

Instructor: John Russon, Mackinnon 338

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:30-1:30 or by appointment.

Course meets Wednesdays, 2:30-5:20, MINS 37.

We will read a number of dialogues by Plato, the subtlest, most comprehensive and most insightful philosopher our world has ever produced. Like Greek tragedies, Plato's dialogues typically portray a small number of characters in complex dramatic situations in tense conversation about controversial topics; unlike Greek tragedies, though, the controversies are typically about complex and subtle conceptual matters. Our goal will be to read these ancient texts well, which will require that we attend with equal care to the complexities of the dramatic situations portrayed in the dialogues and to the interpretation of the metaphysical, epistemological and existential themes discussed by the characters of the dialogues.

Our most basic focus will be on how a normative dimension emerges within our experience. We will approach this theme through the reading of four dialogues. We will begin with the Charmides, a relatively short dialogue that investigates the question, roughly, of what it is to be morally. More exactly, the dialogue addresses the question, "What is sōphrosunē?" This dialogue will introduce us to the distinctive nature of the soul (psuchē) and to the nature and problems of human development. It will also introduce us to the methodological demands of reading a Platonic dialogue. We will then read three rather substantial dialogues, the Theaetetus, the Philebus and the Phaedrus to reflect on how, respectively, the true, the good and the beautiful are present within the life of the soul. The Theaetetus is a complex and challenging study of the nature of knowledge, the Philebus a complex and challenging study of pleasure and the Phaedrus a rich and exciting study of sexuality and language. Ideally, the study of each dialogue will offer us rich resources for the study of the ensuing dialogues and, reciprocally, each will powerfully reflect back on what we have already read.

Schedule of Readings.

We will spend three weeks on each dialogue. Be forewarned, though: the Charmides is much shorter than the other 3 (only 23 Stephanos pages, compared to 68, 56 and 52 pages, respectively, for the Theaetetus, Philebus and Phaedrus), so the reading will get *much* harder (both longer and more conceptually difficult) starting in week 4. If I were taking this course, I would be putting in a lot of time at the beginning of the semester studying the material on my own, rather than waiting to read it for the first time when the schedule calls for it.

Sept 16 Charmides, 153a-161b

Sept 23 161c-169c

Sept 30 169d-176d

Oct 7	<u>Theaetetus</u> , 142a-168c
Oct 14	168c-187b
Oct 21	187b-210d
Oct 28	<u>Philebus</u> , 11a-31b
Nov 4	31b-50e
Nov 11	50e-67b
Nov 18	<u>Phaedrus</u> , 227a-243e
Nov 25	243e-259d
Dec 2	259d-279c

Texts:

Plato, Charmides, translated by West and West (Hackett)

Plato, Phaedrus, translated by Scully (Focus)

Plato, Theaetetus, translated by Benardete (Chicago)

Plato, Philebus, translated by Frede (Hackett)

Assignments:

You will write 2 critical essays, each 8-10 pages in length, and each worth 40% of your final grade. Precise details will be given in class. Your essay must include careful textual explication.

20% of your grade will be based on your ongoing participation. Good participation requires careful reading of the assigned texts in advance of course meetings, active participation in class discussion and attentive responsiveness to the participation of others.

8 Standard Statements of the College of Arts

Fall 2015

E-mail Communication

As per University regulations, all students are required to check their **uoguelph.ca** e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the university and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, ID#, and e-mail contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-ac.shtml>

Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester **Fall 2015** courses, without academic penalty, is **November 6, 2015**. For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-drop.shtml>

Copies of out-of-class assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Each student at the University of Guelph has rights which carry commensurate responsibilities which, broadly, being a civil and respectful member of the University community. The Rights and Responsibilities are detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c14/c14-strightsrespon.shtml>

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and enjoins all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml>

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

Resources

The Undergraduate Calendar is the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate programs. It can be found at:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/>

If you find yourself in difficulty, contact the undergraduate advisor in your program, or the BA Counseling Office: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/baco/contact.shtml>