PHIL 6K03: SEMINAR IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY¹
PLATO ON PLEASURE (TERM 2, 2017-18)

Instructor: Dr. Mark Johnstone
E-mail: mjohnst@mcmaster.ca
Office: UH 307, Ext. 23461
Office hours: TBA
Class meets Tuesdays, 2:30-5:20pm, in KTH B103

Course Description:
In this course, we will examine Plato’s complex and often fascinating views on the nature and value of pleasure. Our key questions will include: What is pleasure, according to Plato? Does he recognize different kinds of pleasure (e.g. bodily pleasure vs. intellectual pleasure, attitudinal pleasure vs. sensation)? If so, in what ways do they differ - and why do they all count as pleasures, on his account? Also, what is the value of pleasure, according to Plato? Did he ever espouse a form of hedonism (the view that pleasure, at least of some kind, is the sole intrinsic good), as some have thought? Did he ever espouse a form of asceticism: the view that pleasure (or at least certain kinds of bodily pleasure) should be avoided entirely? How did he understand the relationship between pleasure and desire? At the end of the day, how did he regard the value of pleasure in relation to the goodness of a life?

Since Plato returned to these issues often, in many different works, we will examine selected passages from a range of different Platonic dialogues. These will include (but will not necessarily be limited to) the Protagoras, Gorgias, Phaedo, Republic, and Philebus. We will look especially closely at the Philebus – a late dialogue that contains Plato’s fullest treatment of the nature and varieties of pleasure, and of its role in a good life. Time permitting, we will conclude by briefly examining Aristotle’s two discussions of pleasure in the Nicomachean Ethics, which are largely framed as a response to Plato.

Objectives
By the end of this course, you should be familiar with Plato’s views on pleasure, and on a range of related philosophical topics. You will have read substantial selections from a variety of Plato’s dialogues. In addition, you should have developed your ability to:

• Read and understand complex texts
• Critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of arguments
• Appreciate unfamiliar ideas and points of view
• Formulate and defend your own positions
• Express yourself clearly in discussion
• Write clearly, concisely and effectively in support of your claims

Required Text
This will be available at the campus store (or online). Please purchase this book – it has all of the translations we will be using in every class. (It is also well worth having.)


¹ This course is cross-listed as PHIL 4K03. Undergraduate students enrolled under this course code will attend the same seminars, but will complete slightly different assessment (e.g. they will write shorter final essays).
Course Website

I will be using the course website on Avenue to Learn (http://avenue.mcmaster.ca/) to post regular updates and information about the course, copies of material distributed in class, lists of supplementary readings, additional resources, and information and advice about assessment (including essay topics). I encourage you to check in regularly.

Assessment

Assessment will be based primarily on a final essay and an in-class presentation. In addition, you will be asked to submit informal weekly reflections, based on the assigned readings (these will not be assessed). Regular attendance will be expected.

1. **Final essay (80%)**: You will be asked to write a single research paper for this course. This should be 12-16 pages in length (MA students) and 15-20 pages in length (PhD students). See below for the due date. I will provide further information about the essays, and my expectations for them, in class and on the course website.

2. **Oral presentation (20%)**: You will be asked to give one in-class oral presentation. This should be about 15 minutes in length, and will be followed by roughly 15 minutes of questions and discussion. Topics will be allocated at the start of the semester. You will have the opportunity to meet with me to discuss the material and your plans for approaching it in advance of your presentation. I will provide further information about the presentations, and my expectations for them, in class and on the course website.

3. **Reading reflections**: You will be asked to submit an informal reflection prior to each class. These reflections should normally be about one page in length (double spaced). In them, you will be invited to highlight and discuss some passage, argument, claim or issue you found especially interesting in the assigned weekly reading from the primary text (i.e. from Plato). The reflections will not be assessed. (If you don’t hear from me, your work was fine.) I will sometimes, but not always, provide brief comments.

4. **Attendance and Participation**: Attendance in class is expected. If you are unable to attend class for any reason, do me the courtesy of letting me know (by email), in advance of class if you can.

Weights:

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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research essay 1 (due 11:59pm on Friday, April 20)</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly reflections</td>
<td>Not assessed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Not assessed</td>
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Instructions for Submitting Work

- All written work should be submitted electronically, using the “Assignments” tool on Avenue to Learn. Please include your name on all submissions, and also number your pages (this sometimes makes commenting on your work easier). Please submit in only one of the following two file formats: MS Word or pdf. There is no need to submit a hard copy in addition to the electronic copy.
Policies on Late Work, Extensions and Accommodations

• I understand that students are sometimes unable to complete a piece of assessment on time (or at all) for legitimate medical or personal/compassionate reasons. If you find yourself in such a situation, please contact me as soon as possible to let me know. Once I have been made aware of the situation, I can grant an extension or take other steps to ensure that you are not unduly penalized for the late or missed work.

• For the essays, I will usually be happy to grant short extensions (say, 2-3 days), so long as you make a request (by email) prior to the due date.

• Students registered with SAS: please do come and see me as soon as possible after the start of the semester. I like to know who you are, in case you encounter difficulties during the term, and also need to know of any special assistance you might require.

Supplementary readings:

• A list of suggested supplementary readings will be placed on the course website. Many of these resources are available online. Others will be made available on the course website as pdfs. Some books will be placed on course reserve in Mills Library.
## Schedule of Classes, Topics, and Readings

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic and Required Reading</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1 Jan 9</td>
<td>Introduction and Overview</td>
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| Week 2 Jan 16 | Hedonism and the Measure Doctrine  
*Protagoras* (349a-end)                                                           |            |
| Week 3 Jan 23 | The Desire for the Good  
*Meno* (77b-79b), *Gorgias* (447a-468c)  
*Gorgias* (481b-514a)  
*Phaedo* (excerpts)                                                                 |            |
| Week 4 Jan 30 | Socrates’ Anti-Hedonism  
*Gorgias* (481b-514a)                                                          |            |
| Week 5 Feb 6 | Plato and Asceticism  
*Phaedo* (excerpts)                                                                |            |
| Week 6 Feb 13 | The Divided Soul  
*Republic* IV (434d-441c)                                                      |            |
| Feb 20 | No class *(mid-term break)*                                                        |            |
| Week 7 Feb 27 | Superior and Inferior Pleasures  
*Republic* IX (580d-588a)                                                        |            |
| Week 8 Mar 6 | Pleasure and the Good Life I  
*Philebus* (11a-31a)                                                              |            |
| Week 9 Mar 13 | “True” and “False” Pleasures  
*Philebus* (31b-44b)                                                              |            |
| Week 10 Mar 20 | “Mixed” and “Pure” Pleasures  
*Philebus* (44b-55c)                                                              |            |
| Week 11 Mar 27 | Pleasure and the Good Life II  
*Philebus* (55c-67c)                                                              |            |
| Week 12 April 3 | Aristotle’s Response to Plato on Pleasure  
*Nic. Ethics* VII, 11-14; X, 1-5                                                  | Essay due 11:59pm on Friday, April 20 |

2 I will also be assigning some relevant secondary literature each week. A list of that literature, broken down by week and topic, will be provided at the start of the term.
**Additional Notes:**

1. The scale used by the Registrar’s Office will be used to convert number grades to final letter grades. Information about grades at McMaster can be found [here](#).

2. You will have the opportunity to evaluate my teaching and the course as a whole towards the end of the term.

3. *E-mail policy*: In accordance with university policy, you should use your own McMaster e-mail account for all e-mail correspondence with me. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student.

4. *Academic integrity policy*: You are expected to exhibit honesty and to behave ethically in all aspects of the learning process. Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. The following list illustrates only three forms: plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained; improper collaboration in group work; copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations. For complete information, please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, available at [http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/)

**Final note:**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.