No extra 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 for some reason you must 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) The final page of this outline is 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) Students are obliged to 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