

Plato

Isaac Wilhelm (iwilhelm@nus.edu.sg, isaacwilhelm.com)

June 10 – July 1, Online, Summer 2024

Office hours: by appt.

Course Description

Plato is one of the most innovative, and influential, philosophers in history. He helped develop a compelling, rigorous, and clear-headed methodology—of asking questions, and critically evaluating any proposed answers—for studying a variety of problems. Historically, that methodology contributed to the development of mathematics, science, history, the arts, philosophy itself, and more. But Plato’s methodology is not a mere historical artifact, relevant only to the past. To this day, that methodology is worth learning: for when practiced well, it can help us discover what is most valuable in life, correct our own biases and misapprehensions, and ultimately, illuminate the deepest features of reality.

In this course, we will discuss seven different readings by Plato. The first, fourth, and seventh readings—which frame the course—describe the trial and death of Socrates. This is the story of Socrates, the main protagonist in most of Plato’s writings, being sentenced to death for spreading what the Ancient Greek politicians considered blasphemous ideas (“Apology”); of Socrates’ refusal to flee, despite the injustice of what he experienced (“Crito”); and ultimately, of Socrates’ acceptance of his own impending execution (“Phaedo”). Throughout these readings, Plato examines the value of philosophical arguments, whether we are obligated to obey unjust laws, and whether the soul is immortal. In the course’s other readings, Plato explores piety and justice (“Euthyphro”), the nature of courage (“Laches”), the relationship between justice and politics (“The Republic,” chapter 1), and the nature of love (“Symposium”). Through these readings, we will learn both about the world itself, and also about the tools that comprise Plato’s critical methodology for studying the world.

Course Requirements

1. Participation (100 points).
 - Students are expected to ask questions, attend all lectures, and occasionally work together in small groups.
 - See the course website for the rubric which I use to grade participation.
2. Final paper, first draft (100 points).
 - Due date: June 28 at 11:59pm Kabul time.
 - Must be in the range 500-600 words.
 - Closer to the due date, a detailed description of this assignment will be posted to the course website.

3. Final paper (100 points).
 - Due date: July 8 at 11:59pm Afghanistan time.
 - Must be in the range 600-700 words.
 - Must be an expanded version of your midterm paper.
 - Closer to the due date, a detailed description of this assignment will be posted to the course website.

For information about various course policies—for instance, the late assignment policy, the grade appeals policy, and the make-up work policy—see the course website below.

- <https://isaacwilhelm.com/courses/2024/PlatoAFSO/pAFSO.htm>

Learning outcomes

By this course's conclusion, you should be able to

- describe several key views that Plato discusses,
- identify common mistakes which people make while reasoning,
- construct arguments for and against Plato's views,
- present views that differ from yours in a fair and charitable manner,
- write clearly, and
- discuss complex philosophical ideas respectfully.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Please adhere to standard policies on plagiarism and academic integrity. Penalties for violations of these policies can be severe: they include an automatic failing grade for the course, and possibly worse. A summary of the relevant policies, from the National University of Singapore, can be found at the website below.

<https://www.nus.edu.sg/celc/programmes/plagiarism.html>

Accessibility

This class should be a great, fun, and educational experience for everyone. And of course, everyone deserves equal access to all educational opportunities. Those with disabilities are encouraged to speak with me about their particular needs, if that would be helpful.

Schedule

The readings are drawn from Plato's dialogues. All readings are required. They are in the googledrive folder to which you will receive access, through an email, at the start of the course.

In the schedule below, I list the requirements and readings for each week. For the requirements, I list the due dates. Bolded text indicates either when a slight change in the pattern of meetings will occur in the corresponding week – for instance, a lecture which takes place on Sunday rather than, as usual, on Monday – or an assignment which is due roughly around that week – for instance, a draft of your final paper. Note that the readings, for any given week, should be completed before the lecture in that week.

This schedule is preliminary, and subject to change. Announcements about changes in the readings or the meeting times for lectures—whenever they occur—will be made in class, and only later added to the syllabus. You are responsible for knowing about those changes, if you miss class.

Week 1: Argumentation and Religion

Requirements

- Lecture: Monday June 10, 12pm Kabul time.

Readings

- “Apology” (Plato).

Week 2: Piety and Goodness

Requirements

- Lecture: Thursday June 13, 12pm Kabul time.

Readings

- “Euthyphro” (Plato).

Week 3: Courage

Requirements

- Lecture: Monday June 17, 12pm Kabul time.

Readings

- “Laches” (Plato).

Week 4: Justice

Requirements

- Lecture: Thursday June 20, 12pm Kabul time.

Readings

- “Crito” (Plato).

Week 5: Justice and Politics

Requirements

- Lecture: **Sunday** June 23, 12pm Kabul time.

Readings

- “The Republic,” chapter 1 (Plato).

Week 6: Love

Requirements

- Lecture: **Wednesday** June 26, **7pm** Kabul time.
- **Final paper (first draft)** due June **28** (that is, on **Friday**), 11:59pm Kabul time.

Readings

- “Symposium” (Plato).

Week 7: The Soul

Requirements

- Lecture: **Monday** July 1, **7pm** Kabul time.
- **Final paper (second draft)** due July **8** (that is, a week after our final class), 11:59pm Kabul time.

Readings

- “Phaedo” (Plato).