

Philosophy 351: Plato's Metaphysics

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What will you learn in this class?

What, really, is real? What is the nature of falsity (and truth)? How does causation work? Is the soul immortal? Was the universe created? Is it possible to speak about (or think of) non-being? If you are blessed enough to be taking this class, you will investigate these and other metaphysical questions in Plato.

We will begin the course by discussing some of Plato's predecessors (Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and—of course—Socrates). We will then pay a great deal of attention to Plato's *Phaedo*, a dialogue where we can see Plato developing the metaphysics of each of these predecessors. Following this, we will turn to Plato's criticism of his own metaphysics in the *Parmenides*. And, finally, we will read a couple of dialogues where I think Plato proposes solutions to the problems raised in the *Parmenides* (the *Sophist* and the *Timaeus*). The last two days of the class will be dedicated to discussing influential modern philosophers who keep Plato's metaphysical legacy alive.

A quick note about myself: I teach a variety of courses, but my research is primarily on none other than western philosophy's most groundbreaking, brilliant, and enduring philosopher: Plato.

What will you accomplish by taking this course?

- (1) You will learn to read Plato.
- (2) You will gain an understanding of an appreciation for Plato's metaphysics.
- (3) You will improve your ability to evaluate, analyze, and interpret complex arguments.

How will you accomplish each of these goals?

- (1) You will accomplish the first goal by doing the assigned reading alongside my reading guides and assigned secondary literature (the secondary articles are not optional). Of course, we will also be reading important passages together in class.
- (2) You will accomplish the second goal by engaging in class. This means coming prepared to and being actively present in class. Early in the semester, we will design a set of engagement standards and I will evaluate your achievement of those standards in a personal interview at midterm and at the end of the semester.
- (3) You will accomplish the third goal by writing a research paper (and by doing a several assignments which I have designed to prepare you for this feat).
- (4) You will work toward all three of these goals by giving a presentation on one influential modern essay (I will provide a detailed framework for this).

What am I like as a teacher?

I am dedicated to an "experiential" or "active" learning model—one in which real learning goes beyond mastery of concepts to higher-order skills like interpretation and analysis.

Because of this, class time will not be used to “cover” everything that was in the day’s reading. Instead, it will be dedicated to solving problems, applying concepts, and evaluating Plato’s arguments. Of course, I will spend some of our time in class explaining difficult concepts, but we will spend as much of our time in class as possible actively learning. This format will require a higher level of dedication, and perhaps it will at first be unfamiliar, but it will greatly improve your philosophical abilities.

How can you get ahold of me?

I will be as available to help you as possible. Please communicate with my over email at sdriscol@richmond.edu, though please note that I am not Google, so I am unplugged sometimes. Please do not send me messages through Blackboard (or Twitter or carrier pigeon or whatever other platform you might have in mind); the best way to contact me is email.

I will also communicate to you through email, so please check your email and assure that your Blackboard account is linked to your correct email address.

I will also hold regular office hours. Details will be announced and are subject to change given the ever-shifting COVID landscape. But regardless of what happens with the virus, I will hold some form of office hours and will be available by appointment.

Required text:

Cooper, John M., and Douglas S. Hutchinson, eds. *Plato: complete works*. Hackett Publishing, 1997. I will provide all additional readings.

**NB: This class will be engaged in textual analysis—you should plan to have your book in every class. Sorry, I know it is a big book—but you will be the coolest kid on campus, carrying around Plato’s complete works like a boss.

Grading scale

Grades	Percent
A	93%
A-	90%
B+	87%
B	83%
B-	80%
C+	77%
C	73%
C-	70%
D+	67%
D	63%
D-	60%
F	<60%

Grading breakdown

Category	Weight
Midterm Engagement Evaluation	20%
Final Engagement evaluation	20%
Article Presentation	15%
Final Paper Assignments	45%

Final Paper Assignments	Weight
Preliminary Research	5%
Topic Approval	5%
Outline	15%
Final Paper	75%

What other rules do you need to be aware of?

Do not use electronic devices in class. Research has now convincingly demonstrated that these are actively detrimental to your learning and the learning of those around you. However, please contact me immediately if you have accessibility concerns that would require an exception to this rule.

Note, this means you'll need to cart around a big book. This is the way. So, please have the day's assigned text ready-to-hand in class. The reason for this is that we will frequently use the text in class for activities. For the articles we will read, either print them or have them accessible on a device—in these cases, you may use your devices to access the text during the activity as long as that is the only thing you are doing on the device.

Masks are required until further notice. This is a guideline announced by the university. If the guideline is rescinded at some point in the semester, we will reevaluate the policy.

Do not lie, cheat, plagiarize, or do anything of the sort. [Please familiarize yourself with the university's rules and regulations](#). If you copy and paste, quote, refer to, or even use a source while writing your papers, just cite it.

Disability Support Services: If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please visit the University of Richmond Disability Services website to begin the accommodations process as soon as possible. If you already have a University of Richmond Disability Accommodation Notice (DAN), please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, so that I am aware of your accommodations. No student will receive accommodations of any kind without a DAN.

Readings Schedule, Fall 2020

Unit 1: Plato's Predecessors

Monday, August 31	Introduction to Platonic "Forms." Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> (selections).
Wednesday, September 2	Pythagoras
Friday, September 4	Heraclitus
Monday, September 7	No Class; Labor Day
Wednesday, September 9	Parmenides

Unit 2: Plato's Socrates

Friday, September 11	"What is it?" <i>Euthyphro</i> 2a-11a
Monday, September 14	"What is it?" <i>Euthyphro</i> 11a-16a
Wednesday, September 16	"No, really, <i>What is it?</i> " <i>Hippias Major</i> 281a-295a
Friday, September 18	"No, really, <i>What is it?</i> " <i>Hippias Major</i> 295a-304e
Monday, September 21	The virtues of definition: <i>Meno</i> 70a-79e.
Wednesday, September 23	Recollection: <i>Meno</i> 80a-86c.
Friday, September 25	Teaching and Knowing: <i>Meno</i> 86c-100c. R.M. Dancy, "Platonic Definitions and Forms."

Unit 3: Platonic Forms

Monday, September 28	Frames and Forms: <i>Phaedo</i> 57a-61d.
Wednesday, September 30	Orphism, Death, and Invisible Forms: <i>Phaedo</i> 61d-69e.
Friday, October 2	Immortality of the Soul: Contraries, Recollection, and Relativity: <i>Phaedo</i> 70a-78b. David Gallop, "Plato's 'Cyclical Argument' Recycled."

Monday, October 5	The Affinity Argument: <i>Phaedo</i> 78b-80e.
Wednesday, October 7	The Attunement Theory: <i>Phaedo</i> 81a-88e.
Friday, October 9	Drama and Misology: <i>Phaedo</i> 88d-95a.
Monday, October 12	Causation and Socrates' "Second Sailing": <i>Phaedo</i> 95a-102d. Gregory Vlastos, "Reason and Causes in the <i>Phaedo</i> "
Wednesday, October 14	The Exclusion of Opposites: <i>Phaedo</i> 102d-107a.
Friday, October 16	Myth and Death: <i>Phaedo</i> 107a-118a.
Monday, October 19	<i>Republic</i> , TBA
Wednesday, October 21	<i>Republic</i> , TBA
Friday, October 23	<i>Republic</i> , TBA

Unit 4: Challenges to Platonic Forms

Monday, October 26	Zeno's Paradox and the forms: <i>Parmenides</i> 126a-130a.
Wednesday, October 28	The Problem of Extent: <i>Parmenides</i> 130a-134e (focus especially on 130a-e).
Friday, October 30	Mereology—wholes and parts. <i>Parmenides</i> 131a-131e. S. Panagiotou, "The Day and Sail Analogies in Plato's <i>Parmenides</i> ."
Monday, November 2	The "Third Man": <i>Parmenides</i> 132a-b. Gregory Vlastos, "The Third Man Argument in the <i>Parmenides</i> ."
Wednesday, November 4	The problem with conceptualism: <i>Parmenides</i> 132b-c. Christoph Helmig, "Plato's Arguments Against Conceptualism. <i>Parmenides</i> 132b3-c11 Reconsidered."
Friday, November 6	The likeness regress: <i>Parmenides</i> 132c-133a. Malcolm Schofield, "Likeness and Likenesses in the <i>Parmenides</i> ."
Monday, November 9	The "Greatest Difficulty": <i>Parmenides</i> 133a-135c. Matthew Duncombe, "The Greatest Difficulty at <i>Parmenides</i> 133c-134e and Plato's Relative Terms."

Unit 5: Rethinking the Forms

Wednesday, November 11	Method and Metaphysics: <i>Sophist</i> 216a-236d.
Friday, November 13	Puzzles about Being and Nonbeing: <i>Sophist</i> 236d-251a.

Monday, November 16	The “Great Kinds”: <i>Sophist</i> 251a-255c. A.R. Lacey, “Plato’s <i>Sophist</i> and the Forms.”
Wednesday, November 18	Difference and Being: <i>Sophist</i> 255c-260a.
Friday, November 20	Meaning, Truth, Affirmation, and their opposites: <i>Sophist</i> 260a-268d. Michael Frede, “Plato’s <i>Sophist</i> on False Statements.”
Monday, November 23	The strange world of the <i>Timaeus</i> : <i>Timaeus</i> 17a-27d.
Tuesday , November 24	Metaphysics redefined: <i>Timaeus</i> 27d-29d.
Wednesday, November 25	No Class (Thanksgiving)
Friday, November 27	No Class (Thanksgiving)
Monday, November 30	Intellect: <i>Timaeus</i> 29d-47e.
Wednesday, December 2	Necessity: <i>Timaeus</i> 47e-52d.
Friday, December 4	More Necessity: <i>Timaeus</i> 52d-69a.

Unit 6: Contemporary Platonism

Monday, December 7	Gottlob Frege, “The Thought: A Logical Inquiry.”
Wednesday, December 9	Edmond Husserl, “The Origin of Geometry.”