

University of Toronto
Faculty of Arts and Science

POL402H1F:
Problems in the Political Thought of the Socratic School

Wednesdays, 12 pm – 2 pm,
LA 213

Course Instructor:

Zachariah Black
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Office hours: TBD
Office: TBD

Course Description

In this course, we will undertake an in-depth study of Plato's most literary dialogue, the *Symposium*. Our goal will be to follow Plato's examination of the nature of *eros* (love, longing, desire) from its role in the individual psyche to its public manifestations in phenomena as seemingly disparate as poetry, tyranny, and the worship of the gods. Our inquiry will lead us into questions about the possibility or desirability of educating *eros*, the relationship between *eros* and reason, and the role of *eros* in healthy political life.

Format, Requirements, and Grading

Our study of Plato's *Symposium* will take the form of a seminar in which the instructor will lecture and students will participate actively. We will read the text with great care, attending to narrative elements, characterological considerations, and the dialogue's many allusions: to poetry; to features of Greek religious and political life; to historical context; to other Platonic dialogues. In order to appreciate these elements, students will need to read each section slowly and thoroughly, marking up their texts, taking notes, and re-reading.

In addition, students will be expected to supplement their reading of the *Symposium* with scholarly commentaries (see below). Familiarity with the *Republic* will be assumed (as POL200 is a prerequisite), and students should return to salient sections of the *Republic* for comparison. The reading of the recommended commentaries and the re-reading of the *Republic* should inform student contributions to seminar discussions.

Weekly attendance at seminars is mandatory. Students are expected to complete the readings before class and come prepared to discuss them. Full participation grades will be reserved for students who contribute to discussion on a weekly basis, demonstrate thorough preparation for each week's discussion, and engage thoughtfully and considerately with the other participants. The instructor will provide a list of thematic questions, as well as a handout with tips for reading

Platonic and Xenophonic dialogues, at the beginning of the semester. Weekly questions will also be provided as a guide to student reading.

Two reading reflections of approximately 500 words each will help students develop the skill of careful textual analysis. Topics will be distributed by the instructor.

Essay topics will be distributed by the instructor, but students who wish to devise their own essay topics may do so, provided they consult with the instructor at least two weeks in advance of the deadline. The first essay must cite the *Republic* and the recommended scholarly commentaries (Bloom and Strauss). The second essay must cite the *Republic*, the recommended scholarly commentaries (Bloom and Strauss), at least two book-length scholarly commentaries, and at least two scholarly articles. Please see the bibliography below for recommendations, and the late penalty and plagiarism sections below for course policies.

Essays and reading reflections should be submitted directly to the instructor at zak.black@mail.utoronto.ca. Students are advised to keep all rough and draft work, as well as copies of assignments, until assignments have been returned and grades have been posted to ACORN.

Grading Schema

Participation: 20%

Reading Reflections (500 words): due **29 September & 17 November 2021**, at 5 p.m. EST: 2x5%

Essay 1 (2000 words), due **27 October 2021**, at 5 p.m. EST: 30%

Essay 2 (3500 words), due **8 December 2021**, at 5 p.m. EST: 40%

Late penalties

Late papers will be penalized at **3% for the first day and 2% a day thereafter**. Students requiring extensions should contact the instructor in advance of the deadline with (a) an explanation of the obstacle to timely completion, and (b) a proposal of a new deadline. All requests submitted 12 hours in advance of the deadline will be considered. In extreme circumstances, later requests may also be considered. If you foresee a problem, please let the instructor know as soon as you can.

Course Schedule

Each week, we will read a short section of Plato's *Symposium* (slowly and thoroughly!), accompanied by Allan Bloom's interpretive essay, "The Ladder of Love," as well as Leo Strauss's lectures on the *Symposium*, collected in *On Plato's Symposium*. Our final two weeks, on Xenophon's *Symposium*, will be accompanied by Robert Bartlett's "Interpretive Essay." The Bloom and Strauss commentaries have been chosen for being especially perceptive and thought-provoking, and for attending to even the "lesser" of the *Symposium's* speeches. However, students

who wish to follow along with a different scholarly commentary may do so after confirming their intention with the course instructor.

N.B.: The following schedule is a rough approximation. Some topics may take more than a single seminar to cover adequately, and we will revise our schedule accordingly.

15 September 2021: Introductory Remarks

22 September 2021: Plato, *Symposium*: Prologue (172A-178A).
Commentary: Bloom, pp. 55-79; Strauss, pp. 1-37.

29 September 2021: Plato, *Symposium*: Phaedrus' speech (178B-180B).
Commentary: Bloom, 79-84; Strauss, 38-56.

6 October 2021: Plato, *Symposium*: Pausanias' speech (180C-185D).
Commentary: Bloom, 85-95; Strauss, 57-91.

13 October 2021: Plato, *Symposium*: Eryximachus' speech (185E-188E).
Commentary: Bloom, 95-102; Strauss, 92-118.

20 October 2021: Plato, *Symposium*: Aristophanes' speech (189A-193D).
Commentary: Bloom, 102-112; Strauss, 119-142.

27 October 2021: Plato, *Symposium*: Agathon's speech (193E-197E).
Commentary: Bloom, 112-121; Strauss, 143-173.

3 November 2021: Plato, *Symposium*: Socrates' speech I (198A-212C).
Commentary: Bloom, 121-154; [no Strauss].

10 November 2021: READING WEEK; NO CLASS

17 November 2021: Plato, *Symposium*: Socrates' speech II (198A-212C again).
Commentary: [no Bloom]; Strauss, 174-251.

24 November 2021: Plato, *Symposium*: Alcibiades' speech (212D-223D).
Commentary: Bloom, 154-177; Strauss: 252-88.

1 December 2021: Xenophon, *Symposium*: chs. 1-4.
Commentary: Robert C. Bartlett, "Interpretive Essay."

8 December 2021: Xenophon, *Symposium*: chs. 5-9.

Required Course Texts

(Available at U of T bookstore.)

- Plato. *The Symposium*. Trans. Seth Benardete. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Strauss, Leo. *On Plato's Symposium*. Ed. Seth Benardete. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Xenophon. *The Shorter Socratic Writings*. Ed. Robert C. Bartlett. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Recommended Scholarly Sources

Books

(To be available on reserve at Robarts Library; those with an asterisk are available online.)

- *Allen, Danielle S. *Why Plato Wrote*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- *Carson, Anne. *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Cavarero, Adriana. *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- *Frank, Jill. *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato's Republic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. [Ch. 5 treats the *Symposium*.]
- *Hunter, Richard L. *Plato's Symposium*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004.
- Murray, Oswyn. *The Symposion: Drinking Greek Style, Essays on Greek Pleasure 1983-2017*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- *Murray, Oswyn, ed. *Symptotica: A Symposium on the Symposion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. [Available through Hathi ETAS.]
- Nails, Debra. *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.
- Nichols, Mary P. *Socrates on Friendship and Community: Reflections on Plato's Symposium, Phaedrus, and Lysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- *Newell, W.R. *Ruling Passion: The Erotics of Statecraft in Platonic Political Philosophy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. [Available through Hathi ETAS.]
- *Osborne, Catherine. *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. [Comparison of Platonic and Christian conceptions of love.]
- *Pangle, Thomas L. *Socrates Founding Political Philosophy in Xenophon's Economist, Symposium, and Apology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020.
- Plato, *Symposium*. Ed. K. J. Dover. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. [Students without Greek can benefit from the English commentary.]
- *Rosen, Stanley. *Plato's Symposium*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968. [Available through Hathi ETAS.]
- *Schofield, Malcolm. *Plato: Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. [Available through Hathi ETAS; primarily a study of *Republic*, *Laws*, and *Statesman*.]
- *Sheffield, Frisbee C.C. *Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- *Strauss, Leo. *Xenophon's Socrates*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972. [Available through Hathi ETAS; contains a chapter on Xenophon's *Symposium*.]
- *Wohl, Victoria. *Love Among the Ruins: The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens*.

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. [A study of Eros in Athenian political life; ch. 3 is about Alcibiades.]

*Zuckert, Catherine. *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Articles and Book Chapters

(Those with an asterisk are available online through the library)

- *Brown, Wendy. "'Supposing Truth Were a Woman...': Plato's Subversion of Masculine Discourse." *Political Theory* 16, no. 4 (1988): 594-616. [Primarily about the *Republic*.]
- *Corner, Sean. "Symposium." In *A Companion to Food in the Ancient World*. Ed. John Wilkins & Robin Nadeau. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: 2015. 234-42.
- *Corner, Sean. "Transcendent Drinking: The Symposium at Sea Reconsidered." *The Classical Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2010): 352-80.
- *Danzig, Gabriel. "Xenophon's *Symposium*." In *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon*. Ed. Michael A. Flower. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 132-151.
- *Dorion, Louis-André. "Xenophon's Socrates." In *A Companion to Socrates*. Ed. Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006. 93-109.
- *Dover, K.J. "Aristophanes' Speech in Plato's *Symposium*." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 86 (1966): 41-50.
- *Ferrari, G.R.F. "Platonic Love." In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Ed. Richard Kraut. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- *Halperin, David. "Why is Diotima a Woman? Platonic *Eros* and the Figuration of Gender." In *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: and Other Essays on Greek Love*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- *Kraut, Richard. "Plato on Love." In *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*. Ed. Gail Fine. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- *Landauer, Matthew. "Drinking Parties Correctly Ordered: Plato on Mass Participation and the Necessity of Rule." *Journal of Politics* ("Just Accepted"). <https://doi.org/10.1086/715998>
- Lane, Melissa. "Virtue as the Love of Knowledge in Plato's *Symposium* and *Republic*." In *Maieusis: Essays on Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat*. 44-67.
- *McCloskey, Benjamin. "Xenophon the Philosopher: E Pluribus Plura." *American Journal of Philology* 138, no. 4 (2017): 605-40.
- *Nehamas, Alexander. "'Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living': Plato, *Symposium* 211d." *European Journal of Philosophy* (2007).
- *Nussbaum, Martha. "The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of Plato's *Symposium*." *Philosophy and Literature* 3, no. 2 (1979): 131-72.
- *Saxonhouse, Arlene W. "Eros and the Female in Greek Political Thought: An Interpretation of Plato's *Symposium*." *Political Theory* 12, no. 1 (1984):
- Saxonhouse, Arlene W. "The Net of Hephaestus: Aristophanes' Speech in Plato's *Symposium*." *Interpretation* 13, no. 1 (1985): 15-32.
- Steiner, Deborah. 1996. "For Love of a Statue: A Reading of Plato's *Symposium* 215A-B." *Ramus* 25: 89-111.

A Note About Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will be dealt with accordingly. For further clarification and information on plagiarism please see Writing at the University of Toronto <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources>. If you are unsure whether something constitutes plagiarism or not after consulting this website, please ask the instructor or your tutorial leader.

Please note that paraphrasing sources from the Internet without citation constitutes plagiarism. You are strongly discouraged from consulting Internet sources for your assignments in this course. The recommended scholarly sources, your classmates, and the instructor are all much better resources. However, if you do reproduce words or ideas from an Internet source in your assignment, you must cite it in your text and bibliography.

Plagiarism undermines the integrity of academic research as well as the university's system of accreditation. Penalties for plagiarism range from serious deductions to the assignment in question up to and including expulsion from the university.