

USC Philosophy 411: Plato
4.0 units

Spring 2023, Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00 – 3:20 pm
Location: SGM 226

Instructor: Professor Ralph Wedgwood
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2 – 4 pm, MHP 113

Course description

This class will explore the philosophy of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (428/427 or 424/423 – 348/347 BCE). Our study of his philosophy will fall into three parts:

1. In the first part, we will study some of the works that are often called “early Socratic dialogues”, which were probably written in the early part of Plato’s career: *Socrates’ Apology*, *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, and *Protagoras*.
2. In the second part, we will study some of the works that are often viewed as belonging to Plato’s “Middle Period”, and as having been written before *The Republic: Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*.
3. In the third part, we will study Plato’s most famous work, which is often viewed as coming towards the end of his “Middle Period”, *The Republic*.

The recommended translations of Plato’s works are those in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett, 1997).

Course Objectives

The goal of this course is for you to come to an in-depth understanding of Plato’s philosophical thought. Primarily, this will involve reading, understanding, and interpreting these difficult and complex texts that Plato wrote around 2400 years ago, and presenting and defending your interpretations of Plato’s thought both in your written work and in your contributions to our class discussions. Interpreting and defending these texts will also involve thinking critically about the philosophical issues that Plato himself was grappling with.

After taking this course, you will have acquired knowledge of some of Plato’s main ideas and arguments. More importantly, (i) you will have improved your ability for independently reading and comprehending complicated texts – in a way that will enable you to identify and state the main claims of these texts, and to reconstruct the texts’ key arguments in favour of these claims; (ii) you will also have developed your skills at critically evaluating such claims and arguments; and (iii) you will have practised your skills at giving clear and persuasive arguments of your own – both in your writing and in your contribution to oral discussions – to defend your interpretation and evaluations of these claims and arguments.

Normal prerequisites

The normal prerequisite for this course is two Philosophy courses. (Others may enrol with my permission.)

Paper Assignments and Grading

There will be **three** paper assignments, one for each of the three parts of the course. Suggested paper topics will be distributed at least two weeks before the due date. You may also write your paper on a different topic if you wish – but only after consultation with me.

Your papers should be turned in electronically *via* the course Blackboard site.

Each of these papers will count for **one-third** of your overall grade for this course. There will be no final exam.

Office Hours

I will be holding office hours on Tuesdays, from 2 pm until 4 pm. Office hours are an opportunity for you to ask questions about the class or the readings, but they're also a chance to chat about how the course is going, to tell me about your ideas about any of the moral issues we're discussing, to test out a plan for one of your papers on me, or to ask for general advice. Don't hesitate to take advantage of this opportunity.

Reading

The primary reading for the course will be the original texts of these dialogues of Plato. There are many good translations, but not all published translations are reliable. If you prefer to read them in a different translation from the recommended Hackett translation, please ask for my advice first.

In each case, you should read the text that is assigned for each class before the class; I will expect to discuss the text with you in the class.

Over the course of the semester, some supplementary writings by modern commentators, and some of my own handouts and lecture notes, will be made available from the course Blackboard site.

Schedule of classes and assignments

1. Monday 9 January: Introduction to the study of Plato's philosophy

Part 1: The early Socratic dialogues

2. Wednesday 11 January: *Socrates' Apology*
3. Monday 16 January – **MLK Day**
4. Wednesday 18 January: *Socrates' Apology*
5. Monday 23 January: *Euthyphro*
6. Wednesday 25 January: *Euthyphro*
7. Monday 30 January: *Crito*
8. Wednesday 1 February: *Crito*
9. Monday 6 February: *Protagoras*
10. Wednesday 8 February: *Protagoras*
11. Monday 13 February: *Protagoras*

Paper 1 due: Friday 17 February

Part 2: Middle-period dialogues

12. Wednesday 15 February: *Meno*
13. Monday 20 February – **President's Day**
14. Wednesday 22 February: *Meno*
15. Monday 27 February: *Meno*
16. Wednesday 29 February: *Phaedo*
17. Monday 6 March: *Phaedo*
18. Wednesday 8 March: *Phaedo*

Spring Break

19. Monday 20 March: *Symposium*
20. Wednesday 22 March: *Symposium*

Paper 2 due: Friday 24 March

Part 3: *The Republic*

21. Monday 27 March: *Republic*, Book 1
22. Wednesday 29 March – **No class**
23. Monday 3 April: *Republic*, Books 2
24. Wednesday 5 April: *Republic*, Book 2–4
25. Monday 10 April: *Republic*, Book 4
26. Wednesday 12 April: *Republic*, Book 4
27. Monday 17 April: *Republic*, Book 5
28. Wednesday 19 April: *Republic*, Books 5–7
29. Monday 24 April: *Republic*, Books 8–9
30. Wednesday 26 April: *Republic*, Book 10

Paper 3 due: Monday 1 May

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu