

PHIL 100: Plato
Fall 2019; MWF 10-10:50am; WLH 2112
Professor David O. Brink; H&SS 8016
Office Hours: M 1-2pm, W 2-3pm, and by appointment
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This is a course about the philosophical views of Socrates (470-399 BCE) and Plato (427-347 BCE). It is common to regard Socrates as the first systematic Western philosopher, and Socrates was Plato's teacher. Socrates never wrote anything, but he figures as the central character in many of Plato's dialogues, and these dialogues are our best evidence of the views of the historical figure Socrates. The content of Plato's dialogues show philosophical change and development of various kinds, in ways that argue for recognizing Plato as a distinct and important philosopher in his own right, not just the intellectual biographer of Socrates. The dialogues pose puzzles about how to understand the relationship between Socrates and Plato. In addition to reconstructing and assessing the philosophical contributions of the dialogues, we will try to identify similarities and differences between Socrates and Plato.

Socrates focused on ethical issues about virtues, such piety, temperance, courage, and justice. His philosophical inquiries take the form of dialogues with both prominent and ordinary Athenians. He examines the moral beliefs of his interlocutors relentlessly, exposing inconsistency, embracing his role as moral gadfly. Though Socrates professes his own ignorance and the (Socratic) dialogues often end inconclusively, along the way he defends revisionary and paradoxical claims.

1. *Virtue and Happiness.* The moral virtues must benefit the person who is virtuous; they must contribute to the agent's own *eudaimonia* or happiness (the eudaimonist assumption). Indeed, Socrates insists that the good or virtuous person cannot be harmed. The eudaimonist assumption might lead you to expect Socrates to recognize only self-regarding virtues, such as prudence. But he recognizes familiar other-regarding virtues (e.g. justice) as genuine virtues.
2. *The Unity of the Virtues.* Socrates denies that the virtues (e.g. courage, temperance, piety, and justice) are distinct; not only must a virtuous person have the other virtues in order to have any one of them, allegedly distinct virtues are really one single trait.
3. *Intellectualism.* Moreover, Socrates thinks that virtue is a purely cognitive state — knowledge of the good — which implies, among other things, that weakness of the will (*akrasia*) is not really possible. I can't know what virtue requires and fail to be moved to virtuous action.
4. *Democracy and Moral Experts.* Though his dialectical methods are democratic in character and he admires various aspects of Athenian democracy, he is also a critic of democracy and suggests that moral knowledge, like other forms of craft knowledge, would be possessed by specialists or experts.

Socrates's views are important not only in their own right but because they structured subsequent work in Greek ethics in important ways. Later philosophers in the tradition, including Plato, his student Aristotle (384-322 BCE), and the Hellenistic schools (e.g. Epicureanism and Stoicism) take each of these claims very seriously, and no one rejects all of Socrates's claims entirely. Indeed, it is quite common for subsequent philosophers to claim that they are preserving the most important part of Socrates's view.

Plato shares many of Socrates's ethical concerns. Like Socrates, he is a eudaimonist, believing that virtues benefit the agent. More than Socrates, he is sensitive to worries that other-regarding virtues, such as justice, do not conform to the eudaimonist assumption, and he addresses those doubts directly, providing a eudaimonist defense of justice. Though he rejects the Socratic assumption that the good person cannot be harmed, he defends the Socratic claim that one is always

better-off being just, no matter what the opportunity cost is, arguing that justice is its own reward, because it improves the agent's soul. Like Socrates, Plato thinks that the virtues require knowledge of good and evil, but, unlike Socrates, he seems to reject the idea that knowledge is sufficient for virtue, recognizing the possibility of akrasia. In his masterwork the *Republic*, Plato pushes Socratic skepticism about democracy further and defends a form of aristocracy — rule by moral experts — as the most ideal constitution. However, in later works, such as the *Statesman* and *Laws*, Plato defends a form of democracy as the best non-ideal constitution.

Aristotle distinguishes between Socrates and Plato partly by the scope of their philosophical concerns. Whereas Socrates was primarily concerned with ethical matters, Aristotle says that Plato was also concerned with metaphysical and epistemological issues. Indeed, Aristotle suggests that Plato was led to focus on metaphysical and epistemological issues partly because of problems he encountered in the Socratic project of defining the ethical virtues. Plato is led to recognize forms or universals that are separate from the sensible particulars (e.g. people and actions) that embody them. He defends a hierarchy of forms, culminating in the Form of the Good. Along the way, he defends psychophysical dualism and the immortality of the soul, partly as a way of making sense of the possibility of inquiry and knowledge.

We will read and discuss a selection of Plato's most important and influential dialogues, with the aim of reconstructing, assessing, and appreciating the philosophical contributions of Socrates and Plato.

FORMAT

Class meetings will involve lecture, seasoned with discussion. The lectures provide philosophical background and structure to the issues raised by the readings and will present and assess these issues in a fairly systematic way. I hope and expect that students will be engaged by the material and ask questions, make comments, and offer their own interpretations and assessments.

Students are expected to come to lecture regularly and be prepared. Attendance will not be taken, but students who attend lectures and participate in discussion do better on class assignments, and participation will be one component in a student's overall grade.

REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

Students registered for the course will take five bi-weekly quizzes and write one paper. The successful completion of each of these requirements is a condition of passing the course. There will be no final exam.

- **Quizzes.** The quizzes will be held every other week (on Fridays), beginning October 11 and on October 25, November 8, November 22, and December 6. They will include true/false, multiple choice, and/or short answer questions and take less than 10 minutes. All quizzes count, and you can miss no more than one quiz and still pass the course. Collectively, the quizzes will be worth 40% of your overall grade.
- **The Paper.** The paper should be 8-10 double-spaced pages. It will be due by 5pm, Wednesday, December 11 but can be submitted earlier. It will be worth 50% of your overall grade. Paper topics will be distributed well in advance of the due date.
- **Submission of Papers.** Students will be expected to submit papers electronically, via turnitin.com on the course website.
- **Late Papers.** If students require an extension on the paper, they must request and justify an extension in advance via email. Late papers (for which an extension was not approved in advance) will lose one full grade for every day (24-hour period) late. For instance, a paper that would have received an A- if handed in on time will receive a C- if handed in two days (more than 24 hours and not more than 48 hours) late.
- **Attendance and Participation.** Attendance will not be taken, but students are expected to

attend class and participate on a regular basis, and I will take note of how regularly students attend and participate. Attendance and participation will count for 10% of your overall grade.

- **Grade Breakdown.** As percentages of your total grade: quizzes = 40%, the paper = 50%, and attendance and participation = 10%.
- **Plagiarism.** Students should note that plagiarism is a violation of the Principles of Academic Integrity (<http://senate.ucsd.edu/manual/appendices/app2.htm>). Anyone determined to have violated these principles will fail the assignment and the course and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism or other academic misconduct, please consult with me *in advance*.

BOOKS

I have ordered one book for the course, which should be available for purchase from the campus bookstore, but could perhaps be found cheaper online.

Plato's Complete Works, ed. J. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

I also have a pdf of this book, which I will post on the course website, for students who are willing to read the dialogues digitally (it can be a bit inconvenient to locate individual dialogues in so large a book).

READINGS

The reading assignments are listed on the Syllabus. I will regularly indicate where we are on the Syllabus (remind me if I don't). It is very important to read the assignments on time.

WEBSITE

All course materials and handouts will be available on the course website available through Course Finder (<https://coursefinder.ucsd.edu>). Students enrolled in the course should have automatic access to the website. You will be expected to have access to print or electronic versions of these handouts during class. You should check periodically to make sure that you have current versions of all the handouts (which are revised or updated periodically).