

PL259: Short Dialogues of Plato

Dr. David Hayes

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Course Times: Tue & Thu 17:30-19:00

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

In his shorter dialogues, Plato takes up questions such as “What is beauty?” “What is courage?” and “What is a friend?” Most of us are likely to care about such fundamental questions. What are the challenges involved in trying to answer them? (How) could we live better or more happily if we knew the answers? What does making progress with such questions look like? As “short dialogues” indicates, why (in Plato’s depictions) do these conversations end so quickly? Why was Socrates put to death for having them? Readings will include: Plato’s *First Alcibiades*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Hippias Major*, *Cleitophon*, *Lysis*, *Euthyphro*, and *Apology*. Some attention will also be given to the reemergence of these Platonic questions in modern philosophic virtue ethics.

Requirements

Preparation

In the seminar, you must always have in your possession a **hard copy** of the text(s) for the day. The required texts for this course are together in the course reader, and in *4 Texts on Socrates*, eds. West and West. The book may be borrowed from the library. **It is required that you purchase the course reader.** It is expected that students will begin the seminar already having read and thought about the text.

Participation

The first and most basic aim of a seminar is to understand the text by reading and thinking together. While the instructor typically takes the lead, this is a shared task. It demands good preparation, the ability to listen to and address the concerns of others, and the courage to think aloud. What matters in these conversations is not the quantity of contributions but the quality. The best contributions are often *good questions*.

Use of Electronics

In the seminar, you must always have in your possession a **hard copy** of the assigned text(s) for the day. The use of electronic devices during class time is only allowed for disability accommodation. The research is unequivocal that the presence of laptops hurts the academic performance of the user – and also of whoever else can see the screen. Put away and do not use your smartphones during the seminar. These devices undermine the effort to forge and sustain a common conversation.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct. Anything is better than turning in work that is not your own, and that is the result of your own personal engagement with the texts and artworks. If you are having difficulties with any assignment, please contact me.

Attendance

As the Student Handbook specifies, more than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will affect the participation grade for the course. Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

The Bard College Berlin Student Handbook specifies that: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.* Concerning extensions for papers in this course, I freely give extensions as long as the student requests one **at least 24 hours before the essay deadline has passed**. You may request an extension via email.

Grade Breakdown

Paper #1 (approximately 2000 words): 25%

Paper #2 (approximately 3000 words): 35%

Short assignments: 10%

Seminar participation: 30% (15% for weeks 1-7, 15% for weeks 8-14).

Schedule

Week 1 Jan 28: First Alcibiades

Jan 30: First Alcibiades

Week 2 Feb 4: First Alcibiades

Feb 6: First Alcibiades

Week 3 Feb 11: Charmides

Feb 13: Charmides

Week 4 Feb 18: Charmides

Feb 20: Charmides

Week 5 Feb 25: Laches

Feb 27: Laches

Week 6 Mar 3: Laches

Mar 5: Laches

First paper due: Sunday March 8, before midnight

Week 7 Mar 10: Shafer-Landau, "Virtue Ethics"

Mar 12: Hippias Major

Week 8 Mar 17: Hippias Major

Mar 19: Hippias Major
Week 9 Mar 24: Speech of Alcibiades, from Symposium
Mar 26: Cleitophon
Week 10 Mar 31: Lysis
Apr 2: Lysis
Spring break: April 6 – April 13
Week 11 Apr 14: Lysis
Apr 16: Lysis
Week 12 Apr 21: Euthyphro
Apr 23: Euthyphro
Week 13 Apr 28 Euthyphro
Apr 30 Apology
Week 14 May 5 Apology
May 7 Apology
Completion week: May 11 – 15
Final Paper due: May 15, by 23:59pm

The Schedule is subject to change based on the pace of conversation.

Remark on the order of readings in the class: Since Schleiermacher, one strain of scholarship has tried to come to grips with the thought of Plato by tracing the development of his philosophy over time. This has led to the theory that the dialogues fall into “early,” “middle, and “late” periods. Rather than organize the dialogues on this syllabus in this manner (according to their speculative date of composition), they are ordered according to the internal chronology that Plato himself marked them with. Although Plato was not the only or even the first writer of dialogues starring Socrates, he appears to be the only author who located the dialogues in specific historical settings. This means that ordering by internal chronology might do justice to Plato’s own intention, perhaps to show how Socrates changed and/or how the Athenians (and others) changed in their responses to him over time. For an account of the scholarly debate, and a defense of the point of view that I adopt in this course, see Catherine H. Zuckert, *Plato’s Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 1-11. The entry on Plato in the online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy discusses the issue in a balanced manner.

Approximate dates of readings [Zuckert]:

432 First Alcibiades
[432-429 Battle of Potidaea: Socrates is abroad]
429 Charmides
423 Laches
421-420 Hippias Major
416 Symposium
411 Cleitophon
[411 Republic]
406 Lysis
399 Euthyphro
399 Apology