

Plato's Myths

AS. 150.328.01

Instructor: Cara Cummings

Email: ccummi15@jhu.edu

Course Description

Plato is a monumental figure in the Western philosophical tradition. Rather than writing long treatises, Plato wrote dialogues. These play-like works construct a conversation into which the reader is drawn. Plato's characters might be well-known for offering rigorous arguments for their respective positions, but they often tell each other, and the reader, quite fanciful stories. While philosophers tend to give more attention to the arguments, we will focus on the stories. We will encounter stories about the city of Atlantis, the Greek gods, love, the soul, and the afterlife. No previous coursework in philosophy is required.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will have had an introduction to ancient Greek philosophy. They will also learn to construct and assess arguments for philosophical positions. Doing so will strengthen their critical thinking skills in all disciplines and even outside of academic life.

Course Requirements

There will be two 5-page papers (each worth 25% of the final grade) and one 7-page paper (worth 40% of the final grade). Participation and attendance will account for the final 10%.

Paper 1: Due 10/16

Without using materials outside of what I have assigned for the course, answer ONE of the following prompts:

- What turns a story into a *mythos* in the sense that ancient Greeks employed the term? Explain in as much detail as you can by referencing the text(s).
- Is the *Apology* an example of a *mythos*, a *logos*, or both? Explain in as much detail as you can by referencing the text(s).

Paper 2: Due 11/13

Without using materials outside of what I have assigned for the course, answer ONE of the following prompts:

- In the *Symposium*, which were more successful in describing erotic love, the *mythoi* or the *logoi*? Explain in as much detail as you can by referencing the text(s).
- In the *Symposium* and the *Apology*, Socrates tells us a *mythos*. However, in the *Protagoras*, it is his opponent who tells us a *mythos*. What is Plato doing differently by having Socrates tell the reader a *mythos* rather than one of his opponents? Explain in as much detail as you can by referencing the text(s).

Paper 3: Due 12/18

Using any of the texts that we have read this semester, answer the following prompt: What is the relation of Plato's *mythoi* to his *logoi*? Are the *mythoi* to be used in addition to the *logoi*, like icing on the cake; instead of the *logoi*, when the latter have failed to persuade listeners; or alongside the *logoi*, as a necessary compliment? Explain in as much detail as you can by referencing the text(s). You ARE allowed to use materials outside of what I have assigned for the course on this assignment.

Course Policies

Use of Electronics

In this course you will be allowed to use your laptop or tablet to take notes or view the readings on blackboard. Using an electronic device for anything outside of this will result in being marked absent for the day.

Attendance Policy

You are allowed two unexcused absences before they begin to affect your grade. I will not take attendance the first week. Your attendance grade will be determined by dividing the number of times that you are in class (not counting the first week) by the number of class meetings that we have minus two (not counting the first week).

Late Work

Late assignments are penalized at a rate of one letter-grade increment per day late (e.g., a B+ becomes a B- on a 2-day-late paper), up to one week. Assignments that are more than a week late will receive a zero. Deadline extensions are granted only in exceptional, *documented* circumstances, and at the discretion of the instructor.

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability or believe that you might have a disability which requires accommodations, then please contact Student Disability Services at 410-516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu, or in-person at 385 Garland Hall.

Academic Integrity

Cheating is wrong. Cheating hurts our community by undermining academic integrity, creating mistrust, and fostering unfair competition. The university will punish cheaters with failure on an

assignment, failure in a course, permanent transcript notation, suspension, and/or expulsion. Offenses may be reported to medical, law, or other professional or graduate schools when a cheater applies. Violations can include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments without permission, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. For more information, see the guide on “Academic Ethics for Undergraduates” and the Ethics Board web site (<http://ethics.jhu.edu>).

Required Texts

Plato. *A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*. Edited by C.D.C. Reeve. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2012.

Reading Schedule

Readings marked with * are available on blackboard.

Unit I: What Is a Myth?

8/31: Course Introduction (No Reading)

9/2: Penelope Murray, “What is a *Muthos* for Plato?”*

Robert Zaslavsky, *Platonic Myth and Platonic Writing* (1-19)*

9/9: Plato, The Myth of Atlantis, *Timaeus* (21a-25e)* & *Critias**

Plato, The Noble Lie, *Republic* Book III (414b-415c)

Unit II: Myths about the Greek Gods

9/14: Plato, *Euthyphro*

9/16: Plato, *Euthyphro*

9/21: Plato, *Apology*

9/23: Plato, *Apology*

9/28: Louis-André Dorion, “The Delphic Oracle on Socrates’ Wisdom: A Myth?”*

9/30: Plato, *Protagoras**

10/5: Plato, *Protagoras**

10/7: Kathryn Morgan, "The *Protagoras*: Platonic Myth in the Making"*

10/12: Draft Workshop

Unit III: Myths about Love

10/14: Plato, *Symposium*

10/19: Plato, *Symposium*

10/21: Drew A. Hyland, "The Animals That Therefore We Were?: Aristophanes's Double-Creatures and the Question of Origins"*

Unit IV: Myths about the Afterlife

10/26: Plato, *Phaedo*

10/28: Plato, *Phaedo*

11/2: Plato, *Gorgias**

11/4: Plato, *Gorgias**

11/9: Draft Workshop

11/11: Plato, *Republic* (Book I)

11/16: Plato, *Republic* (Book II)

11/18: Plato, *Republic* (Book VI)

11/30: Plato, *Republic* (Book X)

12/2: Julia Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement"*

12/7: S.P. Ward, *Penology and Eschatology in Plato's Myths* (109-159)*

12/9: Classes meet according to a Friday schedule