Course Description

This course will examine the foundations of classical political philosophy through a study of Plato’s political psychology. Central to Plato’s political psychology – that is, to his account of the deepest human concerns and passions – is his analysis of the nature and power of eros. Plato’s emphasis on this force in the human soul is a crucial difference between his thought and that of both the preSocratic philosophers of antiquity and the early modern thinkers who shaped the outlook that still prevails in the modern West. In this seminar, we will study Plato’s analysis of eros by examining the two dialogues he devoted to that theme, the Symposium and the Phaedrus. This course aims to develop the capacity of students for concentrated, in-depth study of Plato’s dialogues, which will be approached not just as important moments in the history of political thought but as expressions of a philosophic position that should be examined to see whether it still retains its power and validity.

Required Texts

Plato’s Symposium. Translated by Seth Benardete (University of Chicago Press).

Plato’s Phaedrus. Translated by James Nichols (Cornell University Press).

Recommended Reading

The standard Greek texts (if you can read Greek)


Related Platonic dialogues

Apology of Socrates
Alcibiades I and II
Protagoras
Republic
Phaedo
Parmenides

Selected secondary works


Requirements and Grading

Seminar Paper: 65%

This 12-15 page analytical essay will be due on Monday, December 6. You should come up with your own topic, but I will be happy to discuss possible topics with you. Late papers will be marked down 10 points for initial lateness, and 5 points for each day of lateness beyond the first. Incompletes will not be granted.

Four papers of 2-3 pages: 20%

For these brief papers, I will offer topics at least seven times during the semester. You are required to write four of them. They will be due at the beginning of class one week after they are assigned. Late papers will not be accepted. I will write brief comments on these papers, but I will not grade them. I will, however, consider the quality of these papers over the course of the semester in determining your final grade.

Class participation: 15%

NOTE: Plus/minus grades will be used in final grading.

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259.

Course Plan

I will give the specific assignments for each week as we go along, but this is a rough schedule:

August 26  Eros and Platonic Political Philosophy

Symposium 172a-178a

September 2  Phaedrus’ Speech

Symposium 178a-180b

September 9  Pausanias’ and Eryximachus’ Speeches

Symposium 180c-188e

September 16  Aristophanes’ Speech

Symposium 189a-193d
September 23
Agathon’s Speech

*Symposium* 194e-197e

September 30
Socrates’ Speech, Part I

*Symposium* 198a-204c

October 7
Socrates’ Speech, Part II

*Symposium* 204c-209e

October 14
Socrates’ Speech, Part III

*Symposium* 209e-212c

October 21
Alcibiades and Socrates

*Symposium* 212c-223d

October 28
The Setting and Questions of the *Phaedrus*

*Phaedrus* 227a-237b

November 4
Socrates’ First Speech

*Phaedrus* 237b-243e

November 11
Socrates’ Second Speech, Part I

*Phaedrus* 243c-250c

November 18
Socrates’ Second Speech, Part II

*Phaedrus* 250c-257b

December 2
Rhetoric and Writing [if time permits]

*Phaedrus* 257b-end [if time permits]