

# The Trial and Death of Socrates

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Junction 2011 Core Course

*Is the unexamined life not worth living? Was Socrates a menace to society? Debate these questions and more in an interdisciplinary course on the famous philosopher Socrates.*

## DESCRIPTION:

Socrates was put to death in 399 BCE for allegedly corrupting the youth of Athens. Some years later, his student Plato wrote the *Apology of Socrates*—an account of the defense speech Socrates gave at his trial. The *Apology* is not only a literary masterpiece, it raises many provocative philosophical questions: Is the unexamined life not worth living? Ought we fear our own deaths? Is it possible for a better person to be harmed by a worse one? Can we become morally improved through discovering our own ignorance? In this course, we will learn the historical background and acquire the philosophical tools necessary for acquiring a deep understanding of this classic text and for engaging with the questions it raises.

In addition to daily readings (most of which will be primary sources), there will be weekly writing assignments or problem sets, culminating in a final paper addressing one of the questions raised in the course. Most sessions will offer a mixture of discussion and lecture, but others will incorporate small group work, mock debates, dramatic readings, and more.

## TEXTS:

We will read Plato's *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Crito*, as well as portions of his *Phaedo*. (All of these are contained in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, trans. Grube, rev. Cooper, Hackett: 2000 [henceforth, *TDS*], which you each will receive.) In addition, we will read selections from various Presocratics and Sophists, portions of Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, selections from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, all of *The Clouds*, by Aristophanes, and more.

## EXPECTATIONS:

Attendance at all sessions, unless excused in advance, is required. You will be expected to have carefully read all assigned materials. Since we will be looking at some difficult texts, this will require multiple readings. Assignments (noted on the schedule below) should be turned in at the beginning of the class during which they are due (unless otherwise noted). You will be expected to participate actively in all class discussions. Finally, we'll *all* be expected to keep any disagreements civil and always to be mindful of others.

## SCHEDULE:

### Unit 1: Introducing Socrates

- Session 1 (6/29): the death scene from Plato's *Phaedo*; course overview
  - *Reading*: the death scene from Plato's *Phaedo* (in class)
- Session 2 (6/30): Introduction to argument analysis
  - *Reading*: none.
- *Note*: no class 7/4
- Session 3 (7/5): Introduction to argument analysis, cont.
  - *Reading*: none
  - *DUE TODAY*: argument analysis assignment
- Session 4 (7/6): Plato's *Euthyphro*—introducing Socrates
  - *Reading*: Plato's *Euthyphro* (in *TDS*), first half (2a–9e, ~12 pages)
- Session 5 (7/7): *Euthyphro*, cont.—Socratic questions and adequate answers
  - *Reading*: Plato's *Euthyphro*, to end (9e–end, ~11 pages)

### Unit 2: Intellectual Background—"Theology," Philosophy, and Sophistry

- Session 6 (7/11): Ancient Greek religion: lightning bolts, sacrifices, oracles, and more
  - *Reading*: selections from Hesiod's *Theogony* and from Graves, *The Greek Myths*.
  - *In class*: five-minute presentations on the Greek gods (gods assigned 7/7)
  - *DUE TODAY*: short paper, "Socrates: annoying or awesome?"
- Session 7 (7/12): The Presocratics—early philosophers with strange theories
  - *Reading*: selections from *A Presocratics Reader* and from *Philosophy before Socrates*.
- Session 8 (7/13): The Sophists—intellectuals for hire
  - *Reading*: selections from *A Presocratics Reader* and from Plato's *Protagoras* and his *Euthydemus*.
- Session 9 (7/14): Informal logic; or, how to win friends and influence people
  - *Reading*: none

### Unit 3: Political Background—The Peloponnesian War and Athenian Law

- Session 10 (7/18): The Peloponnesian War—causes, course of events, and consequences
  - *Reading*: selections from Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*.

- *In class*: screening of selections from *Greeks: Crucible of Civilization* (documentary)
- *DUE TODAY*: informal logic problem set
- Session 11 (7/19): The Peloponnesian War, cont.—the oratory of war
  - *Reading*: Pericles’ Funeral Oration and other speeches from Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*.
  - *In class*: mock debate—should Athens go to war?
- Session 12 (7/20): The ancient Athens law court
  - *Reading*: Lysias, *On the Murder of Eratosthenes*.

#### Unit 4: Cultural Background—Social, Epic, and Dramatic Roles

- Session 13 (7/21): Ancient Athenian society—class and gender
  - *Reading*: selections from Plato’s *Symposium* and Aristotle’s *Politics*.
- Session 14 (7/25): The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer
  - *Reading*: selections from the *Iliad* (and *Odyssey*).
- Session 15 (7/26): *The Clouds*, by Aristophanes—a satire of Socrates
  - *Reading*: *The Clouds* (first half)
  - *In class*: reading aloud the first half of the play
  - *DUE TODAY*: composition piece (forensic speech)
- Session 16 (7/27): *The Clouds*, cont.
  - *Reading*: *The Clouds* (to end)
  - *In class*: reading aloud the remainder of the play.
- *Note*: no class 7/28

#### Unit 5: The Trial

- Session 17 (8/1): Plato’s *Apology*
  - *Reading*: The *Apology* (in *TDS*); read it all, but we’ll discuss the first quarter
- Session 18 (8/2): *Apology*, cont.
  - *Reading*: re-read the *Apology* as necessary; we’ll discuss the second quarter
- Session 19 (8/3): *Apology*, cont.
  - *Reading*: re-read the *Apology* as necessary; we’ll discuss the third quarter
- Session 20 (8/4): *Apology*, cont.
  - *Reading*: re-read the *Apology* as necessary; we’ll discuss the final quarter

- *DUE Sunday, 8/7, at noon*: rough draft or outline of final paper

## Unit 6: The Aftermath

- Session 21 (8/8): Plato's *Crito*—why didn't Socrates escape when he could?
  - *Reading*: *Crito* (in *TDS*).
- Session 22 (8/9): Xenophon's *Apology* and Plato's *Phaedo*—why/how did Socrates die?
  - *Reading*: *Socrates' Defense to the Jury* by Xenophon and the death scene from Plato's *Phaedo*.
- Session 23 (8/10): Review (shortened class)
  - *Reading*: none
  - *In class*: preparation for project fair
  - *After class*: Junction project fair
- Session 24 (8/11): Representations of Socrates in art; conclusions (shortened class)
  - *Reading*: none
  - *In class*: multimedia presentation on representations of Socrates in art
  - *DUE TODAY*: final paper