

University of Toronto  
Faculty of Arts and Science

POL402H1F:  
Problems in the Political Thought of the Socratic School

Tuesdays, 10 am – 12 pm,  
Room: OI 4410

**Course Instructor:**

Zachariah Black

zak.black@mail.utoronto.ca

Office hours: Tuesdays, 1 – 3 pm

Office: Sidney Smith 3130

**Course Description**

In this course, we will undertake an in-depth study of Plato's most literary dialogue, the *Symposium*, followed by a shorter look at the *Alcibiades I*. 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. We will also have a particular interest in the relationship of the philosopher Socrates and the statesman Alcibiades, and the development of that relationship across the two dialogues. Our inquiry will lead us into questions about the possibility and desirability of educating *eros*, the role of the emotions in civic education, and the role of *eros* in healthy political life.

**Course Objectives**

Students will develop their skills as close readers of classic works of political philosophy and will employ those skills to make persuasive arguments about perennial features of politics. They will hone their ability to have high-level discussions that combine textual analysis with political, philosophical, and historical reflection. They will develop an understanding of the Platonic perspective on crucial questions of political theory, including the promise and perils of civic education and the role of the emotions (and *eros* in particular) in political life. They will also deepen their understanding of foundational episodes in the history of European political thought: namely, the Peloponnesian War and its consequences for Athenian democracy, the execution of Socrates, and Alcibiades' torrid relationship with both Athens and Socrates.

**Format, Requirements, and Grading**

Our study of Plato's dialogues will take the form of a seminar in which the instructor will lecture and guide discussion, but students will be expected to contribute actively to discussion. Our time will be divided roughly in half between discussion and lecture. We will read the texts 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. The instructor will help guide students through the practice

In addition, students will be expected to supplement their reading of the *Symposium* and *Alcibiades I* 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 (this means that it should be clear from your comments that you have engaged carefully with the dialogue and commentaries), and engage thoughtfully and considerately with the other participants.

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 well ahead of time.

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, Strauss, and Forde), 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](mailto: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 **27 September & 15 November 2022**, at 5 p.m. EST: 2x5%

Essay 1 (2000 words), due **25 October 2022**, at 5 p.m. EST: 30%

Essay 2 (3500 words), due **6 December 2022**, 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 receive serious consideration. In extreme circumstances, later requests may also be considered. If you foresee a problem, please let the instructor know as soon as you can.

Students who require accessibility accommodations should register with Accessibility Services if they have not done so already. Extension requests made through Accessibility Services will be honoured.

### Course Schedule

For the first nine weeks, 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*. We will then move to Plato's *Alcibiades I*, accompanied by Steven Forde'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. All students will have to consult additional scholarly commentaries for the final essay and should begin consulting this scholarship early in the semester. Please see the bibliography below for suggestions.

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 as needed.

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13 September 2022: Introductory Remarks

20 September 2022: Plato, *Symposium*: Prologue (172A-178A).  
Commentary: Bloom, pp. 55-79; Strauss, pp. 1-37.

27 September 2022: Plato, *Symposium*: Phaedrus & Pausanias (178B-180B).  
Commentary: Bloom, 79-84; Strauss, 38-56.

4 October 2022: Plato, *Symposium*: Pausanias & Eryximachus (180C-188E).  
Commentary: Bloom, 85-94; Strauss, 57-91.

11 October 2022: Plato, *Symposium*: Aristophanes' speech (189A-193D).  
Commentary: Bloom, 95-102; Strauss, 92-118.

18 October 2022: Plato, *Symposium*: Agathon's speech (193E-197E).  
Commentary: Bloom, 102-112; Strauss, 119-142.

25 October 2022: Plato, *Symposium*: Socrates' speech I (198A-212C).  
Commentary: Bloom, 121-154; [no Strauss].

1 November 2022: Plato, *Symposium*: Socrates' speech II (198A-212C again).  
Commentary: [no Bloom]; Strauss, 174-251.

\*\*8 November 2022: READING WEEK; NO CLASS\*\*

15 November 2022: Plato, *Symposium*: Alcibiades' speech (212D-223D).  
Commentary: [no Bloom]; Strauss, 174-251.

\*\*16 November 2022 is the last day to drop F courses\*\*

22 November 2022: Plato, *Alcibiades I* (103a-113d)  
Commentary: Bloom, 154-177; Strauss: 252-88.

29 November 2022: Plato, *Alcibiades I* (113d-119c)  
Commentary: Steven Forde, *On Plato's Alcibiades I*

6 December 2022: Plato, *Alcibiades I* (119c-135e) / Summative discussion

### **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.

\*Plato. *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*.

Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1987. [\*This book contains ten dialogues and accompanying interpretive essays. We will only be reading one dialogue and one essay. Students who wish to continue their study of Plato beyond our course will benefit from owning this very interesting book, but students who prefer not to purchase it may ask the instructor for photocopies of the relevant readings.]

### **Recommended Scholarly Sources**

#### Books

(Works 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.

- \*de Romilly, Jacqueline. *The Life of Alcibiades: Dangerous Ambition and the Betrayal of Athens*. Translated by Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2019.
- \*Frank, Jill. *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato's Republic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. [Ch. 5 treats the *Symposium*.]
- \*Helfer, Ariel. *Socrates and Alcibiades: Plato's Drama of Political Ambition and Philosophy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.
- \*Hunter, Richard L. *Plato's Symposium*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004.
- \*Ludwig, Paul W. *Eros and Polis: Desire and Community in Greek Political Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- 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.
- 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.
- \*Osborne, Catherine. *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. [Comparison of Platonic and Christian conceptions of love.]
- 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.
- Schofield, Malcolm. *Plato: Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. [Primarily a study of *Republic*, *Laws*, and *Statesman*.]
- \*Sheffield, Frisbee C.C. *Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- \*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.
- \*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* 84, no. 4 (2022). <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.
- \*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.