

PHIL 4520 Historical Topics: Socrates T 2:30

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Course Description:

The seminar will focus on arguably the most influential and controversial figure in the history of philosophy, Socrates. Socrates left no writings, and most likely did not develop any extensive philosophical theory. Yet, in many respects, he seems to have been the quintessential philosopher, the person who more than anyone else subjected all conventional beliefs to the scrutiny of reason with the hope of becoming a better and happier person. Socrates' influence has been immense, from his contemporaries, such as Plato, to modern philosophers, such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Part of the reason for this influence seems to be that Socrates' figure is so elusive and contradictory that we should not talk about *a single* Socrates, but rather about Plato's Socrates, Nietzsche's Socrates, etc. During the course of the seminar, we will examine the many contradictory portraits of Socrates that philosophers have painted throughout history and try to find out what made Socrates so appealing, controversial, admirable and threatening at the same time. In answering this question, we can hopefully gain a glimpse into what it means to live the philosophical life and into the dangers involved in taking such a life too seriously.

Readings:

Readings will include works by Socrates' contemporaries, in which he features as the main character, such as Plato's *Apology*, *Phaedo*, and *Symposium*, Xenophon's *Memoirs of Socrates*, and Aristophanes' comedy *The Clouds*. We will also read a variety of philosophical, scholarly, and literary works that talk about Socrates or are heavily influenced by Socrates' example, such as Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony*, Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, Gregory Vlastos' *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, and I.F. Stone's controversial *The Trial of Socrates*.

Assignments/evaluation:

There will be two 10-12 page papers. The first paper will be due in late October, and the second at the end of the semester. Each paper will be worth 50% of the final grade.

Academic Integrity:

Please consult section 7 of the General Academic Regulations and Requirements in your Undergraduate Calendar for information concerning plagiarism and cheating. This information can also be found on the Web at:

<http://webapps.cc.umanitoba.ca/calendar07/regulations/plagiarism.asp>