

This course gives an introduction to the philosophy of Plato (?428-348 BC), and thereby also to the Greek practice of philosophy, exploring different questions that the Greek philosophers dealt with and the motivations and methods of their different kinds of writing about them. A guide for understanding Plato's writings is given by the educational context of Plato's Academy. All the major schools of later Greek philosophy except the Epicureans—the Peripatetics (Aristotelians), Stoics, and sceptics—are split-offs from the Academy. The traditional Greek education consisted of "gymnastics," "music," and "grammar," each broadly construed. Both Plato and his rival educators, the older "sophists" Protagoras (?480-411) and Gorgias (?480-380) and Plato's contemporary Isocrates (436-338), argue that this traditional training is not enough to teach you either how to manage the state well, or how to manage even your own life and household well, and that some further discipline is needed. This higher education will be called "philosophy," but different teachers offer training in different disciplines under this name. For many of Plato's rivals, the core of higher education is rhetoric, the art of public speaking; others teach "physics" or natural history, the study of the origins and natures of things including human beings and their societies; others teach mathematics, and others dialectic, the art of argument, and especially refutation, by question and answer. Plato thinks that neither the old education nor the available varieties of the new education are sufficient. Plato takes Socrates as his countermodel to the sophists: while Socrates does not claim to teach how to succeed in life or in politics, he uses dialectic to convince his conversation-partners that their present knowledge is insufficient, and that, in order to be successful, they need a further knowledge of how to live well.

In looking for a kind of knowledge that would be sufficient to guide individual and political life, Plato takes up the sophists' discussions about the "arts" or teachable disciplines. The sophists believe that civilization progresses through the progressive discovery of the arts, they proclaim the invention of new arts, and they try to analyze how the previous discoveries in the arts were made and why they work; and they ask which of the traditional practices in the arts are merely habits or conventions, and which really work because they have some foundation in the nature of things. Model arts, for those who want to analyze existing arts or to create new ones, are medicine and mathematics (including arithmetic and geometry but also mechanics and optics and music-theory and astronomy). Medical writers (whose works are preserved under the name of "Hippocrates") reflect on the conditions for acquiring the knowledge that supports successful medical practice: they disagree about how far, beyond experience, it requires hypotheses (as in mathematics), knowledge of causes, or knowledge of the nature of the human body or the human soul or of the whole cosmos. Medical writers draw on the pre-Socratic philosophers or "physicists" for these disputes, and conversely the philosophers draw on the medical writers, both because medicine is a model of a successful art, and because philosophers propose that the art needed for successful political or individual life will be a "medicine of the soul": so reflection on the conditions of medical knowledge might help to show how to discover a medicine of the soul. Notably Gorgias and Plato think that a medicine of the soul is more desirable than a medicine of the body, that it is better able to bring about happiness or living well, or better able to command other arts. But to understand why this would be so, and to give content to the concept of a medicine of a soul, we will have to understand what a soul is and how it is related to the body, and what condition a medicine of the soul would aim at, as ordinary medicine aims at

the health of the body. Different Greek authors have very different views on these questions, which lead them to very different views of what a medicine of the soul would be and how it might be a model for an art of politics, with very different political implications.

Plato argues in his Gorgias that the art of rhetoric cannot give anything analogous to medicine for the soul, and cannot be the commanding art: rhetoric can only persuade, but cannot give knowledge of the good or of justice, and so cannot give genuine power. Plato tries to develop dialectic as practiced by Socrates into an alternative, as a way of giving knowledge rather than mere persuasion, and of discovering objective norms for action. Dialectic thus comes to substitute for the role that physics or natural history plays for many other Greek thinkers in discovering the true natures of things and measuring human conventions (including linguistic and moral and political conventions) against an objective standard; and Plato argues that physics as practiced by his predecessors, and the social contract theory of society it was used to support, lead to an amoral conception of political rule that cannot bring happiness either to the city as a whole or to its rulers. In dialogues including the Phaedo and Republic Plato tries to make dialectic an alternative to physics as a way to discover the causes or explanations of things, and the first principles which are the starting-point for an overall account of the universe; these lead him also to reflection on how mathematical reasoning works, and to positing non-bodily and non-spatially-extended causes and principles. But dialectic may not be enough for these tasks, and increasingly Plato tries to give his own version of physics to rival pre-Socratic physics. Inspired in part by medical models, Plato tries to develop his own accounts of the nature of the soul, of its relationship with the body and with its physical environment, of how it acquires knowledge and virtue or vice. Crucial texts will be the Phaedo, arguing for the soul's immortality and for its ability to know apart from the bodily senses and drawing ethical consequences; the Republic, constructing as an alternative to social-contract theories a model constitution where social rules will be laid down not to protect the political or economic position of the rulers or contractors but in accordance with a quasi-medical knowledge tending to the health of the citizens' souls; the Theaetetus, critically examining empiricist accounts of knowledge and the accounts of knowable physical reality that they presuppose, and suggesting alternative models of knowledge; and the Timaeus, constructing an alternative model for the physical world itself, as a domain governed not by chance or violence but by an art caring for the cosmos as a whole and guiding human beings toward theoretical and practical rationality. Plato's hypothetical descriptions of a human action and cognition, and a collective human life and a physical universe governed by reason, are attractive in their outlines but highly questionable in their details; they provide the starting point for the criticism and the positive alternatives developed in the moral, political, and natural philosophies of Aristotle, the Stoics, and other later Greek philosophers.

The course will be divided into three units, whose approximate time-lengths, main topics, and some central readings are as follows.

U1 (3 weeks): Socrates, the political context, elenchus and protreptic, care for the soul, sophistic and the arts: Apology, Protagoras

U2 (5 weeks): Dialectic as a rival to rhetoric, dialectic as a rival to physics, criticisms of the physicists and the place of soul in the cosmos, the project of a medicine of the soul and justice as the health of the soul: Gorgias, Phaedo, selections from the Republic

U3 (5 weeks): Knowledge and opinion, the conditions for knowledge, hypotheses, the structure of the soul, sensible and intelligible worlds: selections from the Republic, Theaetetus, Timaeus