

**PHIL 301—Plato Seminar**  
**Dr. Coleen Zoller**  
**Spring 2009**

**Contact Information:**

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*“There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself.” --Plato, Letter VII*

*Through the love I felt for Alcibiades I experienced a kind of Bacchic inspiration. When the Bacchantes are filled with the god's power they draw milk and honey from wells which do not even yield water to others. I have no learning to teach anyone and help him in that way, but I thought that through just being with him my love for him might make him better.  
--Socrates in Aeschines' Alcibiades (fr. 11; H. Dittmar)*

*As Sokrates tells it, your story begins the moment Eros enters you. That incursion is the biggest risk of your life. How you handle it is an index of the quality, wisdom and decorum of the things inside you. As you handle it you come into contact with what is inside you, in a sudden and startling way. You perceive what you are, what you lack, what you could be. What is this mode of perception, so different from ordinary perception that it is well described as madness? How is it that when you fall in love you feel as if suddenly you are seeing the world as it really is? A mood of knowledge floats out over your life. You seem to know what is real and what is not. Something is lifting you toward an understanding so complete and clear it makes you jubilant. This mood is no delusion, in Sokrates' belief. It is a glance down into time, at realities you once knew, as staggeringly beautiful as the glance of your beloved (249e-50c). --Anne Carson, Eros the Bittersweet*

**Course Description:**

Conceiving of the soul as what animates the material stuff of the body causes many Greeks, particularly Plato, to consider the soul a human being's true self. As a result, Plato is deeply concerned with how one ought to think of and treat one's soul before death reunites the soul with the eternal, unchanging Forms. Nevertheless, throughout the dialogues Plato makes clear that the question of how one should be disposed toward the soul is very much intertwined with the question of how one ought to handle the body. This course will focus on interpreting the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic* with an eye toward interpreting the nature of Platonic dualism as well as the role of *erôs* in the life of a philosopher.

**Course Objectives:**

The general aim of a philosophy course is as Kant wrote, to “have the courage to use your *own* mind!” More specifically, in this course students should:

- Identify Plato's fundamental vocabulary, questions, and theories

- Utilize some knowledge acquired in previous philosophy classes, especially PHIL241—Ancient Philosophy
- Actively read the Platonic dialogues
- Employ the art of wonder by questioning what one’s own beliefs about education, *erôs*, ethics, and philosophy presuppose
- Appreciate the influence ancient thought has on our world
- Debate effectively, including: organizing thoughts logically; analyzing and evaluating arguments; accounting for a variety of viewpoints; and speaking directly to fellow students in class
- Begin the project of being lifelong learners

### Required Texts:

Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett)

Richard Kraut, “Introduction to the Study of Plato” (**available on blackboard**)

### Some Resources Available at the Blough-Weis Library:

Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*

Richard Kraut, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*

Gerald Press, ed. *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity*

C.C.W. Taylor, *Socrates: A Very Short Introduction* (ch. 4 is particularly useful)

Julia Annas, *Plato: A Very Short Introduction*

Julia Annas, *Ancient Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*

Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*

### Grading:

Participation = 25%

Quizzes = 15%

Mid-term Paper = 15%

Final Paper = 25%

Final Exam = 20%

**Office hours:** Please take advantage of my office hours to discuss any problems you have with the reading assignments, discussions in class, meaning of life, etc. Do not feel that you must have a carefully formulated set of questions before you come to see me. The articulation of the problem is often the main stumbling block; so if something is an issue for you, don’t hesitate to talk with me about it.

### Course Requirements:

**A. Attendance:** All students are expected to attend all classes, arriving punctually. Any missed class will lower one’s participation grade.

### B. Class Participation:

1. *My Assumptions:*

a. **Cell phones should be entirely silent and stowed in your bag for the duration of all class meetings.**

b. You are citizens (not consumers) at this university.

- c. Some of you wonder what exactly an instructor expects when s/he asks you to participate and how this will be graded.
- d. Every one of us is able to contribute something to our class discussions.
- e. No one knows everything.
- f. Questions are just as important as comments.
- g. Expressing agreement with a classmate's comment is just as valuable as expressing disagreement.
- h. Coming to class unprepared is disrespectful to your peers who are prepared.
- i. Some of you are shy about speaking publicly.
- j. Some of you don't believe you can learn from class discussions with your peers.
- k. Those of you who take more time to ruminate sometimes resent students who appear to "shoot their mouths off."
- l. Some of you would prefer to be fed information directly by the instructor.
- m. Many of you wonder why this and other courses ask students to participate.
- n. Laptop computers may be used in class only with proper documentation from the SU Health and Counseling Center.

2. *Why participate?* There are two main reasons to participate in your classes. First, pedagogical research has demonstrated that students learn more when they actively participate in class discussions. Second, all students have a civic responsibility to offer their questions and thoughts so that the entire class can collaboratively learn the course material. Furthermore, participating in class will help you practice having thoughtful conversations outside of class.

3. *Class format:* The format of this class will vary from day to day, including all of the following: recitation "lectures", conversations, debates, seminar. What I mean by recitation "lectures" is that when presenting new material, my presentation will include calling on students to elicit information about the readings. When class takes the form of a conversation I will ask students to discuss their responses to the texts and the issues they raise. Frequently there will be smaller group discussions—sometimes these will involve debating the strengths and weaknesses of theories and ideas, other times these will involve seminar-style in-depth analysis of the day's topic.

4. *Assistance:* As soon as possible anyone who feels ill at ease should discuss with the instructor ways of easing oneself into participation.

5. *Rubric:* A participation grade will be assigned to each student based on which of the following regularly applied to her/him:

F = not physically present, or *severely detracting from* classroom discussion (e.g., behaving in a manner that is disrespectful like **checking text messages**); never interacts with peers; never prepared; never participates; demonstrates a noticeable and on-going lack of interest in course material (e.g., **sleeping**)

D = present physically but not mentally and/or not being prepared, or *detracting from* classroom discussion (e.g., **regular mid-class bathroom trips, not having text and classroom supplies with you**, having side conversations, daydreaming, etc.); making totally irrelevant comments

C = **present, alert, and prepared for class** (e.g., having read required texts in at least a cursory way, bringing text and classroom supplies with you to class, reflecting in advance on the day's texts, etc.), and adding to the discussion **but in only minimal ways**

B = present, alert, prepared for class (e.g., having read required texts with significant attention, bringing text and classroom supplies with you to class, reflecting in advance on the day's texts, etc.), and **contributing positively to class discussion (e.g., communicating some understanding of the text, asking related questions, sharing ideas, maintaining an appropriate balance of talking & listening, etc.)**

A = present, alert, prepared (e.g., having read required texts thoroughly, bringing notes, text--**with significant passages marked**--and classroom supplies with you to class, reflecting in advance on the day's texts, having written a reflection paper as well as some additional questions to ask to advance the conversation, etc.), and **making thoughtful contributions to classroom discussion based on engagement with the texts** (e.g., communicating one's understanding of the text and the overall course, posing related questions to both the instructor and fellow students, sharing ideas and responding to the ideas of others, maintaining an appropriate balance of talking and listening, **applying course material to personal experience; actively engaging in one's own learning, etc.)**

**C. Quizzes & Exams:** There shall be six unannounced quizzes throughout the semester as well as a final exam. These will test your understanding of the reading material and what is covered in class. All quizzes and exams will be cumulative. A missed quiz or exam earns a zero (unless permission for an alternative has been granted by the professor IN ADVANCE—and I do not automatically grant such requests). The lowest quiz grade will be dropped. The final exam will be proctored during the final exam period scheduled by the registrar.

**D. Writing:** There will be two formal writing assignments of approximately 6 pages each in addition to less formal writing assignments. Your writing should demonstrate both your understanding and evaluation of course texts. Details about assignments will be announced well in advance of the due dates. All formal papers must be submitted BOTH in hardcopy to me as well as in e-copy to turnitin.com. In advance of the due date you must set up an account at [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) (instructions and log in information will be provided).

**Policy on Cheating, Plagiarism, and other forms of Academic Dishonesty:**

All forms of plagiarism and cheating are prohibited. All forms of academic dishonesty are prohibited. This includes submitting without citation your own work originally written for other assignments. Students found cheating on assignments will receive an F for the course and will be reported to the Dean of Student Life. I reserve the right to have all student written assignments submitted in an electronic format for the expressed purpose of checking assignments for plagiarism against internet sources (including pay-sites for papers) using turnitin.com. If you are in doubt about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please discuss this with me BEFORE turning in an assignment.

**Students with Disabilities:**

If you are seeking an academic accommodation, it is essential that you have appropriate documentation on file with the University and present that documentation to me as early as

possible in the semester. If you believe that you have a disability but have no documentation on file at Susquehanna and wish to discuss what steps can be taken to determine whether an accommodation is warranted, please contact the Counseling Center for further information and assistance. Some additional information is available at <http://www.susqu.edu/counseling/disabilities/>.

### **Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings:**

Week 1, Day 1 (1/13)	Introductory Session. <i>Theaetetus</i> 149a1-151d3
Week 1, Day 2 (1/15)	<i>Phaedo</i> 57a-70b7
Week 2 (1/20-1/22)	NO CLASS: read Kraut, "Introduction to the Study of Plato" (available on blackboard under "course documents")
Week 3, Day 1 (1/27)	<i>Phaedo</i> 70b8-88e3
Week 3, Day 2 (1/29)	<i>Phaedo</i> 88e4-107b
Week 4, Day 1 (2/3)	<i>Phaedo</i> 107c1-118a (optional: read ch. 1 of manuscript (bb))
Week 4, Day 2 (2/5)	<i>Symposium</i> 172a-201c
Week 5, Day 1 (2/10)	<i>Symposium</i> 201d-223d (optional: read ch. 2 of manuscript (bb))
Week 5, Day 2 (2/12)	<i>Phaedrus</i> 227a-243b
Week 6, Day 1 (2/17)	<i>Phaedrus</i> 243b-257b
Week 6, Day 2 (2/19)	<i>Phaedrus</i> 257c-279c
Week 7, Day 1 (2/24)	Midterm paper workshop
Week 7, Day 2 (2/26)	<i>Gorgias</i> 447a-481b5

Midterm Papers are due on February 27 by 4:15 P.M. BOTH in hardcopy to my office and to turnitin.com.

Week 8, Day 1	<i>Gorgias</i> 481b6-501c
Week 8, Day 2	<i>Gorgias</i> 501c-527e (optional: read ch. 3 of manuscript (bb))
Week 9, Day 1	<i>Republic</i> I
Week 9, Day 2	<i>Republic</i> II
Week 10, Day 1	<i>Republic</i> III
Week 10, Day 2	<i>Republic</i> IV
Week 11, Day 1	<i>Republic</i> V
Week 11, Day 2	<i>Republic</i> VI
Week 12, Day 1	<i>Republic</i> VII
Week 12, Day 2	<i>Republic</i> VIII
Week 13, Day 1	<i>Republic</i> IX
Week 13, Day 2	<i>Republic</i> X
Week 14, Day 1	Final paper workshop
Week 14, Day 2	Final session: exam review

**Final Papers are due at the final exam scheduled by the Registrar BOTH in hardcopy to me and to turnitin.com.**

**Assignment: Read, Reflect, Write.**

*“To **read** well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books [especially great books] must be read as deliberately and as reservedly as they were written.”*  
 –Henry David Thoreau, Walden

*“Bigger **questions**, questions with more than one answer, questions without an answer are harder to cope with in silence. Once asked they do not evaporate and leave the mind to its serener musings. Once asked they gain dimension and texture, trip you on the stairs, wake you at night-time. A black hole sucks up its surroundings and even light never escapes. Better then to ask no questions? Better then to be a contented pig than an unhappy Socrates?”*  
 --Jeanette Winterson, Written on the Body

One might mistakenly think that simply running one’s eyes over the assigned reading means that one is prepared for class. This assumption neglects **reflection**. The way to get the most out of your reading and out of class is to spend time BEFORE CLASS thinking about each reading so that you will be prepared to answer fact-type questions (e.g., During which century did Plato write?) as well as evaluation-type questions (e.g., do you agree with Plato when he has Socrates say that the unexamined life is not worth living?).

To assist in your reflection on the readings, each student must **write** a short reflection paper for each class for which a reading assignment or a film viewing assignment is given. A reflection paper must:

1. state the main point of the reading (i.e., the main thing that the author is trying to say).
  2. ask a question about the reading (make sure it is in the form of a question). This question should be an “unanswered question” by which I mean that it should be an interesting and *difficult* question (i.e., one to which there is no easy or obvious answer). If, after stating the question, you can provide a simple, snappy answer to it, then the question is not a good one.
  3. explain why your question is *interesting, difficult, and/or important to you* (not to me, not to your classmates, not Plato...just YOU!). Do NOT attempt to answer your question in place of this explanation, and don’t choose questions that are not interesting to you.
- These papers are due in class and NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR ANY REASON EVER!
  - Each paper must be clearly labeled to correspond to the reading (note the name of the author of the reading, the name of reading—books titles should be italicized, while article titles should be in quotation marks—and the pages numbers).
  - To do well on this assignment, it is important that you follow the directions strictly.
  - Reflection papers count toward the participation grade.