

# Socrates and the Examined Life

PHL 306 and WCV 303 [42195 & 47705]  
The University of Texas at Austin  
Spring Semester: 20 Jan – 07 May 2009  
TTh 9.30-11.00a, Garrison Hall 1.134

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## Required Texts Bookstore

*Plato: I*, tr. Fowler (Loeb)  
*Early Socratic Dialogues*, ed. Saunders (Penguin)  
*Plato on Love*, ed. Reeve (Hackett)  
*Four Plays by Aristophanes*, tr. Arrowsmith (Plume)  
Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*, trr. Waterfield and Treddenick (Penguin)

## The Course

Socrates considered himself a lover of talking, a lover of people, a lover of love, and, in a certain way, a lover of wisdom. He thought he knew very little, claimed not to teach, and avoided entering or reforming conventional political settings. Instead he held conversations. He seemed to think doing so, talking about matters of first interest to the young and old Athenians and foreigners he ran into, was the best way for them all to spend their leisure time. Through these exchanges, prompted by the news or a casual request for advice, he would investigate with others education, democracy, respect, happiness, friendship, and all the other deep issues of human living, in ways directly related to those with whom he spoke. Socrates may have been intrigued by natural science and inquiry into physics, but he seems to have set that aside for mutual discussion into both the investigators' worries and themselves.

The major goal of this class is to understand the value of this "endless chatter" in which Socrates' neighbors thought he engaged. The difficulty in understanding how talking out matters (rather than dogmatizing) would seriously benefit anybody is on display in the variety of depictions of his activity we will read. Socrates thought he knew only that he knew he knew nothing big, but others disagreed: wasn't he a sage, an intellectual, a magician, a very clever man? We will look into how his testing of other people's pretensions and commitments led those who watched or heard about him to think this. We will also look into why Socrates talked to people in the way he did and with the hopes he had for that way. And while it's relatively clear that Socrates aims to help his interlocutors decide to examine themselves in the future, what is less clear is how Socrates benefits *himself*.

For your grade you will be assigned regular writing assignments of the most diverse sort; there will also be two written-and-oral exams. We will use class-time to have freewheeling conversations about Socrates, modes of philosophical inquiry, ways to read seriously, and methods of writing useful for your own understanding.

## Assignments

### Lecture

Class-sessions include full-class and small-group discussions, and your presence and activity in them constitute 10% (= 10 pts) of your grade. Attendance is mandatory; each unexcused absence (or tardiness) will further reduce your points in this way: first: -1 pt; second: -2 pts; third: -3 pts; fourth: -4 pts. After four unexcused absences, you will have lost all ten points; each subsequent absence will reduce your class grade by an entire grade letter. Participation in class means always paying attention to the class activity, particularly what your classmates are saying (and for this reason I recommend against distracting laptops); engaging proportionally in small-group discussions; and contributing to full-class discussion. Contributing means asking questions, giving helpful suggestions, and taking notes about what others say and you think. Inactivity results in point-deduction at my discretion.

### Reading

The reading is required, and provides the basis for class discussion, homeworks, exams, and papers, even if we do not discuss every amount assigned. In-class discussion of reading should serve largely to give you skills for reading the assigned readings on your own. Read each section slowly and thoughtfully, and take notes of interesting passages, your reactions to the points the authors bring up, and any questions that come up, so that you will have specific items for discussion.

### Homeworks

Overall worth 40% of your grade, each assignment will be worth 5% of your grade (VIa-b are together worth 10%). Most homework assignments will ask you to complete a sequence of written exercises. Some of these exercises will have you work with passages from the assigned reading; others will provide a new short text for your consideration; yet others may require you to engage in some activity and then reflect and write on it. I will grade each rigorously, befitting what I take to be the key work of this course. I always expect extensive textual citation and reference. I will also, sometimes, give extensive comments, which I keep track of. You should think about them and take their advice into mind for when writing your subsequent homeworks and preparing for your exams (since I might ask exactly that question again). I am happy to discuss the HW questions either before or after they're due. Unless otherwise stated there is no page-requirement for these HWs; you may find they often run to several pages. You will not receive credit unless you staple, paginate, and include full heading information (name, course, homework due-date and number). I will not accept emailed HWs, even if you have an excused absence (so in such a case you must arrange to get your HW to me or my mailbox). HWs turned in late (i.e., after the beginning of the class-period they're due) will be lowered one grade-level, but will not be accepted at all after I have finished grading everyone else's HWs (usually by one or two class sessions later, though sometimes sooner), unless you have a documented absence.

### Peer Review

You will give a copy of your HW VIa, which will be a 1000-word essay about *Alcibiades*, to each of two (predetermined) classmates. Each reviewer will read and comment on two papers: yours, and that of the other person reading your paper. These groups of three will meet once outside of class, where you will talk about your respective comments, and discuss how to improve each person's paper. You should include your email or phone numbers so you can decide about meeting up. I will distribute a handout suggesting what to look for, how to comment, and what to talk about in your meeting. You will turn in a revised version of this assignment, called VIb, to me; to receive credit you must append to this revised version the earlier commented-upon drafts you received back from your two reviewers. Each

reviewed draft should have the respective reviewer's name on it. Your grade for HW VIa-b will tally your initial effort, your responsiveness to your reviewers' comments, and the thoroughness of *your* comments on the papers *you* reviewed.

#### Two Exams

The two exams each have two parts. About one week before an exam, you will receive a review-sheet for each part. (HW VII serves as sort of a practice-test for the second exam.) The review-sheet will include examples of the sorts of questions, though perhaps not the actual questions, I will ask, as well as general themes and puzzles and relations to think about. The exam is designed to reward actual work in preparation (finding patterns, making interesting inferences, judging significance, getting handy at certain modes of analysis), not merely remembering the lectures or being clever. The first part of the exam is a one-hour in-class written response to some questions. The second part is a thirty-minute oral exam held sometime in the three days following the written component. You and one other student will meet at my office and we three will chat. I will ask you to say some things about your written responses, to reflect on the topics and readings of our class, and to respond to what the other student says. I will grade both parts of the exam holistically, looking especially to the extent to which you show you've practiced and mastered the skills of interpretation, introspection, comparison, and analysis we've worked on in class. I will also consider the familiarity with the texts, discussion, and themes you demonstrate; and your responsiveness to the questions, your classmate, and me.

#### Analytic Paper

We are constructing a philosophic-literary commentary to Plato's work, *The Apology of Socrates*. Each student will choose a brief passage from the dialogue—as short as a single word, as long as a few sentences—and provide a comprehensive analysis of it. We will practice close-reading throughout the term, looking at the *Apology* in particular in the week before Spring Break. You will have a chance to make a go at a small-scale passage-analysis and commentary in HW V; my written comments in return will help you with your final project (on a different passage). Commentary and analysis may involve dissection and judgment of the argument, if there is one; assessment of why Socrates utters the passage he does; observation of parallel or divergent remarks elsewhere in our reading; and anything else that helps a reader understand what the passage means and what its function in the greater function of the dialogue is. This project is an exercise in philosophical and literary research, in imaginative interpretation, in precise expository writing, and in revision. Your grade depends on your care, effort, rigor, imagination, and ability to integrate into your work pertinent aspects of our course. This single paper has three parts, and will constitute 20% of the overall course grade. For [Paper I], send me an email quoting at the top the passage you want to discuss (including a back-up choice or two, in the unlikely case I judge your first-choice passage as unsatisfactory for whatever reason), and 400 words about what kinds of things you'd like to say about that passage (5%). I may request that you modify your passage or say more things about it before I accept this as satisfactory. I will respond as quickly as possible with lots of questions I expect you to pursue, in addition to the ones you've already scheduled for yourself, and some research ideas. Your responsiveness to these questions and research ideas will be reflected in your grade for the next part. I expect more than questions you may ask—I would like to see potential answers. For [Paper II], submit, again by email, your complete draft, of 2000 words (10%). I will assess it by the thoughtfulness (imagination, insight, articulation, elaboration, breadth, depth, sensitivity) of your responses, your abundant use of references to and quotations from the readings, and the perfection of your prose (grammar, editing). I will again

respond as quickly as possible with remarks for revision. For [Paper III], submit, by both hard-copy and email, your revised draft, the grade for which will depend solely on the effort of your revision (5%). To the hard-copy, append a print-out of the two earlier drafts with my comments on them. I will compile all the remarks into a PDF and distribute it. You should read this packet, "Class Commentary on *Apology*," since you may be asked about it on either portion of the second exam.

## Expectations

### What to do

Because this course has, officially, a lower-division status, I endeavor to help you become as strong as possible in as broad a range of intellectual activities relevant to philosophy and the humanities as possible. I expect you to make a serious effort practicing the skills of reading, thinking, writing, and discussing this course presents. Some of the HW questions may appear to invite glib answers, but I want you to aim for answers that serve to open up the prompt, finding in it cause to reason rigorously and adventurously, rather than to close it. It can be hard at first to know what counts as an appropriately sensitive or deep response, but one goal of class discussion and my comments on your HWs is to point out ways to test something for its significance and complexity.

### What to learn

It is unlikely you will ever have occasion to choose between extreme modes of life (the monk vs. the playboy, the nurse vs. the rascal). Accordingly, we do not study Socrates just to find out whether those of us who don't live in intentional poverty, who don't spend all our time confronting others about their hypocrisy, who sometimes feel at a loss for words, ought completely to change our way of being. We study Socrates instead because, so I think we will find out, Socrates does in a more vivid and persistent way what we already expect ourselves and others to do. Socrates' habit of calling others to account for their plans and self-certainties is what we know we ought to do to all those we care about and those whose actions we think may affect us. So to study Socrates is to study a certain ideal of ourselves.

## Technical Matters

### Accessibility

Students with disabilities who require special accommodations need to get a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY). This letter should be presented to me at the beginning of the semester and accommodations needed should be discussed at that time. Five business days before an exam or assignment the student should remind me of any testing accommodations that will be needed. For more information, see: [deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/providing.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/providing.php)

### Cheating

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for this course shall be grounds for failing the entire course. This includes, but is not restricted to, any plagiarism on any paper, or cheating on any portion of the homework or exams. Plagiarism includes, among other things, not citing text, paraphrases, or ideas taken from any assigned or unassigned reading, or other students' comments or papers. Please ask about any case you're concerned about.

### Grading

A - achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.  
B - achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.  
C - achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.  
D - achievement that is worthy of credit but fails to meet fully the course requirements.  
F - represents failure and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and you are not receiving an Incomplete.

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| Schedule | T 20 (Jan) | Diogenes Laertius' biography of Socrates. Look over syllabus.  |
|          | Th 22      | Wisdom literature and advice literature. Student introductions.<br>Xenophon, <i>The Estate-Manager</i> 1-6 (pp. 289-310)<br><b>[HW I]</b> First homework assignment, "Wisdom and Advice," due.                           |
|          | T 27       | Some concrete historical background. Xenophon's project.<br><i>The Estate-Manager</i> 7-21   |
|          | Th 29      | Is anything special about Socrates? What does he care about? Do people trust him, and if so, why? Do we see him do philosophy?<br>Xenophon, <i>Memoirs of Socrates</i> 1.1-3   |
|          | T 03 (Feb) | Finding regularities in Socrates' behavior.<br><i>Memoirs of Socrates</i> 1.4-2.3, 4.2, 4.8<br><b>[HW II]</b> Second HW, "Talking with friends," due.  |
|          | Th 05      | A methodology of instruction. Studying in a school with pale-skinned philosophizers. Why learn rhetoric and natural science?<br>Aristophanes, <i>Clouds</i> pp. 21-90  |
|          | T 10       | What and who the play is about. The shape-shifting choral <i>Clouds</i> and Socrates. Two "Arguments." Our understanding of Socrates.<br><i>Clouds</i> pp. 91-147<br><b>[HW III]</b> Third HW, "Speech and Nature," due. |
|          | Th 12      | Hippias the Polymath, and why Socrates would talk to him. Concern with the definition of "the fine."<br>Plato, <i>Hippias Major</i> 281a1-291d7  |
|          | T 17       | The alter-ego and self-examination. Some ways of thinking.<br><i>Hippias Major</i> 291d1-304e7   |
|          | Th 19      | Socrates and the "many-turning" Odysseus. Why talk about Homeric literature? "Aporia" and one's own confusion.<br>Plato, <i>Hippias Minor</i><br><b>[HW IV]</b> Fourth HW, "Plato's Socrates," due.                      |
|          | T 24       | Seeking advice versus reforming a legal system. Talking, asking, examining, refuting, reproaching, encouraging.<br>Distribute exam-review sheet.<br>Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>  |
|          | Th 26      | Review Day.<br>"Reading notes for <i>Euthyphro</i> "   |
|          | T 03 (Mar) | <b>[EXAM I]</b> [oral component by Friday]   |
|          | Th 05      | The outline of this forensic speech. Models for it. Its goal.<br>Plato, <i>Apology</i>   |

- T 10 How to doing a close-reading. Some examples.  
“Reading notes for *Apology*”
- Th 12 Why is being called “wise” offensive? What is it exactly Socrates thinks he knows and doesn’t know?  
Peterson, “The Socrates of Plato’s *Apology*”  
**[HW V]** Fifth HW, “Reading the *Apology*,” due
- T 17, Th 19 **SPRING BREAK** [No Class]
- T 24 A primer to Socratic-Platonic philosophy? The matchup of the century! Socrates’ non-annoying (seductive) conversation.  
Plato, *Alcibiades I* 103a1-124b8
- Th 26 What is made explicit, and what isn’t, in the dialogue. How can we judge success? Self-care and self-knowledge. Socrates’ self-esteem. Receive peer-review guidance sheet.  
*Alcibiades I* 124b10-135e9  
**[HW VIa]** Copies of “Alcibiades Paper” due to Peer Reviewers.
- T 31 Socrates’ watchers. The drinking party. A sequence of speeches.  
Plato, *Symposium* 172a1-201c9
- Th 02 (Apr) Diotima’s method of teaching, and her student. The relevance of a lesson about love, to the “erotic philosopher.” Praise and truth.  
*Symposium* 201c10-212c2  
**[HW VIb]** Revision of “Alcibiades Paper” due to me.
- [M 06] **[PAPER I]** Abstract due by email by 3p.
- T 07 Alcibiades’ inside-and-out image of Socrates. Images of Socrates. Was Socrates “effective” on Alcibiades, and if so, in what way?  
*Symposium* 212c3-223d11
- Th 09 Priming Phaedrus for a conversation about self-knowledge, therapy, hearsay, praise, love, and language.  
Plato, *Phaedrus* 227a1-243e7
- T 14 Several examinations of Phaedrus.  
*Phaedrus* 243e8-264e8  
**[HW VII]** Seventh HW, “Eros and Exam Review” due.
- Th 16 Is “true rhetoric” Socratic? The complex conversation of the *Phdr.*  
*Phaedrus* 265a1-279c7
- [M 20] **[PAPER II]** Full draft due by email by 5p.
- T 21 An unsuccessful criticism of Socrates. Socratic silence.  
Plato, *Cleitophon*  
[This and all following readings will be distributed in class]

- Th 23            Evaluating authorship. Authenticity of representation.  
Plato[?], *Rival Lovers*  
Plato[?], *Theages*
- T 28            Evaluating authorship, continued.  
Plato[?], *Hipparchus*  
[Plato], *Alcibiades II*
- [W 29]        **[PAPER III]** Final Draft due by email and hardcopy by 4p.
- Th 30            Contemporary controversies and research directions. How ought  
we to characterize Socrates despite what we don't understand?  
Distribute exam review sheet.  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/socrates/>  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates>
- T 05 (May)    Course Evaluation. Exam Review. Love and the Socratic life.  
Kateb, "Socratic Integrity"  
"Class Commentary on *Apology*"
- Th 07            **[EXAM 2]** [oral component through Sunday]