

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

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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 Skeptics 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 ourselves to Plato’s understanding and use of Socrates. The historical Socrates seems to have focused on ethics, and the course will begin by examining some of Plato’s shorter dialogues that remain faithful to this project. Other dialogues show Plato extending his interest to 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 will be another major theme of the course.

**PLEASE NOTE: THERE WILL BE NO LAPTOP, CELL PHONE, OR
 HANDHELD DEVICE USE ALLOWED IN THE CLASSROOM.**

There are several reasons for this, and I’ll mention them on the first day when we go over this outline, but the most important is the impact of these things on learning. Empirical studies are finally starting to roll in and the results are not pretty: usage of electronic devices during class time dramatically decreases learning, both for the primary user of the device and for everyone that sits around that user. Some evidence can be found here:

“Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers”

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131512002254>

Schedule:

Week	Dialogue	Supplemental Readings	Assignment
1 Sep 8	<i>Laches</i>	Thucydides Readings #1	
2 Sep 15	<i>Lysis</i>	Aristotle, bk. IX <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	
3 Sep 22	<i>Hippias Minor</i>	Guthrie, “The Sophists”	<i>Hi.Mi.</i> Essay
4 Sept 29	<i>Euthyphro</i>	Hamilton, <i>The Myths of Daedalus</i>	<i>Euth.</i> Outline
5 Oct 6	<i>Rep. I</i>	Lysias, <i>Against Eratosthenes</i>	
6 Oct 13	<i>Apology</i>	Thucydides Readings #2	<i>Euth.</i> Essay
7 Oct 20	<i>Gorgias</i>	Ober, “Public Speech & the Power of the People”	<i>Gorg.</i> Outline
8 Oct 27	<i>Gorgias</i>	Xenophon, <i>Hellenika</i>	<i>Gorg.</i> Essay
9 Nov 3	<i>Crito</i>	Xenophon, <i>Memorabilia</i>	
10 Nov 10	<i>Symposium</i>	Thucydides Readings #3	Last Outline
11 Nov 17	<i>Symposium</i>		
12 Nov 24	<i>Phaedo</i>		Last Essay

Assignments:

A: Four short essays/assignments that respond to the following questions, handed in on the date specified. The first essay should be at least 600 words in length, and will be worth 10% of the final grade; this assignment is really a diagnostic exercise. The second and third short essays should be 3-4 pages in length, three short essays should be at least 900 words in length and each will be worth 15% of the final grade. The last short paper should be 1500 words in length and is worth 20% of the final grade. For the latter three shorter assignments students 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. 22rd; 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 AN EXTREMELY GOOD EXCUSE.

The *Hippias Minor* concludes with Socrates claiming 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. 12th):

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 Socrates *does* expect. Supply an answer to this question.

3) Third Short Assignment (due Oct. 27rd):

In the *Euthyphro* at 5a-b, Socrates asserts 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 (*Gorgias* 456c-457c), and it is unclear if Gorgias is refuted on the point. Well, which is it? Are teachers responsible for the actions of their students, or not? Whichever side you take on this issue, you must show what is wrong with the arguments for the opposing side.

4) Fourth Short Assignment (due Nov. 26th): Students have a choice, and may complete any of the following assignments. If students choose an essay option, it should be roughly 5 pages in length.

1) How does the theory of 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?

2) Create a work of art that deals with some philosophical principle or argument that we have looked at in this course and that you wish to investigate. You may draw, paint, make an etching, or sculpt your work; I only ask for no pastels. Include with your work an explanation of how it illustrates the point of the principle or argument you wish to explore. The explanation of your work **MUST** be at least three pages long. I look particularly favourably on abstract art.

3) It is sometimes said that "Plato, like nature, does nothing without reason." Nevertheless, some of his choices of examples and images seem arbitrary, and in this assignment I'd like you to put that saying to the test. Choose some symbol, image, or exemplar that recurs in a plurality of the dialogues that we have studied this semester, and explain its non-arbitrary nature. Why did Plato choose *that example in*

particular to express his point? Students may not write an essay examining the role that the myth of Daedalus in the dialogues.

4) In the *Crito*, Socrates states that he must obey the command of the jury and await his fate in jail because it is just to obey the authority vested in the jury of his trial. Yet in the *Apology*, he says directly to the jury that if they command him to stop practicing philosophy, he will not obey them. How can Socrates be behaving consistently in this sequence of events?

5) Write an essay on a topic of your own choosing. I recommend choosing this assignment if you are interested in doing an essay, and if you do choose it, then I would like you to check your topic with me sometime before the final two weeks of class.

B: Classwork. On occasion I will ask for some small sample of work showing you are keeping up with the course. This assignment is in lieu of attendance. Possible work includes some very brief homework assignments to be handed in the next class, or handing in your notes at the end of class for evaluation, the occasional quiz on the content of a dialogue, or what have you. These assignments will not be very onerous, and as I say, they are just a way of checking to make sure everyone is on the same page in terms of course progress. This will count for 15% of your grade.

C: A Final Exam. Date to be determined. Worth 25% of final grade. The questions on the exam will be determined and made available as the semester progresses.

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