

Sample syllabus: Plato's Trilogy

Seminar, cross-listed for upper-level undergraduates and graduate students

Course description: This course will entail a detailed study of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato's three dialogues known among scholars as "Plato's Trilogy": the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*. After spending four weeks gathering resources by discussing adjacent texts by the Presocratics, Sophists, and Plato, we will spend the latter eleven weeks embarking upon a close reading of the trilogy.

Some questions we will consider are, what is knowledge, and how is knowledge distinct from opinion? Is truth merely "up to the individual," or are some truths shared among all? If so, what are these allegedly universal truths, and how can we be certain of the truth of universal assertions? What sort of metaphysical composition would such universally true assertions indicate? Finally, on the basis of our answers to such questions, how can we live good lives and organize societies that encourage flourishing and care for all? Who should be in charge of overseeing such a socio-political project?

Students will be graded based on demonstrating genuine engagement with these difficult questions. The course will be conducted seminar style, emphasizing close reading of texts and regular participation from all enrolled students. Graded portions will include weekly discussion boards, participation in student-led discussions, and a research paper developed in several stages over the course of the semester.

Learning Objectives:

- To gain a critical perspective on philosophical theory and its history.
- To become familiar with major aspects of Plato's philosophy while also identifying their underlying premises or assumptions and developing critical responses to them.
- To develop critical reading and thinking skills.
- To develop academic and professional writing skills.

Textbook: No textbooks are required for this class. All readings have been made available. These were taken from the university library.

Grading:

30% Participation: This includes (1) regularly demonstrating genuine engagement with readings, (2) leading one discussion and co-leading another discussion over the course of semester, and (3) acting as respondent several times over the semester.

30% Weekly discussion boards: Starting in week three, I will set up a discussion board with some critical questions. Each student will owe three posts per week: (1) one **400-500 word post**; (2) **one critical question** about the text or its relation with other texts and ideas we've discussed; (3) **one 150-response** to another's post or question.

40% Research paper: Students must submit a research paper of no less than 3000 words. The paper will be due in **two drafts** (see calendar below). The paper must **engage with academic research publications**. Students will meet with the professor after submitting each draft.

Masks

Currently, we are not requiring masks in the classroom. This may change. The instructor reserves the right to mandate masks in the classroom, though there is no expectation of needing to do so. Students are welcome to wear masks in class if desired.

Technology

Please do not use cellphones in class. Laptop use for notetaking is permitted.

Accessibility

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Students with a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course should contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) located in Boucke Building Room 116 at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information....

Cheating

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for this course shall be grounds for failing the entire course and communication of dishonesty to the College. This includes, but is not restricted to, plagiarism or cheating on any assignment, quiz, or paper. All written work must be the student's own. Use of AI or webpages for writing is not permitted, and confirmed cases will result in a grade of zero (0%).

Reading schedule:

UNIT 1: Introduction

Week 1: Introduction: Presocratic philosophy: The Milesians and Heraclitus
Patricia Curd (ed.), *A Presocratics Reader*: Introduction (pg. 1-7), The Milesians (13-22)
Patricia Curd (ed.), *A Presocratics Reader*: Heraclitus (pg. 39-54)

Week 2: Presocratic philosophy: Parmenides and the Sophists
Patricia Curd (ed.), *A Presocratics Reader*: Parmenides (pg. 55-65)
Patricia Curd (ed.), *A Presocratics Reader*: The Sophists (pg. 144-161)

Week 3: Socrates and Plato: the *Euthyphro* and *Apology*
Plato, *Euthyphro*
Plato, *Apology*

Week 4: Plato's theory of forms
Plato, *Republic* Books 5-7 excerpts: 475e-480a and 514a-520d
Plato, *Phaedo* excerpts: 95b-106a

UNIT 2: Plato's Trilogy #1: *Theaetetus*

Week 5: *Theaetetus* #1: philosophical midwifery and the meaning of knowledge
Plato, *Theaetetus* 142a-151d
Plato, *Theaetetus* 151d-160e

Week 6: *Theaetetus* #2: knowledge as perception and the theory of flux
Plato, *Theaetetus* 160e-177c
Plato, *Theaetetus* 177c-186e

Week 7: *Theaetetus* #3: knowledge as true judgment with an account
Plato, *Theaetetus* 186e-201c
Plato, *Theaetetus* 201c-210d

Week 8: Transition (?): the *Cratylus* on names, flux, and being
Plato, *Cratylus*: 383a-391c and 396d-397a (and, optionally, 391d-396c)
Plato, *Cratylus*: 428a-440e (and, optionally, 397a-427e)

UNIT 3: Plato's Trilogy #2: *Sophist*

Week 9: *Sophist* 1: Accounting for the sophist through dialectical division
Plato, *Sophist* 216a-221c
Plato, *Sophist* 221c-236d

Week 10: *Sophist* 2: Nonbeing and being
Plato, *Sophist* 236d-242d
Plato, *Sophist* 242d-249d

Week 11: *Sophist* 3: Structuring metaphysical kinds and true statements
Plato, *Sophist* 249d-259e
Plato, *Sophist* 260a-268d

UNIT 4: Plato's Trilogy #3: *Statesman*

Week 12: *Statesman* #1: Leading the *polis*, shepherding versus care
Plato, *Statesman* 257a-267c
Plato, *Statesman* 267c-276e

Week 13: *Statesman* #2: Care through weaving
Plato, *Statesman* 277a-287c

Catch up and discuss research papers, FIRST DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE

Week 14: No class, Fall Break

Week 15: *Statesman* #3: The difficulty of locating the carer
Plato, *Statesman* 287c-300a
Plato, *Statesman* 300a-311c

Week 16: Course conclusion
No reading -- catch up and conclude course, FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER