

*Plato and “the Footnotes” through Foucault*  
(or: “Plato and the Genealogy of the Crises of Human Ecology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”)

Syllabus  
Fall 2015 – Gray Cox  
Mondays/Thursdays 11:10-12:35, Davis Seminar Room

Introduction:

This is a course in intellectual history that examines the founding problems, questions and assumptions of the Western philosophical tradition as framed in the context of Classical Greece by the texts of Plato and the continuing dialogues and disputes they sparked. That “problematic” frames the origins of central elements in the crises faced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in dealing with human ecological concerns.

Those elements include, for example: the separation of Man and Nature, a patriarchal view of society, a *Realpolitik* vision of the world, a monological conception of rationality and science, a transcendent view of the divine, and a relativism in morals.

But there are also elements in Plato that provide resources for transforming our problematic including, for example: a non-dualistic understanding of nature (in “khora”), a re-gendered view of society, a justice centered view of politics, a dialogical understanding of reason and knowledge, an emergent and immanent view of the divine, and a Socratic understanding of objective moral wisdom.

Alfred North Whitehead once commented that the “*The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.*” (PROCESS AND REALITY, p. 39) This course will explore Plato’s original body of ideas and the methods he used to develop them through careful reading of a large number of dialogues and selections from key philosophers’ responses to them along with documents describing Plato’s cultural and historical context.

Looking at these texts in their con-texts requires a combination of both philosophical analysis of the arguments they present and historical analysis of the settings in which they occur. In that sense, it requires an interdisciplinary and human ecological approach to these texts – texts which have been, themselves, profoundly formative of the frameworks of thinking that have generated the human ecological problems we face now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In looking closely at the figure of Socrates and the Socratic method we will, in important respects, also be absorbed in the study of the complex, vexed, problematic, interconnected genealogies of key terms that govern our thinking today. These consist of modern concepts whose origins are to be found in the Greek of Plato’s day – concepts like: politics, eros, ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, method, history, tragedy, comedy, theology, androgyny, mathematics, power, causality, freedom, truth, goodness, wisdom, and, perhaps most importantly of all, the ideas themselves of “idea” and “philosophy”.

Readings will include a sampling of Plato’s shorter dialogues such as EUTHYPHRO, MENO, APOLOGY and SYMPOSIUM as well as the THE REPUBLIC and selections from others such as TIMAEUS, LACHES, CRITO, PHAEDO and PARMENIDES. In parallel with these texts, as both commentaries on them and as ways of understanding their significance in the history of philosophy, we

will also read very short selections from thinkers such as the Pre-Socratics, Aristotle, Kant, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, de Beauvoir, Foucault, and Alyson Jaggar. For historical context on Plato's life and thought, we will also read selections from Pierre Hadot, Bettany Hughes and others and study selections from the art and other key cultural documents including texts by Homer, Aristophanes, Sophocles, Xenophon and Thucydides.

Enrollment limited to 15. Introductory/intermediate, HS, HY.

Goals:

By the end of the course students should: 1.) understand and be able to articulate key ideas and problematics in Plato and begin to place them in their cultural context; 2.) be able to critically analyze texts and ideas in oral discussion and in short written pieces by examining them for internal consistency and the adequacy with which they respond to the challenges presented by the problematics of their own cultural setting as well as the light cast on them by critiques of subsequent philosophers.

In an important sense, the aim of the course is to learn how to do "slow reading" in intellectual history. One focal point of the course will be the key passages in the *APOLOGY* which purport to develop definitive characterizations of the paradigmatic Western philosopher. Through the variety of texts read throughout the course, we will be returning to those key passages to give them as in depth, careful and "examined" a reading as possible.

Evaluation:

In pairs, students will provide in-class presentations on key aspects of Greek culture dealing with the history of Math, the Presocratics, Epic poetry, Comedy, Tragedy, History, Art or Sex. These sessions should include 20 minutes of presentation followed by 20 minutes of discussion drawing on the reading of some short selection of primary and/or secondary material assigned for that class. In preparation for these each pair should meet with Gray at least once to discuss materials, themes, and presentation strategies.

For students taking this course for a letter grade, the final grade will be weighted based on class participation and short homework assignments (20%), short papers (25%), the midterm and final problem sets (30%) and presentation with a partner on an aspect of Greek culture (25%).

### Schedule

1/6 Introductions and syllabus review

Socratic Ignorance and the Examined Life: Two key texts from Plato's *APOLOGY*

Brief class review of our impressions of Plato and of Classical Greece

1/9 *REPUBLIC*, Book I, early parts, pp. 1-20; C. M. Bowra, *THE GREEK EXPERIENCE*, "The Unity of the Greeks", 1-19, handout; W. T. Jones on War and Melian dialogue, handout

Analytic versus/and Hermeneutic Approaches to Intellectual History

DUE: Assignment on framing an argument, for use in class

- 1/13 Plato's LACHES in handout, Hadot's WHAT IS ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY, 1-38, -- handouts -- assignment in pairs pick a passage of interest to read aloud and comment on (?  
 Discuss education as issue  
 Place of courage in our virtues today – and its forms in facing Big Freaking Problems
- 1/16 EUTHYPHRO, assignment in pairs to pick a passage and read and comment on, making use of extended commentaries in the text and in handouts =  
 Lecture: Secularism and the West  
 Or connect it to our world today and the “Gods” or goodness or justice or another analogy for a value like human ecology or . . . who determines value? Is the good good because human's value it or do they value it because it is good?? ? ???  
 Substitute humans for Gods and ask about this  
 Also see this dialogue as foundational for the debate over secularism in the West – and Qtub and others objections.  
 Use commentary from Hughes on religion and sacrifices and the Gods? With also a bit from the stories of the gods from Hesiod's Theogony  
 And Kant's argument from Grundwerk that we must know the moral independently – and compare to SK and to Qtub
- 1/20 readings from Bettany Hughes, THE HEMLOCK CUP  
 And assign film online – Bettany Hughes, ATHENS: THE BIRTH OF DEMOCRACY  
 Introductory material on language – inflected, some more key terms . . .  
 Homework: etymology exercise, looking at the definitions of some key terms – in pairs – pick two terms each and fan out for other constructions from them AND then pick some modern terms and work backwards for their origins. And have them reflect on the latin intermissions and transferences?  
 EXTRA SESSION \_\_ LAB on Greek Language
- 1/23 Plato's MENO -- Thales and Pythagoras and Egyptians . . . on history of astronomy and Math, Kant, -- GRAY  
 Lecture: The Meno Problem of Knowledge in Ethics and how to solve it
- 1/27 More MENO & Arts and Architecture -- Readings TBA Group Presentation  
 DUE: First Short Paper – In 3-4 pages put a passage from a dialogue in context and then assess its argument  
<http://www.parthenon.newmentor.net/taylor01.htm>
- ??? INSERT PLATO AT GOOGLEPLEX and move all sessions back one  
 And create this slot by combining two of the REPUBLIC – put 2 and 3 together and 4 and 5  
 Lecture: What is wisdom --? ?? How it is different from Intelligence

1/30 Aristophanes' THE CLOUDS – performance – Group Presentation on Comedy, Xenophon's APOLOGY --

Interesting presentation in Greek with subtitles of key passage of the CLOUDS:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BMVvIzvEc4>

2/3 Plato's APOLOGY

2/4 EXTRA SESSION DESSERT POTLUCK on Oedipus, group presentation on tragic drama

2/6 CRITO, and Nietzsche on Master slave and on Socrates dying, handout  
And MLK and Thoreau

2/10 SYMPOSIUM – Foucault handout, Group Presentation on Sexuality -- Abby DUE: Midterm Problem Set

Recommended -- Delightful animation of Aristophanes's speech in French with subtitles: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4paSMqKYXtY>

2/13 SYMPOSIUM– Selections from Aristotle and from Plato's PARMENIDES in handout

Lecture: What is love and what is its role in ethics? – vs. Eros, and vs. neighborly vs. enemy love . . . what Jesus was talking about . . .

2/17 REPUBLIC II, Iliad and Group Presentation on Epic poetry –

DUE: short paper on one of the dialogues read in class -- context and argument

2/20 REPUBLIC III, IV, Pericles' "Funeral Oration" and Thucydides and Group Presentation on History –

Recommended: Lecture on Hoplite warfare: <http://oyc.yale.edu/classics/clcv-205/lecture-6>

2/24 REPUBLIC V, Jaggar on "Love and Emotion", Presocratics, readings on them TBA --

2/27 REPUBLIC VI, Hadot – "Spiritual Exercises", handout  
Plato's Seventh Letter, handout

EXTRA SESSION?

Optional Extra-credit activity – providing a public performance of some portion of the SYMPOSIUM – Scenes from a Symposium – they each prepare a section and perform it. And then we have anarration that strings them together . . . and uses summaries of parts . . . AND we have people contributing slides to set the setting – arts and architecture, sexuality, warfare, math, et cetera . . . And perform this for the college as a whole . . . and do it in Turrets or Library on couches . . . with the text presented on the walls to be read so no one needs to learn all their lines. And they have to connect the scenes to some later thing or to their other courses . . . DO NEAR END OF TERM SO THEY CAN INCLUDE THIS IN THEIR GROUP WORK

3/3 REPUBLIC VII, Heidegger on the Cave, selection from the TIMAEUS

Lecture: What is emergent knowledge? And emergent values? – after Lederach? In Plato in the context of . . . Symposium? And Republic? Arguing Socrates believes in them though he does so by exemplification . . .

3/6 REPUBLIC VIII. Karl Popper on THE OPEN SOCIETY AND ITS ENEMIES, handout; also recommended, I. F. Stone's THE TRIAL OF SOCRATES

3/10 REPUBLIC IX, X (?) -- Kierkegaard on Socrates as “the individual” . . . and not Christian

3/13 Closing - Final Problem Set due  
and reread key Apology passages in light of THE REPUBLIC

Some Podcasts:

<http://www.critical-theory.com/5-great-introductory-theory-philosophy-lecture-series-freely-online/>