

This course gives an introduction to the philosophy of Plato (?428-348 BC), and thereby also to the Greek practice of philosophy, exploring different questions that the Greek philosophers dealt with and the motivations and methods of their different kinds of writing about them. A guide for understanding Plato's writings is given by the educational context of Plato's Academy. All the major schools of later Greek philosophy except the Epicureans—the Peripatetics (Aristotelians), Stoics, and sceptics—are split-offs from the Academy. The traditional Greek education consisted of "gymnastics," "music," and "grammar," each broadly construed. Both Plato and his rival educators, the older "sophists" Protagoras (?480-411) and Gorgias (?480-380) and Plato's contemporary Isocrates (436-338), argue that this traditional training is not enough to teach you either how to manage the state well, or how to manage even your own life and household well, and that some further discipline is needed. This higher education will be called "philosophy," but different teachers offer training in different disciplines under this name. For many of Plato's rivals, the core of higher education is rhetoric, the art of public speaking; others teach "physics" or natural history [περὶ φύσεως ἱστορία], the study of the origins and natures of things including human beings and their societies; others teach mathematics, and others dialectic, the art of argument, and especially refutation, by question and answer. Plato thinks that neither the old education nor the available varieties of the new education are sufficient. Plato takes Socrates as his countermodel to the sophists: while Socrates does not claim to teach how to succeed in life or in politics, he uses dialectic to convince his conversation-partners that their present knowledge is insufficient, and that, in order to be successful, they need a further knowledge of how to live well.

In looking for a kind of knowledge that would be sufficient to guide individual and political life, Plato takes up the sophists' discussions about the "arts" [τέχναι] or teachable disciplines. The sophists believe that civilization progresses through the progressive discovery of the arts, they proclaim the invention of new arts, and they try to analyze how the previous discoveries in the arts were made and why they work; and they ask which of the traditional practices in the arts are merely habits or conventions, and which really work because they have some foundation in the nature of things. Model arts, for those who want to analyze existing arts or to create new ones, are medicine and mathematics (including arithmetic and geometry but also mechanics and optics and music-theory and astronomy). Medical writers (whose works are preserved together under the name "Hippocrates") reflect on the conditions for acquiring the knowledge that supports successful medical practice: they disagree about how far, beyond experience, it requires hypotheses (as in mathematics), knowledge of causes, or knowledge of the nature of the human body or the human soul or of the whole cosmos. Medical writers draw on the pre-Socratic philosophers or "physicists" for these disputes, and conversely the philosophers draw on the medical writers, both because medicine is a model of a successful art, and because philosophers propose that the art needed for successful political or individual life will be a "medicine of the soul": so reflection on the conditions of medical knowledge might help to show how to discover a medicine of the soul. Notably Gorgias and Plato think that a medicine of the soul is more desirable than a medicine of the body, that it is better able to bring about happiness or living well, or better able to command other arts. But to understand why this would be so, and to give content to the concept of a medicine of a soul, we will have to understand what a soul is and how it is related to the body, and what condition a medicine of the soul would aim at, as ordinary

medicine aims at the health of the body. Different Greek authors have very different views on these questions, which lead them to very different views of what a medicine of the soul would be and how it might be a model for an art of politics, with very different political implications.

Plato argues in his Gorgias that the art of rhetoric cannot give anything analogous to medicine for the soul, and cannot be the commanding art: rhetoric can only persuade, but cannot give knowledge of the good or of justice, and so cannot give genuine power. Rhetoric exploits the contradictory things that appear true (under different conditions) to the audience in order to persuade them, but as long as the rhetorician is at the mercy of what appears true to him, he does not have power. Plato tries to develop dialectic as practiced by Socrates into an alternative, as a way of giving knowledge rather than mere persuasion, and of discovering objective norms for action. Dialectic thus comes to substitute for the role that physics or natural history plays for many other Greek thinkers in discovering the true natures of things and measuring human conventions (including linguistic and moral and political conventions) against an objective standard; and Plato argues that physics as practiced by his predecessors, and the social contract theory of society it was used to support, lead to an amoral conception of political rule that cannot bring happiness either to the city as a whole or to its rulers. In the Phaedo and Republic Plato tries to make dialectic an alternative to physics as a way to discover the causes [αἴτια] or explanations of things, and the first principles [ἀρχαί] which are the starting-point for an overall account of the universe; these lead him also to reflection on how mathematical reasoning works, and to positing non-bodily and non-spatially-extended causes and principles. But dialectic may not be enough for these tasks, and Plato develops his own version of physics to rival pre-Socratic physics. Plato finds the pre-Socratic physicists Anaxagoras (who gives an account of knowledge or rationality [νοῦς] as the power governing the cosmos) and Empedocles (who gives an account of the place of individual persons in cosmic history) the most promising, but he also finds their accounts of the natures, causes and principles of things insufficient, and he tries to find an alternative account which will deliver on Anaxagoras' and Empedocles' promises better than they themselves were able to. This leads Plato to develop a method of hypothetical reasoning, modelled on the methods of Greek mathematics, and to explore hypotheses of non-bodily, non-spatially-extended principles and of how they can be causes of other things.

In dialogue with the physicists and inspired in part by medical models, Plato tries to develop his own accounts of the nature of the soul, of its relationship with the body and with its physical environment, of how it acquires knowledge and virtue or vice. The Phaedo argues for the soul's immortality and for its ability to know apart from the bodily senses, and draws ethical consequences; the Republic, in rivalry with social-contract theories, constructs a model constitution [πολιτεία] where social rules will be laid down not to protect the political or economic position of the rulers or contractors, but in accordance with a quasi-medical knowledge tending to the health of the citizens' souls. The Phaedo and Republic already suggest a way that dialectic, in rivalry with physics, can discover ἀρχαί, first principles existing before everything else from which everything else can be somehow derived or deduced, but give no details on the starting-points or the steps of the derivation: in the Parmenides and Sophist Plato begins to reconstruct at least hypothetically how this would work. Finally, the Timaeus constructs an alternative model for the physical world itself, as a domain governed not by chance or violence but by an art caring for the cosmos as a whole and guiding human beings toward theoretical and practical rationality. Plato's hypothetical descriptions of the first principles and what is derived from them, and of a human action and cognition, and a collective human life and a physical universe governed by reason, are attractive in their outlines but highly questionable in their

details; they provide the starting point for the criticism and the positive alternatives developed in the ethics, politics, physics, logic and metaphysics of natural philosophies of Aristotle, the Stoics, and other later Greek philosophers.

The course will be divided into four units, whose approximate time-lengths, main topics, and some central readings (from Plato and earlier writers) are as follows. There will also be other readings. Often for a given day we will read both a central text by Plato and another text, by Plato or someone else, for background and comparison. All of these readings are equally required and you must have all of them with you in class.

U1 (3 weeks): Socrates, the political context, elenchus and protreptic, care for the soul, sophistic and the arts: Apology, Protagoras

U2 (4 weeks): Dialectic vs. rhetoric, critique of opinion (δόξα), human nature, the project of a medicine of the soul and justice as the health of the soul: Gorgias, selections from the Republic; Gorgias, Antiphon, Hippocratic texts

U3 (4 weeks): Dialectic vs. physics, the method of hypothesis, the critique of Anaxagoras, hypotheses of non-extended Forms and unities, the soul as bearer of identity through time: Phaedo, selections from the Republic and Parmenides; Anaxagoras, Epicharmus, Zeno

U4 (2 weeks): Plato's alternative to the physicists: the rule of reason (νοῦς), cosmology, the critique of vortices, the place of soul in the world: Timaeus; Empedocles, Democritus

The two assigned books for the course, Plato's Complete Works (ed. Cooper and Hutchinson) and Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists (ed. Gagarin and Woodruff), are available at the Word Bookstore on Milton Street. (Ask for the book at the counter, pay by cash or check. You may also buy the books online through <https://www.wordbookstore.ca/phil-354-plato-1>, and either pick up the books at the store or have them delivered.) Some shorter texts, not included in these books, will be posted electronically on the course webpage (see below), and you must print these out and bring them to class with you (computers are not allowed in class). All of these texts are equally required.

The course will meet for two 90-minute lecture-discussion sessions per week. Discussions will depend very heavily on details of the reading. You must always have done each day's reading carefully and on time, and have the texts with you in class—on paper, not electronically—so that you are prepared to answer questions about them. It is not enough to do the reading in the library or on the web without making a copy for yourselves. The readings are not supplements to help you understand the topic that the course is about; the readings are what the course is about. Do not come to class if you have been unable to do the readings.

No prior knowledge of Greek philosophy will be presupposed, but this is not intended as a first course in philosophy. Students must be familiar with how philosophers evaluate arguments, and with what is expected of a philosophy paper. No knowledge of Greek (beyond the alphabet) is required, but you should be ready to listen to discussions of the meaning of Greek words, and to adopt some of them as technical terms in English for the duration of the course. Any further background in Greek language or civilization would of course be an advantage; Classics students are very welcome.

Grades will be based on a 5-7 double-spaced-page paper (20%: there will be two alternative due dates, one before Thanksgiving and one near the end of October, which will be announced in class and posted on the course webpage), a 12-15 double-spaced-page term-paper due the last day of class (40%), class participation (20%), and two short analyses of the arguments of

particular texts (each 10%): I will ask each student twice during the term to prepare such an analysis and to make copies and distribute them (with your name, but not your student number, on them) at the beginning of class as an aid to discussion. (You must do one handout during the first half of the term and another during the second half. If the class stays at the limit, we will go back and forth between three and four handouts per session.) Students will also have to learn the Greek alphabet, and must pass a test on the Greek alphabet to remain in the course. (A handout on the Greek alphabet is attached.) Do not ask for extensions: if a paper is handed in late, I may or may not grade it, with or without penalty, but I will make no guarantees ahead of time. Papers must be handed in in class, at the end of the class: do not cut class in order to finish a paper. Please submit everything double-sided. In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

The aim of the course is not to teach you what Plato said in some particular texts, but to teach you to read Plato, and the kinds of Greek philosophical texts that are in dialogue with Plato, intelligently and critically, and this is what the papers will test for. Each paper should be on a text that we have not discussed (or have only touched on) in class: you should design it as if it were an additional lecture and discussion-piece on a dialogue or a topic that the class did not have time to get to. Your paper should take some appropriate-sized piece of text (it may be much smaller than a whole Platonic dialogue) and explain what the author is trying to do and how he does it, e.g. how he argues for some thesis, solves some problem, refutes some opponent, or tries to show that he can beat some opponent at his own game (perhaps rhetoric or *περὶ φύσεως ἱστορία*). While constraints of space may mean that the short paper has to be mainly expository, the term-paper allows more scope for considering objections. It is not generally useful to bring objections that depend on modern philosophy (or science or politics); it is much more useful to see how some approximate contemporary of Plato's might have objected, or did object, to Plato's arguments, and whether or how Plato might answer their objections. Instead of examining only one text, a paper can juxtapose two different texts (by Plato, or by Plato and some other Greek thinker), putting them in dialogue with each other. It is possible to write about a text we have talked about in class, if by putting it in a new comparison you can show it in a new light, but papers that repeat class lectures and discussions, or secondary literature, will fail. The aim of the papers is to show that you have acquired the skills to read and interpret and explain philosophical texts by Plato and his contemporaries on your own. Do not use the secondary literature for any issues of philosophical interpretation. (It is all right to use secondary literature, properly cited, e.g. for the background political history, if this is relevant for your project.) If you write the short paper for the first due date, it should be on a topic in, broadly, Socratic refutation and ethics; if for the second, then in Platonic physics, metaphysics, or epistemology. The short paper and the term paper should be in different areas. You must consult with me well before the end of term on your proposed topic for the term-paper.

To receive a passing grade for the course, students must show that they have kept up with the readings and are able to discuss them in class. Students who are unable to do this will be asked to withdraw. Since there is no final exam, my only evidence that you have read the texts other than those you discuss in your papers and handouts, and that you have read them intelligently and critically, will be your class attendance and participation, including answering questions in class. I cannot grade you if I cannot certify that you have done this.

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

In referring to texts of Plato in your handouts and papers, you must always use the "Stephanus

pages," the number-letter combinations such as "340e" (referring originally to pages of a classic 16<sup>th</sup>-century edition of Plato) that are in the margins of Cooper-Hutchinson and most other translations; references to the pages of Cooper-Hutchinson or other translations are unacceptable. (Similarly, if you cite Aristotle, you must use the "Bekker pages" printed in the margins.)

McGill requires me to add the following paragraph: "McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest> for more information)."

Computers and other electronic equipment may not be used in class; classes may not be recorded under any circumstances. Remote participation will be possible only under extraordinary circumstances; asynchronous participation will never be possible.

My office is Leacock 921 (phone 398-7452); I will be available there Mondays from 4:00 to 6:00 except when there is a philosophy department meeting (which is normally the first Monday of each month, the second Monday of September), in which case I should still be there from 5:00 to 6:00. I cannot in general answer emails: come to office hours, or talk to me after class (not before class). I may be able to give brief answers to brief messages on the course website (see below).

I will try to use the McGill MyCourses page as the course webpage, but it is possible that this will run into difficulties, in which case we will use an inter-university platform such as Iversity, and if so all students and auditors will have to sign up for the course on that platform so that they can receive reading assignments and any other messages for the course. I will announce each day's reading assignment in an announcement on the course webpage, and if the text is not in one of the required course books, I will post a copy of the text itself. I will also use the course webpage to ask for volunteers to prepare handouts on the next day's readings; please volunteer by replying via the webpage (hopefully there will be a way to reply that everyone in the class can see). If feasible, I will also ask students to post their class handouts on the webpage.

The reading for the second day of class, Friday September 2, will be the beginning of Plato's Letter VII (through 326b) and the whole Apology of Socrates, both to be found in the Cooper-Hutchinson Plato Complete Works; and an excerpt from Aristotle's Constitution of the Athenians, chapters 34-41, attached, which gives some historical context for these texts. Please also review the "Principal Dates" in Gagarin-Woodruff Early Greek Political Thought pp.xxxii-xxxv. For the second day we need a handout for the first half of the Apology, through 28b2; a handout for the second half, from 28b3 to the end; and a handout on the assigned section of the Constitution of the Athenians, focusing on what happened to the Athenian constitution in the few years before Socrates' trial, the people that Socrates is accused of associating with (mainly Critias and Alcibiades), the rules governing Socrates' trial, and the motives people might have had for prosecuting him.