

McGill University
Department of Philosophy
Phil 354-001 Plato (Fall 2023)

Birks 111

Prof. Susan-Judith Hoffmann

Office: TBA

Office hours: Mondays 5:30-6:30.

Telephone: NA

Email: susan.hoffmann@mcgill.ca

Course Description

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) famously proclaimed that the history of European philosophy is nothing but a series of footnotes to Plato (428/427 - 348/347 BCE). To this day, Plato's ideas and insights continue to influence major work in philosophy. In this course, students will be introduced to some of Plato's most exciting and thoughtful insights about a universe replete with wisdom, about the nature of scientific knowledge and truth, and about the ethical question of how one can live a good life. We will begin by a brief examination of the historical and cultural context of Plato's work. We will then read excerpts of dialogues that deal with Plato's views on the nature of the soul or self, the nature of knowledge and the related question of the nature of reality. Students will be introduced to Plato's account of the relationship between what can only be perceived by the senses and what is ultimately real through an examination of Plato's famous doctrine of Ideas or doctrine of Forms. We will also consider the question of what constitutes the best kind of life one might live, and what role friendship and love play in such a life. Finally, time permitting, we will examine Plato's complex views on the nature and value of art. We will read the *Symposium*, parts of the *Meno* and the *Phaedrus* and much of the *Republic*. By the end of the course, students should have an appreciation of the depth and breadth of first fully worked out philosophical system in the history of philosophy and should be well prepared to continue the pleasure of reading Plato on their own.

The course will consist of lectures and discussions centered around a careful reading of the texts. Students will prepare a weekly thoughtful question for class discussion on the readings and will be expected to participate in class discussions, either in writing or orally.

Lectures are not recorded or posted on My Courses and students are not permitted to record the lectures and discussions.

Evaluation: Each student will be assigned 5 questions for class discussion to be submitted on My Courses 25%. These students are expected to take a leadership role in the group discussions of the texts on Wednesdays.

One midterm examination: 35% The midterm examination consists of an in-class component that is worth 30% and a take home component that is worth 5%. The examination consists of short essay questions (500-600 words each). No notes or texts are permitted during the in-class components of the midterm examination. The questions are not distributed in advance.

One end of term in class essay assignment: 20%

Students are permitted to have hard copies of the dialogues in class for this assignment. The possible essay questions will be available well before the in-class assignment so that students have an opportunity to reflect and to do additional primary source reading if they wish to do so.

Students who can demonstrate that they are able to give a strong class presentation may have an opportunity to opt out of the essay assignment and substitute an oral class presentation (approx. 35 minutes) for 20%. This option will be dependent upon class size.

One final examination: 20%

The questions for the final examination will not be available in advance although students will have some choice in the questions they must answer. The exam is short essay format.

Communication

If I have a message for students, I will post it on My Courses so please check regularly. Please do not leave messages for me on My Courses, please email me at susan.hoffmann@mcgill.ca

Dialogue

There is no written feedback on your questions for class discussion although you are welcome, on an individual basis, to discuss your question with me during office hours or during an appointment made at a time that is mutually agreeable. Examples of good questions will be discussed and general feedback about the quality of the questions will be offered at the beginning of the semester.

Readings

Students should purchase Plato's *Republic*, translated and edited by G.M.A Grube and rev C.D.C Reeve (Hackett), and the *Symposium*, translated and edited by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Hackett). Both are available at Paragraphe Bookstore at 2220 McGill College. The excerpts from the *Meno* and *Phaedrus* are available to students on My Courses.

Schedule of Content

Please note that this schedule is tentative and the dates for specific lectures and questions for class discussion may change. However, the chronological order of the course material will not change, nor will the dates for in class exams and in class essay writing assignments.

Wednesday August 30th: Introduction to the Course.

Monday Sept 4th: No class. Comments on PBS documentary due at 11:59 on My Courses.

https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/the_greeks_national_geographic/

Wednesday Sept 6th: Plato and the Presocratics.

Monday Sept: 11th: Lecture on the Phaedrus.

Monday Sept 11th: Question for Class Discussion on the Phaedrus due on My Courses at 11:59 pm.

Wednesday Sept 13th: Phaedrus Lecture and Discussion.

Monday Sept 18th: Lecture on the Meno. Question for Class Discussion on the Meno due on My Courses at 11:59 pm.

Wednesday Sept 20th: Meno Lecture and Discussion.

Monday September 25th: Lecture on the Symposium. Question for Class Discussion on the Symposium (to the end of Pausanias speech) due at 11:59 pm.

Wednesday Sept 27th: Symposium Lecture and Discussion.

Monday Oct 2nd: Lecture on the Symposium. Question for Class Discussion on the Symposium (to the end of Agathon speech) due at 11:59 pm.

Wednesday Oct 4th: Symposium Lecture and Discussion.

Monday Oct 1st: Lecture on the Symposium. Question for Class Discussion on the Symposium (to the end of dialogue) due at 11:59 pm.

Wednesday Oct 4th: Symposium Lecture and Discussion.

Study Break.

Monday Oct 16th: Lecture on the Republic. Question for Class Discussion on the Republic, Books I, II due at 11:59 pm.

Wednesday Oct 18th: Republic Books I, II.

Monday Oct 23rd: In class written exam, part 1.

Wednesday Oct 25th: In class written exam part 2.

Friday Oct 27th: Exam part 3 due on My Courses at 11:59.

Monday October 30th: Republic Books IV, V. Question for Class Discussion due at 11:59 pm.

Wednesday Nov 1: Republic Books IV, V.

Monday Nov 6th: Republic Book VI. Question for Class Discussion due at 11:59 pm.

Wednesday Nov 8th: Republic Book VI.

Monday Nov 13th: In class assignment.

Wednesday November 15th: In class assignment. (If there is insufficient time to finish this assignment, we will use one more class period on November 20th to finish.) The typed up version of the in class written assignment will be due the following class, so November 20th or November 22nd depending on how many class periods are required.

Monday Nov 20th: Republic VII.

Wednesday Nov 22nd: Book VII. Question for Class Discussion due at 11:59 pm.

Monday Nov 27th: Republic Book X.

Wednesday 29th: Republic Book X.

November 30th: Wrap Up.

University Policies

In accord with McGill University's [Charter of Student Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.

Conformément à [la Charte des droits de l'étudiant](#) de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté, sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue.

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 McGill's [guide to academic honesty](#) for more information.)

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon [le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et procédures disciplinaires](#). (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le [guide pour l'honnêteté académique de McGill](#).)

The [University Student Assessment Policy](#) exists to ensure fair and equitable academic assessment for all students and to protect students from excessive workloads. Students and instructors are encouraged to review this Policy.

Instructors may avail themselves of software integrated within myCourses that can be used for text-matching (also applies to formula-, equation-, and graph-matching). Consult the [Tools to Support Teaching and Learning](#) web page for approved tools. If you intend to use text-matching software, inform students in writing before the end of the add/drop period of your intention to do so.

Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text-matching software within myCourses.

© Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that copyright infringements can be subject to follow-up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and/or the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#).”

Many students may face mental health challenges that can impact not only their academic success but also their ability to thrive in our campus community. Please reach out for support when you need it; many [resources](#) are available on-campus, off-campus, and online.”

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.