

HUL 360: Selected Topics in Philosophy

IInd Semester, 2023-24

Arudra Burra

Course description

Our topic for the semester is the study of some of Plato's key dialogues: the quartet comprising "The Trial and Execution of Socrates" (*Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Phaedo*); *Laches*, and *Gorgias* (possibly one or two others if time permits, but that is unlikely).

The idea is to develop some familiarity with Plato's writings, and gain some general experience in the close reading of philosophical texts. In engaging with these texts *philosophically* (rather than, say, as works of literature), we will occasionally discuss contemporary philosophical debates as well.

I hope that in cultivating a (perhaps qualified) enthusiasm for Plato and Socrates, we will also cultivate an enthusiasm for philosophy itself – both in its contemporary academic *avatar*, as well as its more traditional sense as an inquiry into how to live.

Alfred North Whitehead famously said that the history of Western philosophy could be seen as a history of footnotes to Plato. Plato was also a reference point for Indian thinkers as diverse as Gandhi, Nehru, Vivekananda, and Iqbal. We will consider these connections as well, from time to time.

Pre-requisites and expectations

There are no pre-requisites except enthusiasm, and a willingness to work. Since we will be carrying on a sustained conversation from one class to the next, I expect you to attend every class.

Be warned that this is a demanding, reading-intensive course.

Administrative matters

The course will meet on Mondays and Thursdays in the M slot (5-6.30 pm), in LH519.

I will hold office hours from 11.30-1 pm on Mondays and Thursdays in MS605, and otherwise by appointment via email (burra@hss.iitd.ac.in)

Class announcements and softcopies of the readings will be posted online on the class piazza site: http://piazza.com/iit_delhi/spring2024/hul360. The access code is *hul360*.

I have a strict prohibition on the use of electronic devices in class: you must bring hardcopies, which will be made available in SCOOPS.

Evaluation

I am increasingly of the view that the setting of exams and assignments, as well as their evaluation, comes in the way of learning. That said, my job does require me to prepare a framework for evaluation:

Pass-marks: 30%

20%: in-class participation, assessed via quizzes and responses

35%: mid-term (15%) and final (20%) exams (in-class, open-book)

35%: mid-term (15%) and final (20%) writing assignments (take-home)

10%: Writing reflection (take-home)

There is no formal attendance criterion.