

PHIL 100: Plato (Winter 2025)

Instructor: Patricia Marechal

Tu-Th 5:00-6:20pm, CENTR 218

Office Hours: Thursday 2-3pm (RWAC 0498 or online)

Description

This course will introduce you to the philosophical works of Plato. We will focus on this thinker's conception of the human soul, knowledge, the good life, justice, and the structure of reality. We will first discuss the views in the Socratic dialogues and then do a close reading of Plato's masterpiece, the *Republic*. Finally, we will read Plato's *Phaedo*. We will examine Plato's answers to enduring questions such as: What are the fundamental constituents of reality? What is knowledge, and how do we come to have it? How can we be happy, and what is a good life? What makes for a just society? Our emphasis will be on analyzing Plato's views, and his reasons and arguments for holding these positions.

Objectives

This class focuses on developing skills that are central to humanities classes. These include: skills in *reading a text closely and critically*, skills in *writing clearly* and in *constructing a well-defended argument*, and skills in *productive group discussion*. And since this class is designed to be a course in the history of philosophy, there will be both historical and philosophical objectives.

Historical objectives: Ancient texts are often hard to read and interpret. The style, organization, and context of production of these texts are quite different from contemporary readings. Our goals as historians will be to read these texts closely and interpret them charitably, taking into account the historical context in which they were produced, and to understand what these authors are saying, why they are saying these things, and who their interlocutors are.

Philosophical objectives: The philosophers we will read make sophisticated distinctions, analyze concepts, offer arguments and counterarguments, present evidence, and attempt to refute their opponents' views. Our goals as philosophers will be to discover the main problems and questions that occupied philosophers in this period in the domains of physics, metaphysics, and ethics. We will learn to identify, analyze, map, and reconstruct the arguments and views advanced in these texts, with a view to understanding these author's positions, and their motivations for proposing them. Finally, we will learn to assess these proposals and arguments, and evaluate whether they are plausible and coherent.

By the end of this course, you will have developed and refined the following general skills: (i) how to read difficult philosophical material; (ii) how to identify and reconstruct arguments; and (iii) how to produce and clearly articulate your own arguments, both in writing and orally in class.

Policies and Academic Integrity

I do not allow the use of laptops (or iPads or tablets or iPhones or Droids, etc.) in class. There is substantial evidence that this helps create a better environment for discussion and learning in general. So, we'll be going old school: please bring along a pen and some paper. (There is, of course, an exception to this rule if you need a phone/laptop as part of a disability-related accommodation.)

Extensions are not available in this course except in extraordinary circumstances. Late papers are penalized 1/2 a grade for every 24 hour delay. Electronic copies of every paper need to be submitted to the Canvas website.

Support

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning such as feeling down, difficulty concentrating or lack of motivation. These stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. UCSD services are available to assist you. If you find yourself struggling with your mental or physical health this quarter, please feel to approach me. I will be flexible and accommodating.

Required Texts

Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo. Second Edition.* Translated by G.M.A. Grube and John M. Cooper (Hackett, 2002). ISBN 978-087220-633-5.

Plato, *Republic*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett, 2004). ISBN 978-0872207366

I will make other primary texts and all secondary materials available to you in PDF form on the course website.

N.B.: The primary texts we will be reading were originally written in Ancient Greek, but *no knowledge of this language is required for this course*. We will be reading these texts in translation, and I will only use terms in the original language (and explain what they mean) when it is pertinent. However, if there are students who would like to study the original Greek texts more closely, I would be happy to do so outside of class.

Course Requirements

1. Participation: Missing class will diminish your learning experience and that of others who can learn from you. Unexcused absences will therefore negatively affect your participation grade, which is a significant part of your total grade.

2. Weekly online discussion posts (20%) & comments (10%)

A. By end of Thurs (midnight) of each week, you will need to contribute a post to the discussion board on Canvas. Your post should include:

(1) a quote of one sentence (or two) of particular interest to you from the week's readings, (2) 100-word response, including your thoughts and opinions about the topic being discussed, and (3) at least one question about the sentence(s) you've chosen.

B. Before the end of Friday (midnight), you will also need to post one 50-word (minimum) comment on someone else's post.

3. Mid-term assignment: You will have to extend a conversation in the sections of the *Republic* read thus far, picking up somewhere where you think the conversation could or should have taken a different turn. Rough length: 800 words.

4. Final exam: An in-class closed-book hand-written final exam during the window of time specified by the registrar for the course's final; a study guide will be distributed during the 10th week, and there will be an exam-focused review/discussion session in the days before the exam.

Grades

Discussion Posts & Comments (30%)
Mid-term Exam (30%)
Final Exam (30%)
Attendance and Participation (10%)

Course Schedule

Jan 7 (T): **Introduction**

Jan 9 (Th): **The Socratic search for definitions**

Reading: *Euthyphro* 2a-12d

Jan 14 (T): **Socrates on Trial**

Reading: *Apology*

Jan 16 (Th): **Is Virtue Teachable? Socratic Intellectualism; The Theory of Recollection**

Reading: *Meno*

Jan 21 (T): **The Search for Justice**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 1

Jan 23 (Th): **Glaucon's Challenge; The Design of an Ideal Society**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 2

Jan 28 (T): **The Early Education of the Guardians; Myths and Poets**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 3

Jan 30 (Th): **Justice in the City; The Tri-partite soul**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 4

Feb 4 (T): NO Class - *Lecture on Homer organized by the CHS*

Feb 6 (Th): **The Tri-partite soul (contn'ed)**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 4

Feb 11 (T): Mid-Term due and peer conversation (no readings)

Feb 13 (Th): **Women Guardians and The Community of Women and Children**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 5

Feb 18 (T): **Knowledge and Opinion, Being and Becoming**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 5

Feb 20 (Th): **The Three allegories**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 6 (complete) and 7 (until 520d5)

Feb 25 (I): **Philosopher-kings**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 7

Feb 27 (Th): **Unjust Societies 1: Timocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 8

March 4 (I): **Unjust Societies 2: Tyranny; Freedom and Pleasure**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 9

March 6 (Th): **Poetry again; The Myth of Err**

Reading: *Republic*, Book 10

March 11 (I): **The Death of Socrates**

Reading: *Phaedo*

March 13 (Th): **Conclusions**

Additional Readings and Resources

Broad overviews:

A History of Philosophy without Any Gaps: a very good podcast by Peter Adamson (LMU Munich), with 20–30-minute lectures on both major and minor figures in the history of philosophy: <http://historyofphilosophy.net> Links to an external site.

K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1962-1981). A six-volume treatment of Greek philosophy up to Aristotle. Much more information than you probably want! But, if you want it, it's there.

On Plato

Julia Annas, *Plato: A Very Short Introduction* (2003)

Gail Fine, *Oxford Handbook of Plato* (2008)

Andrew Mason, *Plato* (UC, 2010).