

# Seminar: Socrates Against the Sophists

## Classics 349/Philosophy 350

Mount Holyoke College

Spring 2015

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### MEETINGS:

Mondays, 1:15–4:05 pm, Skinner 210

### DESCRIPTION:

In a number of Plato's dialogues we find the character Socrates debating various sophists—itinerant teachers-for-hire whose views were often diametrically opposed to Socrates' own. This seminar is structured around a close, careful reading of three such dialogues: the *Euthydemus*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Gorgias*. These dialogues will offer a general introduction to Socratic philosophy, but we will also focus on a few issues in much greater detail. Chief among those special topics will be questions about the nature and value of moral knowledge, the possibility of moral education, and the efficacy of the Socratic method of inquiry.

### OBJECTIVES:

One of the aims of this course is to introduce you to the intellectual conflict between Socrates and the Sophists—and, in doing so, to introduce you to the philosophical issues these individuals were grappling with. But another aim of this course—perhaps even more important than the first—is to develop your skill at the kind of reading, writing, thinking, and speaking called for when working on the history of philosophy. There is a *historical* component to this latter aim: you'll learn to read historical texts closely and carefully, mindful of the context in which they were written. And there is a *philosophical* component to it: you'll learn to thoughtfully but critically assess the arguments we find in those texts. Furthermore, since this is an advanced seminar, the course will help you to develop more advanced skills in working on the history of philosophy. Among these will be skill at effectively using both primary and secondary literature in developing your own thoughts. The readings, assignments, and class sessions will all contribute toward realizing these aims.

### TEXTS:

Books are available for purchase at the Odyssey Bookshop and on reserve at the MHC Library.

- *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John Cooper. Hackett Publishing Co. (May 1, 1997).  
[Abbreviated 'CW' on the schedule, below.]

- *The Older Sophists*, edited by Rosamond Kent Sprague. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. (March 2001). [Abbreviated ‘TOS’ on the schedule, below.]
- Optional: G.B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*. Cambridge University Press (September 30, 1981). [Abbreviated ‘SM’ on the schedule, below.]
- Other readings will be posted to Moodle.

## READINGS:

Readings listed on the schedule below fall into one of three categories: *primary sources*, *secondary sources*, and *additional readings*. Primary and secondary sources are required, unless otherwise noted; additional readings are recommended, but not required. You should plan to do the readings in advance of the session for which they are listed. Be sure to give yourself ample time to complete the readings. Philosophical writing often makes for—and benefits from—slow reading. This is especially so for historical texts. You should expect most of these readings to be difficult and dense. So plan ahead and when you do approach them, do so slowly and carefully.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

*Note:* any handouts used during sessions will be distributed in hardcopy but will also be available at that time in an electronic format (typically a .pdf available through the course Moodle site).

### Session 1 (1/26): Introduction

- *Primary sources:* Sophists: name and notion [TOS pp. 1–2]; additional readings in class.
- *Secondary sources:* Introduction to *Plato: Complete Works* [CW pp. vii–xxvi].
- *Additional readings:*
  - Kerferd, Chs. 1–4 [SM pp. 1–41], esp. Ch. 3.
  - <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/socrates/>
  - <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sophists/>
  - <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-ethics-shorter/>

### Session 2 (2/2): canceled on account of snow

### Session 3 (2/9): Plato’s *Apology*

- *Primary sources:* Plato, *Apology* [CW, pp. 17–36].
- *Secondary sources:* Nails, “The Trial and Death of Socrates” and Brickhouse and Smith, “The Paradox of Socratic Ignorance in Plato’s *Apology*.”
- *Additional readings:*
  - For more context on the climate in Athens leading to the trials of individuals like Socrates, see Dover, “The Freedom of the Intellectual in Greek Society”
  - Plato clearly had Aristophanes’ *Clouds*—a satire of Socrates, among other things—in mind in writing his *Apology*. A skim of the *Clouds* will give you a sense of how public intellectuals were depicted in comedy. (There are copies in the Mount Holyoke Library.)

- Some people think that Plato’s *Apology* and Gorgias’s *Defense of Palamedes* have some striking similarities and that the former may be consciously imitating, at points, the latter. If you’re interested in this question, I recommend you read Gorgias’s *Defense* [TOS pp. 54–63]. For secondary literature, see Coulter, “The Relation of the *Apology* of Socrates to Gorgias’ *Defense of Palamedes* and Plato’s Critique of Gorgianic Rhetoric”

#### **Session 4 (2/16): Plato’s *Euthydemus***

- *Primary source*: Plato, *Euthydemus* [CW pp. 708–745].
- *Secondary sources*: McCabe, “Silencing the Sophists: The Drama of the *Euthydemus*.”
- *Additional readings*:
  - Kerferd, Ch. 6 [SM pp. 59–67].
  - I also highly recommend Nehamas, “Eristic, Antilogic, Sophistic, Dialectic: Plato’s Demarcation of Philosophy from Sophistry.”
  - For more examples of “sophistical argumentation,” I recommend the *Dissoi Logoi* [TOS pp. 279–293].

#### **Make-up Session (2/20): Protagoras and Protagorean Relativism**

- *Primary sources*: Protagoras fragments B1–5 [In Sprague, TOS pp. 18–20], Plato’s *Theaetetus* 169d–171d [CW pp. 188–190], and Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book IV, section 4 and section 5 (first paragraph).
- *Secondary sources*: none required.
- *Additional readings*:
  - For additional background on Protagoras and his views, see Sprague, TOS pp. 3–18.
  - An important paper on the argument in the *Theaetetus* is Burnyeat, “Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato’s *Theaetetus*.”
  - For more on the sophists and relativism, see Kerferd Ch. 9 [SM pp. 83–110] and Bett, “The Sophists and Relativism.”
  - For a contemporary treatment of relative truth, see MacFarlane, “Making Sense of Relative Truth.”

#### **Session 5 (2/23): Plato’s *Protagoras***

- *Primary source*: the first half of Plato’s *Protagoras*, through 338e [CW pp. 747–770].
- *Secondary sources*: Vlastos, “The Unity of the Virtues in the ‘Protagoras.’”
- *Additional readings*:
  - Kerferd Ch. 11 and 12 [SM pp. 131–162].
  - On the arguments over whether virtue can be taught, you may want to compare Plato’s *Meno* 86c–96d.
  - A lot of ink has been spilled over how best to understand the unity of (the) virtue(s). For a paper that challenges Vlastos’s interpretation, and proposes a different account, see Penner, “The Unity of Virtue.”

**\*\*\*Philosophy Department Colloquium, 2/25: Rachana Kamtekar\*\*\***

- Prof. Kamtekar will be visiting Mount Holyoke to give a colloquium. Her talk is titled “The hypothetical psychology of the *Protagoras*.” I hereby vigorously exhort you all to attend!
- More details forthcoming
- Two other papers by Prof. Kamtekar that are relevant to our course are her “Plato on the Attribution of Conative Attitudes” and “The Profession of Friendship: Callicles, Democratic Politics, and Rhetorical Education in Plato’s *Gorgias*.”

**Session 6 (3/2): Plato’s *Protagoras*, cont.**

- *Primary sources*: the second half of Plato’s *Protagoras*, from 339a to the end [CW pp. 770–790]
- *Secondary sources*: Singpurwalla, “Reasoning with the Irrational: Moral Psychology in the *Protagoras*.”
- *Additional readings*:
  - Many scholars have compared the discussion of “being overcome by pleasure” in *Prot* 352a–357e with Socrates’ discussion in Plato’s *Meno* 77b–78b.
  - For a proposed reconstruction of the Simonides poem, see Beresford, “Nobody’s Perfect: A New Text and Interpretation of Simonides PMG 542.”

**Session 7 (3/9): Attic oratory**

- *Primary sources*: Gorgias, “Encomium of Helen” [TOS pp. 50–54], Demosthenes, “First Phillipic,” and Lysias, “On the Death of Eratosthenes.”
- *Secondary sources*: Gagarin, “Series Introduction: Greek Oratory.”
- *Additional readings*:
  - Perhaps the most famous speech from the classical era of Greece is Pericles’ “Funeral Oration” (from Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*). If you aren’t familiar with this speech, I highly recommend it. (It is an example of the epideictic genre.) For a more contemporary example, I recommend US President Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address.”
  - Many more readings in Sprague’s *The Older Sophists* provide examples of oratory from the classical era. One figure of particular note is Antiphon. His “tetralogies” are examples of law court speeches and present both sides of (fictional) cases; he may have used them as teaching tools.
  - For a classic definition of rhetoric and discussion of the three kinds of rhetorical speeches (political, forensic, and epideictic), I recommend Book I Chapters 1–10 of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. See also the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article “Aristotle’s Rhetoric” (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>).

Spring Break! (3/14–3/22)—*note*: after break we will read Plato’s *Gorgias*; it is long and complex, so I recommend you try to read the whole thing over break.

**Session 8 (3/23): Plato’s *Gorgias***

- *Primary source*: the first quarter of Plato’s *Gorgias*, through 461b [CW pp. 792–805].
- *Secondary sources*: Barney, “Gorgias’ Defense.”

- *Additional readings:*
  - For an interesting paper about the opening lines of the *Gorgias*, see Doyle, “On the first eight lines of Plato’s *Gorgias*.”

#### **Session 9 (3/30): Plato’s *Gorgias*, cont.**

- *Primary sources:* the second quarter of Plato’s *Gorgias*, 461b–481b [CW pp. 805–826].
- *Secondary sources:* Wolfsdorf, “*Gorgias* 466a4–468e5: Rhetoric’s Inadequate Means.”
- *Additional readings:*
  - There’s a huge amount that’s been written about this section of the dialogue. Ask me if you’re interested in reading more.

#### **Session 10 (4/6): Plato’s *Gorgias*, cont.**

- *Primary sources:* the second half of Plato’s *Gorgias*, 481b–end [CW pp. 826–869].
- *Secondary sources:* Gentzler, “The Sophistic Cross-examination of Callicles in the *Gorgias*.”
- *Additional readings:*
  - Kerferd, Ch. 10 [SM pp. 111–130].
  - For discussion of the concluding myth, see Annas, “Plato’s Myths of Judgement,” section II. See also Sedley, “Myth, punishment and politics in the *Gorgias*.”
  - You might compare Callicles’ immoralism with the position Thrasymachus develops and defends in Plato’s *Republic*, Book I [CW pp. 972–998]. With these views you may also be interested to compare Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*.
  - There’s a lot that’s been written about this section of the dialogue as well. Ask me if you’re interested in reading more.

#### **Session 11 (4/13): Shame, Irony, and Sincerity in Political Speech—with special guest Prof. Markovits!**

- *Primary source:* reread the *Gorgias* as needed.
- *Secondary sources:* Tarnopolsky, “Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato and the Contemporary Politics of Shame” and Markovits, *The Politics of Sincerity*, Chapter 3.
- *Additional readings:*
  - The rest of Markovits’s book; Tarnopolsky’s book (same title as the paper).

#### **Session 12 (4/20): In-class presentations**

- No readings

#### **Session 13 (4/27): Conclusions**

- *Primary source:* Plato’s *Sophist* 221c–236d [CW pp. 241–257].
- *Secondary sources:* Zoller, “To ‘Graze Freely in the Pastures of Philosophy’: The Pedagogical Methods and Political Motives of Socrates and the Sophists.”
- *Additional readings:*
  - None

## REQUIREMENTS:

*Note:* you must pass each portion of the course in order to pass the course.

- Attendance & participation: 20%
  - *Note:* this includes a required in-class presentation; see below.
- Reading responses: 20%
- Papers: 60%
  - Paper #1: 20%
  - Paper #2: 40%

## ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:

Your attendance and participation is essential to the success of this course. We're going to be exploring these texts and issues together. Thus:

- Attendance is required. (Be sure to bring the readings to class with you.) If, for whatever reason, you cannot attend a class, please contact me *as soon as possible in advance of the class you expect to miss*.
- Participation in class is required. There are many ways to participate: you could ask a question about the text we're discussing, you could introduce a new perspective on the issue we're discussing, you could even just interject to say "I feel completely lost right now!" (If you're thinking this, you're probably not the only one.)
  - *Note:* I will set up a general discussion forum on the course Moodle site. Posting questions or comments to the forum or responding to other people's questions/comments will also count as class participation.
- You should expect to disagree from time to time—with things we read or discuss, with other people in class (including me), and perhaps on occasion even with yourself. These disagreements may be *vigorous* but must always be *reasoned* and *respectful*.
- *A note on gadgets:* laptops, iPads, and so forth are permitted in class as long as you're using them to take notes, to refer to assigned readings, or to run software that assists with either of these functions.<sup>1</sup>

### *Presentations:*

- The penultimate class session (Session 12) will be dedicated to student presentations: each of you will present some of your ideas for your final paper and lead a brief class discussion about those ideas.
- More details forthcoming in the second half of the semester.

## READING RESPONSES:

Over the course of the semester you will write six short "reading response" papers:

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<sup>1</sup>See <http://bit.ly/1ihJUxL> for some evidence that suggests multitasking (e.g., looking at Facebook during class) is bad for learning.

- Each reading response should engage with a text (or texts) we are reading and should do the following:
  - It must *reference* primary source material (quoting or paraphrasing) we have been reading. (It may engage with secondary sources as well, but it must primarily engage with a primary source.)
  - It should *raise a question* about the text. This could be a question of interpretation (e.g., “How are we to make sense of Socrates’ conception of desire in this passage?”). Or it could be a question of argument analysis (e.g., “Is the argument in this passage any good?”).
  - It should begin to *explore an answer* (or answers) to your question.
- *Reading responses are due 24 hours before the session in which we discuss the text you engage with.*
- Only one reading response per session. (No submitting six for a single session.)
- No reading responses for sessions 12 and 13. This means you’ll need to have completed all of them by session 11, which means you’ll need to do at least two before spring break.
- Papers should be about 300 words (about one page, 12 point Times New Roman) and should be submitted to me as .pdfs *via email*.
- Reading responses will be graded pass/fail.

## PAPERS:

There will be two papers this term:

- Paper #1: 1500–2000 words (about 5–7 pages, 12 point Times New Roman).
  - You may expand one of your reading responses (or combine several of them) into paper #1; however, your paper must show substantial new thought.
  - This paper must engage directly with at least one primary source.
- Paper #2: 3000–4500 words (about 10–15 pages, 12 point Times New Roman).
  - You may expand one (or more) of your reading responses or paper #1, or you may combine any number of these, into paper #2; however, your paper must show substantial new thought.
  - This paper must engage directly with at least one primary source and at least one secondary source.

More details forthcoming with each assignment.

## EXTENSION POLICY

- Three “no-questions asked” 24-hour extensions per semester. (For use on papers or reading responses.)
- These may be combined for a three-day extension on one paper or broken up among multiple papers; they cannot be combined for use on reading responses. *You must request the extension in advance of the original deadline.*
- No other extensions (except for exceptional circumstances)
- Unexcused late papers lose 1/3 grade per day or portion thereof (e.g., an “A” paper turned in during the first 24 hours after a deadline will receive an “A–”).

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES:

- Friday, 3/13: Paper #1 due on Moodle (by noon).
- Sunday, 4/12: last day to submit last reading response (by 1:15 pm).
- Monday, 4/20: in-class presentations.
- Friday, 5/1: Paper #2 due on Moodle (by noon).<sup>2</sup>

For other important college-wide dates, consult the Registrar's academic calendar.<sup>3</sup>

## ACADEMIC HONESTY:

As students at Mount Holyoke College, you have each agreed to live by the following code of honor: "I will honor myself, my fellow students, and Mount Holyoke College by acting responsibly, honestly, and respectfully in both my words and deeds." Pages 55–59 of the Student Handbook<sup>4</sup> describe the application of the Honor Code to academic matters. In particular, note that "It is the responsibility of each student to read *A Guide to the Uses and Acknowledgment of Sources* and the *Student Handbook*, which define the standards adopted by the College; to observe the established procedures in preparing assignments and writing papers and examinations, and to submit as one's own only that work that she or he has originated" (p. 56). I will expect you to be mindful of these responsibilities when producing work for this course. Additionally, I will expect you to have reviewed *The Proper Use of Sources Tutorial*.<sup>5</sup> Remember: when in doubt, cite—and, of course, you can always check with me. Whatever you do, don't plagiarize. ***Plagiarism could result in failure on the assignment or in the course as a whole.***

For some additional information about academic responsibility (written for international students in particular, but good for everyone to read) see: [http://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/global/docs/academic\\_responsibility\\_pamphlet\\_for\\_intl\\_students.pdf](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/global/docs/academic_responsibility_pamphlet_for_intl_students.pdf)

## ASSISTANCE:

- You should always feel free to contact me about any questions or concerns you have about the course. Write me an email, visit my office hours, intercept me on campus!
- The SAW (*Speaking, Arguing, Writing*) Center can provide assistance with, well, your speaking, arguing, and writing. You can schedule an appointment or swing by during their drop-in hours.<sup>6</sup>
- The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program<sup>7</sup> provides support for Mount Holyoke students whose first language is not English. For more information, contact the ESOL Coordinator, Mark Shea ([markshea@mtholyoke.edu](mailto:markshea@mtholyoke.edu)).
- If you have a disability and would like to request accommodations, please contact AccessAbility Services, located in Wilder Hall B4, at (413)-538-2646 or [accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu](mailto:accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu). If you are eligible, they will give you an accommodation letter which you should bring to me as

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<sup>2</sup>This due date ensures that you are able to use all three of your 24-hr extensions on the final paper should you choose to do so.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.mtholyoke.edu/registrar/calendar>.

<sup>4</sup><http://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/deanofstudents/docs/mhcstudenthandbook.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup><http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/>.

<sup>6</sup>You can find out more here: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/saw/peer/center>.

<sup>7</sup><http://www.mtholyoke.edu/esol>.



soon as possible. That way we can work together to make sure all of the course content is accessible to you.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>More information on AccessAbility Services here: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/accessability>.