

**PHILOSOPHY 300: PLATO AND HIS PREDECESSORS**  
SPRING 2020, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:**

In this course we will examine the ways in which Plato, who is often regarded as the founder of western philosophy, distinguished his philosophical project from the intellectual pursuits of both his predecessors and his contemporary rivals. In addition to considering Plato's influential views about the nature of reality, knowledge, and human happiness, we will aim to understand the kinds of questions that Plato thinks philosophy is apt to answer, the method by which he thinks philosophy ought to be conducted, and his arguments about the value of philosophy over competing intellectual pursuits and ways of life.

**TEXTS:**

The required text for this course is:

- J. Cooper & D.S. Hutchinson (eds.), *Plato, Complete Works* Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997.

Please do not use any translations other than those in the Hackett series. These translations are uniformly excellent, and the Hackett edition of the complete works has the additional benefit of being inexpensive.

*Note about reading ancient philosophical texts:* Although each reading assignment for this course is not terribly long, it will always be very dense. I recommend reading through the assignment multiple times, first, to get a sense of the conclusion of the argument—and additionally what happens in the plot—and then again to look more carefully at how Plato establishes that conclusion. The dialogues we will be reading are considered classics for a good reason: they repay the effort you put into understanding their ideas. Reading, like writing, is an art that can only be acquired through extensive and intensive practice. As Thoreau put it, “To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written. [...] [T]his only is reading, in a high sense, not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to stand on tip-toe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to” (“Reading,” *Walden*).

*Secondary Literature:* All secondary literature will be made available on Blackboard under the “Course Materials” tab. All of these readings are optional, but I will occasionally draw on them in class, and it will be important to consult some of the optional readings connected to the paper topics you choose to write on. There is a list of the optional secondary literature at the end of this syllabus.

*Recommended Listening:* I additionally recommend listening to Peter Adamson’s “History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps” podcast series, which contains excellent episodes on many of the dialogues we will be reading. I give links to the webpages for the podcast episodes, but I highly recommend subscribing to the podcast in your favorite podcatcher—it is a truly amazing resource. In connection with our reading of the *Euthydemus*, I also recommend listening to a brilliant “free and modernized” English version of the dialogue by C.A. Kirwan performed here in Princeton

April 10<sup>th</sup> 1958. Much of what goes on in the *Euthydemus*, for reasons that will become clear when we discuss it, do not translate easily into English; Kirwan has done Greekless readers a great service with this modernized version of the dialogue, which brings much of the philosophical depth and also the humor of the dialogue to life for contemporary English speaking audiences.

#### REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

##### Problem Sets:

- Problem set 1, due Thurs. Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> by 5 pm (20%)
- Problem set 2: due Thurs. April 16<sup>th</sup> by 5 pm (20%).

Paper In Lieu Of Midterm: due Fri. March 13<sup>th</sup> by 5 pm (20%)

Paper In Lieu Of Final Exam (30%):

- Final paper topic and argument outline: due Fri. May 1<sup>st</sup> by 5 pm (5%)
- Final paper due Tues. May 12<sup>th</sup> by 5 pm (25%).

Participation (10%)

*Problem Sets:* To help you digest the course material I will assign a total of two short problem sets over the course of the semester. In each problem set, you will provide short answers to a handful of questions pertaining to the readings and our discussions of them. These questions will allow you to gauge your progress in the course and will also help prepare you to write successful argumentative papers. Each problem set will provide you with the opportunity to practice the exegetical and argumentative skills required to write successful papers. Each problem set is worth 20% of your grade.

*Argumentative Papers:* Students will write two argumentative papers—a midterm paper of 1500 words (20%), and a final paper of 2500 words (30%). For the midterm essay, I will provide a set of prompts, which will include the option of developing your own paper topic in consultation with me. For the final paper, you will be required to develop your own paper topic and prepare a brief outline of your argument by the last day of instruction (Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup>). Sending your paper topic and an outline to me by this date is a requirement and will make up 5% of your total grade.

*Participation:* Attendance and participation is mandatory and make up the remaining 10% of your grade. So long as you are not frequently absent from class, your attendance grade will default to your average grade on your problem sets and argumentative papers. If your performance on papers and problem sets *improves* over the course of the semester, your participation grade will default to your *best* grade. It is also possible to increase your participation grade by demonstrating engagement in the course in a variety of ways. The most obvious way is to be engaged in class discussion by asking questions, posing problems, etc. But I also try to be accommodating of different levels of comfort with public speaking. Students can demonstrate engaged participation in a variety of ways, for example, by speaking with me in office hours, posing questions over email, by forming study and discussion groups with their peers etc.

#### (TENTATIVE) SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Monday, Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup>: Introduction to Plato and his dialogues, syllabus review  
Recommended Listening: “In Dialogue: The Life and Works of Plato”  
<https://historyofphilosophy.net/plato-life>

#### **I: THE *APOLOGY***

Wednesday, Feb. 5<sup>th</sup>: Plato's Socrates on the value of philosophical inquiry.

Reading: Plato, *Apology*

Recommended Listening: "Method Man: Plato's Socrates"

<https://historyofphilosophy.net/plato-socrates>

## **II: THE *PROTAGORAS***

Monday, Feb. 10<sup>th</sup>: Socrates' warning about the dangers of sophistry; Protagoras' profession; and Protagoras' Great speech.

Reading: Plato, *Protagoras*, 309a-328d

Wednesday, Feb. 12<sup>th</sup>: Socrates' dialectical examination of the unity of the virtues; discussion of Simonides' poem.

Reading: Plato, *Protagoras*, 328d-349b

Monday, Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>: Socrates' final refutation of Protagoras on the unity of the virtues.

Reading: Plato, *Protagoras*, 349b-362a

## **III: THE *GORGIAS***

Wednesday, Feb. 19<sup>th</sup>: The Gorgias episode: Gorgias' defense of rhetoric, and Socrates' refutation.

Reading: Plato, *Gorgias*, 447a-461b

Recommended Listening: "Virtue Meets its Match: Plato's *Gorgias*"

<https://historyofphilosophy.net/plato-gorgias>

Monday, Feb. 24<sup>th</sup>: The Polus Episode: Socrates on Rhetoric as a mere knack; argument that tyrants and rhetoricians do not do anything they want.

Reading: Plato, *Gorgias*, 461b-481b

Wednesday, Feb. 26<sup>th</sup>: The Callicles Episode: Callicles' defense of Immoralism.

Reading: Plato, *Gorgias*, 481b-500b

***Problem set #1 due Thursday Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> by 5 pm***

Monday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>: The Callicles Episode continued

Reading: Plato, *Gorgias*, 500b-527e

## **IV: THE *EUTHYDEMUS***

Wednesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>: The Eristics' first advertisement of their wisdom and Socrates' first protreptic to philosophy.

Reading: Plato, *Euthydemus*, 271a-283b  
Recommended Listening: Kirwan, "Euthydemus" parts 1-4.  
<https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/euthydemus-platonic-dialogue>

Monday, March 9<sup>th</sup>: The Eristics' second advertisement of their wisdom and Socrates' second protreptic to philosophy.

Reading: Plato, *Euthydemus*, 283b-293a  
Recommended Listening: Kirwan, "Euthydemus" parts 5-8.  
<https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/euthydemus-platonic-dialogue>

Wednesday, March 11<sup>th</sup>: The Eristics' final advertisement of their wisdom and the Isocratean critic of philosophy.

Reading: Plato, *Euthydemus*, 293a-307c  
Recommended Listening: Kirwan, "Euthydemus" parts 9-12.  
<https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/euthydemus-platonic-dialogue>

***Midterm Paper due Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup> by 5pm***

Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>: Spring Break, no class.

Wednesday, March 18<sup>th</sup>: Spring break, no class.

**V: THE *MENO***

Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>: Meno's 'Eristic' paradox, and the theory of recollection

Reading: Plato, *Meno* 70a-86b. Read all, but pay special attention to 80a-86b.

Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>: The method of hypothesis and the difference between true belief and knowledge.

Reading: Plato, *Meno* 86b-100b.

**VI: THE *REPUBLIC***

Monday, March 30<sup>th</sup>: The Sophistic Challenge to Justice

Reading: Plato, *Clitophon* and *Republic* I. Read all, but pay special attention to 336b-354c.

Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup>: Division of goods and Glaucon's Challenge

Reading: Plato, *Republic* II 357a-367e

Monday, April 6<sup>th</sup>: The city/soul analogy and the definitions of the virtues in the city

Reading: *Republic* II 367e to IV 435c. Read all (this is a lot of reading, most of it you can basically just skim) but pay special attention to 367e-377a and 427d-435c.  
Recommended Listening: "Soul and the City: Plato's Political Philosophy"  
<https://historyofphilosophy.net/plato-republic-soul-political-philosophy>

Wednesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>: Argument for the tripartition of the soul and the initial answer to Glaucon's Challenge

Reading: Plato, *Republic* IV 435c-445e.

Monday, April 13<sup>th</sup>: Philosophers vs. the lovers of sights and sounds

Reading: Plato, *Republic* V. Read all but pay special attention to 471c-480a.

Wednesday, April 15<sup>th</sup>: Philosophical natures, the form of the good, and the divided line

Reading: *Republic* VI. Read all but pay special attention to 487b-497a and 502c-511e.

***Problem set 2: due Thursday April 16<sup>th</sup> by 5 pm***

Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>: The allegory of the cave and the education of philosophers

Reading: *Republic* VII. Read all but pay special attention to 514a-521c and 531c-541b

Recommended Listening: "Ain't No Sunshine: The Cave Allegory in Plato's *Republic*"  
<https://historyofphilosophy.net/plato-cave-allegory-republic>

Wednesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>: The degradation of cities and souls: Timocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy and Tyranny.

Reading: *Republic* VIII

Monday, April 27<sup>th</sup>: Tyrannical vs. Philosophical souls

Reading: *Republic* IX. Read all but pay special attention to 583b-588a.

Wednesday, April 29<sup>th</sup>:

Reading: *Republic* X. Read all but pay special attention to 595a-607a.

***Final Paper topic and paper outline due Friday May 1<sup>st</sup> by 5 pm***

***Final Paper due Dean's Date, Tuesday May 12<sup>th</sup> by 5 pm. .***

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OPTIONAL FURTHER READING:**

The following is list of the optional secondary material available on Blackboard under "Course Materials", with some indication of which topics or parts of dialogues they should be read alongside. This is *not* a list of assigned texts; do not even try to read all of it. The purpose of this list is simply to guide your further reading if you become especially interested in a particular topic or argument and want to research it further for the purposes of writing your papers.

#### **0: INTRODUCTIONS TO PLATO**

- Richard Kraut, "Introduction to the Study of Plato"
- Miles Burnyeat, "Plato"

#### **I: THE *APOLOGY***

Introductions to the *Apology*:

- R.E. Allen, “Introduction to the *Apology*”

In connection with Socrates’ questioning of the Poets:

- Plato, *Ion* (In Cooper)

For an amusing portrait of the “old charges” against Socrates:

- Aristophanes, *The Clouds*

For a discussion of Socrates’ “divine sign”:

- Gregory Vlastos, “Socratic Piety”

## **II: THE *PROTAGORAS***

Introductions to the *Protagoras*:

- Michael Frede, “Introduction to the *Protagoras*”
- Terrence Irwin, “Protagoras”

On the life and work of the historical Protagoras:

- “B” Fragments of Protagoras in R.K. Sprague, *The Older Sophists*

For a sophistic text demonstrating the ability to “argue on both sides of an argument,” for which Protagoras was famous:

- Rosamond Kent Sprague (trans), “Dissoi Logoi or Dialexeis”

On the portrayal of Protagoras’ educational program in the *Protagoras*:

- Heda Segvic, “Protagoras’ Political Art”
- Marina McCoy, “Socrates on Simonides: The Use of Poetry in Socratic and Platonic Rhetoric”

On the discussion of the Unity of the Virtues:

- Terry Penner, “The Unity of Virtue”
- Gregory Vlastos, “The Unity of the Virtues in the ‘Protagoras’”

On Socratic Intellectualism:

- Terry Penner, “Socrates on the Strength of Knowledge”
- Heda Segvic, “No One Errs Willingly: The Meaning of Socratic Intellectualism”

## **III: THE *GORGIAS***

Introductions:

- R.E. Allen, “Introduction to the *Gorgias*”
- Donald Zehl, “Introduction”

For a sample of the kind of rhetoric in which Gorgias was engaged:

- Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*

On the argumentative strategy of the *Gorgias*:

- Charles H. Kahn, “Drama and Dialectic in Plato’s *Gorgias*”
- James Doyle, “Socrates and Gorgias”

On Gorgias’ defense of rhetoric:

- Rachel Barney, “Gorgias’ Defense: Plato and His Opponents on Rhetoric and the Good”

On Socrates’ argument that Tyrants and Rhetoricians do nothing they want:

- Heda Segvic, “No One Errs Willingly: The Meaning of Socratic Intellectualism”
- Terry Penner, “Desire and Power in Socrates: The Argument of Gorgias 466A-468E that Orators and Tyrants Have No Power in the City”.
- Ian Campbell, “Power, Getting What You Want, and Happiness: *Gorgias* 466a4-472d7”

On Socrates’ dialectical refutation of Polus:

- Gregory Vlastos, “Does Socrates Cheat?”

On the Callicles Episode:

- Raphael Woolf, “Callicles and Socrates: Psychic (Dis)harmony in the *Gorgias*”

#### **IV: THE *EUTHYDEMUS***

I recommend reading the transcript of Kirwan’s “free and modernized” “translation” of the *Euthydemus* in addition to listening to it:

- Kirwan, “Euthydemus”

On Socrates’ first “protreptic” to philosophy see:

- Russel Jones, “Wisdom and Happiness in *Euthydemus* 278-282”
- Terrence Irwin, “Euthydemus”

On the Eristic refutations in the Euthydemus:

- M.M. McCabe, “Persistent Fallacies”
- Roslyn Weiss, 2000. “When Winning is Everything: Socratic Elenchus and Euthydemian Eristic”

On the question of Plato’s awareness of, and ability to solve the fallacies in the *Euthydemus* see:

- Rosamond Kent Sprague, 1962. *Plato’s Use Of Fallacy: A Study of the Euthydemus and Some Other Dialogues*, Chapter 1.
- M.A. Stewart, 1977. “Plato’s Sophistry (I)”
- Ian Campbell, “Ambiguity and Fallacy in Plato’s *Euthydemus*”
- Ian Campbell, “The Eristic Background to the Principle of Non-Contradiction”

On the use of the verb “to be” in the fallacies of the second Eristic episode:

- Leslie Brown, 1986. “Being in the *Sophist*: A Syntactical Enquiry” parts III and IV

On the Isocrates character in the final section of the dialogue see:

- Isocrates, *Against the Sophists*; *Encomium of Helen* 1-14; *Antidosis* 261-269.

#### **V: THE *REPUBLIC***

On Thrasymachus in Book 1:

- Merrick Anderson, “Thrasymachus’ Sophistic Account of Justice in *Republic I*”
- Rachel Barney “Socrates’ Refutation of Thrasymachus”

On the division of goods and Glaucon’s challenge in book 2:

- Merrick Anderson, “What Are the Wages of Justice? Rethinking the *Republic*’s Division of Goods”

- Terrence Irwin, “Republic II: Questions of Justice”

On the City-Soul Analogy in the Republic:

- Bernard Williams, “The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato’s *Republic*”

On the Argument for the Tripartition of the Soul:

- Hendrik Lorenz, “The Analysis of the Soul in Plato’s Republic”
- John Cooper, “Plato’s Theory of Human Motivation”

On the “Middle Books” (5-7) of the Republic:

- David Sedley, “Philosophy, The Forms and The Art of Ruling” in the Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic.
- Terry Penner, “The Forms in the *Republic*”