Phil 301h: Selected Topics in Philosophy

Fall 2006 Syllabus

Plato's Psychological Dialogues

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Hours: 11:00-11:50/1:00-1:50 MWF
Class Time: W 6:00-8:45 p.m.
Room: Library Conference Room

Course Description

This course will examine in detail Plato's four psychological dialogues: *The Symposium, The Phaedrus, The Republic,* and *The Phaedo*. In particular, it will look for common elements and themes in the texts to explore the hypothesis that the four texts belong together as a set following an ancient practice of writing dramatic fiction in tetralogies. Along the way, the course will attempt to construct a coherent account of Plato's metaphysical and epistemic doctrines concerning the soul.

Required Text

Cooper, John M., Ed., *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

Assignments

Each student is expected to come to class prepared, having read and studied the assignment for the day. In addition, each student will write six expository/interpretive essays. At some point in the semester, each student will present (at least) one of these papers to the class for constructive criticism and discussion.

This course will meet one night a week. The format for each week will be the same. The first part of the course will consist of a lecture presented by the instructor. This will be followed by a short break. After the break, one student will read an essay. The remainder of the session will consist of questions and comments on the essay in relation to the reading assignment.

To facilitate this format, the class will be divided into two groups, an A group and a B group. One week, the A group will be writing papers on the assignment; the next week, the B group, and so on. Each week, a student will be selected from the appropriate group to present his/her paper.

Grading

75% - Papers – 12.5% each
25% - Course Participation

Course Participation

Course participation grades are not automatic. They are based on oral contributions to the collective learning experience of the class as a whole in terms of asking pertinent questions, answering questions correctly or, at least, provocatively, making insightful observations, and offering other meaningful expressions of interest in the material that help encourage learning. I begin by assuming a C for each student's course participation grade and move from there. Students should realize that *it is possible to talk a lot in class and receive a low grade for course participation*. Frequent absences are also grounds for a low participation grade.

Attendance

Because being present and attentive in class is part of (and perhaps the most important part of) the learning experience and because a serious comportment toward learning new ideas is necessary for understanding philosophy, I have a serious attendance policy: *final grades will be dropped a part letter grade for each unexcused absence*. In order for an absence to be excused, students must submit an official university excuse in writing. I will NOT accept email for this purpose. Special consideration will be given to seniors who miss class for job and graduate school interviews that must be scheduled during class time.

Incompletes

Incompletes will be given only in rare circumstances and only when a previous arrangement has been made.

Academic Honesty

All work submitted in this course must be prepared by the student expressly for this course. A student who submits work that is plagiarized, bought, borrowed from the archives of a fraternity, copied from another student, etc., *will fail the course.* I fully support the University's Academic Honor Code. To avoid confusion, students should keep in mind that plagiarism occurs not only when someone copies an author word for word, but also when someone uses another's ideas without giving credit, even if the ideas are paraphrased (that is, put in your own words). Always document your sources!

Paper Guidelines

All papers should be typed, double-spaced in Times New Roman 12-point font with one inch margins on all sides and page numbers in the bottom center. Each paper should include a title. They should be longer than four pages and no longer than five. Citations to Plato's texts are required following the proper documentation technique that scholars use for Plato's dialogues. No text is required except for the edition of Plato that we will be using for the class. However, should you use a commentary or another translation of

Plato's texts, proper documentation is required following the MLA style. Use parenthetical references. No footnotes please.

To aid in the comparison of translation, Plato's texts are always cited according to the pagination in the Stephanus edition of 1578. These page numbers appear in the margins of your texts as small numbers followed by the letters a through e. Sample references include *Phaedo* 61c, *Republic* 567b, and *Phaedrus* 279b-d. Where the dialogue in question is clear from context, you can leave the text name out of the reference and use only the number. Sample references appear contextualized in the paragraph below, which, incidentally, serves also as a good example of a first paragraph for an interpretive essay.

> In the *Phaedo*, Plato presents three main arguments for the immortality of the soul, the "Cycle of Opposites" argument (70c-72e), the "Recollection" argument (72e-77d), and the "Affinity" argument (77d-80c). These are initiated after Socrates makes an appeal to ancient authority. "We recall an ancient theory that the souls arriving there come from here, and then again that they arrive here and are born here from the dead" (70c). Such an appeal may shed some light on how we are to interpret Plato's attitude about these arguments. Is this appeal to ancient authority meant to indicate that these arguments should be taken *more* or *less* seriously? We can see from the interchange between Socrates and Cephalus in the *Republic* (328c-331d) that old doctrines sometimes represent mere starting points to be replaced by newer, more pressing arguments. What does the *Republic* suggest about how we are to read the arguments in the *Phaedo*?

Helpful Hints for Interpreting Plato

Plato's dialogues, especially the four we will be examining in this course, are often characterized as dramatic fiction. It is important to keep this in mind when reading his texts. If they are fiction, then, of course, Plato could have written them otherwise than he did, and this means, in turn, that we should always be asking *why* did Plato write his texts this way as opposed to that. This *imperative of fiction* highlights the fact that Plato's texts are carefully edited.

His use of character is intentional; it is significant, for instance, that Alcibiades, an Athenian general that Plato blames for the loss of the Peloponnesian War, and not Plato's brother, Glaucon, interrupts the speeches in the *Symposium*. It does matter that the name *Polemarchus* means 'warlord' in Greek and that the character with this name argues for the conception of justice that he does in the *Republic*. It is not an accident that Aristophanes is a comic playwright while Agathon writes tragedies. In each of these cases, and in many others, we can ask about Plato's agenda. What was his point in making Glaucon and Adiemantus, two of his own brothers, serve as Socrates' primary interlocutors in the *Republic*?

No less than his choice of character, Plato's choice of other details is equally pressing. Why does the *Symposium* unfold under the watchful eye of Dionysus and the *Phaedo* under Apollo, while the *Republic* under the eye of Bendis, a foreign deity that was recently

introduced into Athens? Why does Plato invoke the story of Theseus and the Minotaur at the beginning of the *Phaedo* or have Socrates writing a poetic him to Apollo on the morning of his death? What point might Plato be making by ending the *Republic* with a myth after criticizing mythology earlier in the text?

The structure of the texts is also important. Each text is full of digresses, but Plato, being a master dramatist, does not waste his time on incidentals. If something looks like an irrelevant digress to us, it is most likely a clue to look to another level of meaning. Plato is a master of metaphor and extended allegory, and his texts become a veritable maze that invites the careful reader to discover secrets that escape the notice of those who are not ready for his meaning. Indeed, Plato's texts are deeply rewarding, but only to the patient. To see this, it is vital to remember where you are in the text. It's not enough to know, for instance, that the cave story in the *Republic* is an allegory. One must also remember that it is an allegory nested inside of another allegory, for this makes a genuine difference in the interpretation of Plato's meaning(s).

Before Plato started writing philosophy, we was himself a playwright. Some rightfully point out that he never left this calling behind. Oddly, while his texts often criticize the poetic—including all of literature and drama, for the Greeks—they remain master works of literature in their own right. Like all fine literature, they cannot simply be read. They must be deciphered and interpreted, but always on the basis of the actual words and what we can learn about the person and times that produced them.

Text Outlines

Plato's texts are continuous with no section breaks. Even the *Republic* is artificially divided into its traditional ten books, (though many scholars think that book one was originally an independent text.) Nonetheless, knowing where natural divisions appear helps to reveal the structure of the texts and the flow of the arguments. The following outlines will help in this regard. The outline for the *Republic* that appears below was taken from Francis Cornford's 1945 translation.

- The Symposium
    - Prologue (172a-174a)
    - The Tale of Aristodemus (174a-178a)
        - The Speech of Phaedrus (178a-180b)
        - The Speech of Pausanias (180c-185c)
        - The Speech of Eryximachus (185c-188e)
        - The Speech of Aristophanes (189a-193e)
        - Agathon
            - Socrates and Agathon (193e-194d)
            - The Speech of Agathon (194d-197e)
            - Transition from Agathon to Socrates (198a-201d)
        - The Speech of Socrates
            - The Nature and Origin of Love (201d-204c)
            - The Cause and Effect of Love (204c-209e)

            - The Ascent Passage (209e-212c)
        - Alcibiades
            - The Entry of Alcibiades (212c-214e)
            - The Speech of Alcibiades (214e-222b)
    - Conclusion (222c-223d)

- The Phaedrus
    - Prologue (227a-230e)
    - The Speech of Lysias (230e-234c)
    - The First Interlude (234c-237a)
    - The First Speech of Socrates (237a-241d)
    - The Second Interlude. The Palinode (241d-243e)
    - The Second Speech of Socrates
        - Divine Madness and the Immortality of the Soul (243e-246a)
        - The Myth of Souls. The Chariot Analogy. Recollection (246a-250c)
        - Beauty and the Effects of Love. The Different Kinds of Lover (250d-253c)
        - The Chariot Analogy Continued. The Control of the Passions. A Concluding Prayer (253c-257b)
    - The Myth of the Cicadas (257b-259d)
    - Knowledge and the True Art of Rhetoric (259e-264e)
    - Collection and Division, or Dialectic (264e-266d)
    - Rhetoric, the False Art and the True (266d-274b)
    - Speech and Writing (274b-277a)
    - Conclusion (277a-279c)

- The Republic
    - Part I. Some Current Views of Justice
        - 1. Cephalus. Justice as Honesty in Word and Deed (327a-331d)
        - 2. Polemarchus. Justice as Helping Friends and Harming Enemies (331e-336a)
        - 3. Thrasymachus. Justice as the Interest of the Stronger (336b-347e)
        - 4. Thrasymachus. Is Injustice More Profitable than Justice? (347e-354c)
    - Part II. Justice in the State and in the Individual
        - 5. The Problem Stated (357a-367e)
        - 6. The Rudiments of Social Organization (367e-372a)
        - 7. The Luxurious State (372a-375a)
        - 8. The Guardian's Temperament (375a-376d)
        - Primary Education of the Guardians
            - 9-1. Censorship of Literature for School Use (376d-392c)
            - 9-2. The Influence of Dramatic Recitation (392c-398b)
            - 9-3. Musical Accompaniment and Meter (398c-400c)

        - 9-4. The Aim of Education in Poetry and Music (400c-403c)
        - 9-5. Physical Training. Physicians and Judges (403c-412b)
    - 10. Selection of Rulers: The Guardian's Manner of Living (412b-421c)
    - 11. The Guardian's Duties (421c-427c)
    - 12. The Virtues in the State (427d-434d)
    - 13. The Three Parts of the Soul (434d-441c)
    - 14. The Virtues in the Individual (441c-445b)
- Part II (Appendix). The Position of Women and the Usages of War
    - 15. The Equality of Women (445b-457b)
    - 16. Abolition of the Family for the Guardians (457b-466d)
    - 17. Usages of War (466d-471c)
- Part III. The Philosopher King
    - 18. The Paradox: Philosophers Must Be Kings (471c-474b)
    - 19. Definition of the Philosopher. The Two Worlds (474b-480a)
    - 20. The Philosopher's Fitness to Rule (484a-487a)
    - 21. Why the Philosophic Nature Is Useless or Corrupted in Existing Society (487b-497a)
    - 22. A Philosophic Ruler Is Not an Impossibility (497a-502c)
    - 23. The Good as the Highest Object of Knowledge (502c-509c)
    - 24. Four Stages of Cognition. The Line (509d-511e)
    - 25. The Allegory of the Cave (514a-521b)
    - 26. Higher Education (521c-531c)
    - 27. Dialectic (531c-535a)
    - 28. Programme of Study (535a-541b)
- Part IV. The Decline of Society and of the Soul. Comparison of the Just and Unjust Lives
    - 29. The Fall of the Ideal State. Timocracy and the Timocratic Man (543a-550c)
    - 30. Oligarchy (Plutocracy) and the Oligarchic Man (550c-555b)
    - 31. Democracy and the Democratic Man (555b-562a)
    - 32. Despotism and the Despotic Man (562a-576b)
    - 33. The Just and Unjust Lives Compared in Respect of Happiness (576b-588a)
    - 34. Justice, Not Injustice, Is Profitable (588b-592b)
- Part V. The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry
    - 35. How Representation in Art Is Related to Truth (595a-602b)
    - 36. Dramatic Poetry Appeals to the Emotions, Not to the Reason (602c-605c)
    - 37. The Effect of Dramatic Poetry on Character (605c-608b)
- Part VI. Immortality and the Rewards of Justice
    - 38. A Proof of Immortality (608c-612a)
    - 39. The Rewards of Justice in this Life (612a-613e)
    - 40. The Rewards of Justice after Death. The Myth of Er (613e-621d)

- The Phaedo
    - Prologue (57a-59c)
    - Death and the Philosopher (59c-70c)
    - The Arguments for the Immortality of the Soul
        - The Cycle of Opposites Argument (70c-72e)
        - The Recollection Argument (72e-77d)
        - The Affinity Argument (77d-80c)
    - The Doctrines Concerning Body and Soul (80c-84b)
    - Two Objections
        - Simmias' Objection: The Harmony and Lyre (84b-86d)
        - Cebes' Objection: The Man and Cloak (86d-88c)
    - Interlude: The Warning Against Misology (88c-91c)
    - Socrates' Reply to Simmias (91c-95a)
    - Socrates' Reply to Cebes
        - The Causes of Generation and Destruction (95a-99c)
        - Socrates' Theory of Causation: Forms as Causes (99c-105b)
        - The Soul in Particular (105b-107a)
    - The Myth of the Afterlife (107a-115a)
    - The Death Scene (115a-118a)

Supplemental Bibliography

The following books will help you understand the Plato's texts a little better. I have selected them with the course readings in mind. However, please note that this is not an exhaustive or authoritative listing. These are good books; whether they are the best or not, I cannot say.

Burkert, Walter. *Greek Religion*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Cohen, David. *Law, Sexuality and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Cohen, David. *Law, Violence and Community in Classical Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Davies, J. K. *Democracy and Classical Athens*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978.

Dover, K. J. *Greek Homosexuality*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Guthrie, W. K. C., *A History of Greek Philosophy*. Volumes 3-5. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971-1978.

Forrest, W. C. *A History of Sparta: 950-192 B.C.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968.

Jaeger, Werner. *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture.* Trans. Gilbert Highet. Volumes 1-3. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939-1944.

Kagan, Donald. *The Peloponnesian War*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

Robinson, T. M. *Plato's Psychology*. 2nd Edition. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1995.

Taylor, A. E. *Plato: The Man and His Works*. Dover Publications, 2001. Originally published in 1934 (I think), this book remains provocative. It is still in print.

Thomas, Rosalind. *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

White, Nicholas P. *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976.

Course Calendar

8/23 – Introduction to the Course, Plato, and the Four Psychological Dialogues

8/30 – *Symposium* 172a-201d – Group A Papers Due

9/6 – *Symposium* 201d-223d – Group B Papers Due

9/13 – *Phaedrus* 227a-257b – Group A Papers Due

9/20 – *Phaedrus* 257b-279c – Group B Papers Due

9/27 – *Republic* 327a-354c – Group A Papers Due

10/4 – *Republic* 357a-427c – Group B Papers Due

10/11 – *Republic* 427d-471c – Group A Papers Due

10/18 – *Republic* 471c-511e – Group B Papers Due

10/25 – *Republic* 514a-541b – Group A Papers Due

11/1 – *Republic* 543a-592b – Group B Papers Due

11/8 – *Republic* 595a-621d – Group A Papers Due

11/15 – *Phaedo* 57a-91c – Group B Papers Due

11/22 – Thanksgiving Break

11/29 – *Phaedo* 91c-118a – Course Conclusion

Suzanne's Table of Tetralogies

The following table represents a useful taxonomy for approaching Plato's texts. It emerges as part of a hypothesis put forth by an independent French scholar, Bernard Suzanne, concerning Plato's agenda. Whether Suzanne's hypothesis is true or not is hard to say, but his approach can only serve to draw readers more deeply into the mind of Plato. See http://plato-dialogues.org/tetralog.htm for links to commentary on some of the texts listed in the table below.

	a i t i a (cause)	*epithumiai* (desires) *phusis* (nature)	*thumos* (will) *krisis* (judgment) *èthos* (behavior)	*logos* (reason) *kosmos* (order)
Tetralogy 1 : The start of the quest *what is man ?*	**ALCIBIADES** man	**LYSIS** friendship *(philo-)*	**LACHES** manhood *(andreia)*	**CHARMIDES** wisdom *(-sophos)*
Tetralogy 2 : The sophists *eikasia* (conjecture)	**PROTAGORAS** relativism	**HIPPIAS Major** illusion of beauty	**GORGIAS** illusion of justice	**HIPPIAS Minor** illusion of science
Tetralogy 3 : Socrates' trial *pistis* (true belief)	**MENO** pragmatism	**EUTHYPHRO** letter of the law	**THE APOLOGY** law in action	**CRITO** spirit of the law
Tetralogy 4 : The soul *psuchè*	**THE SYMPOSIUM** the driving force: *eros*	**PHÆDRUS** nature of the soul : *erôs<=>logos*	**THE REPUBLIC** behaviour of the soul : justice	**PHÆDO** destiny of the soul : being
Tetralogy 5 : Speech *(logos)* *dianoia* (knowledge)	**CRATYLUS** the words of speech	**ION** *logos* of the poet	**EUTHYDEMUS** *logos* of the sophist	**MENEXENUS** *logos* of the politician
Tetralogy 6 : Dialectic *epistèmè* (science)	**PARMENIDES** the traps of reason	**THEÆTETUS** the limits of reason	**THE SOPHIST** the laws of reason	**THE STATESMAN** the goals of reason
Tetralogy 7 : Man in the world *kosmos* (order)	**PHILEBUS** the good of man	**TIMÆUS** contemplating *(theôria)*	**CRITIAS** deciding *(krisis)*	**THE LAWS** acting *(erga)*