

PHL 400.101 (course # 16247): Special Topics

Pleasure Unlimited:

Plato's *Philebus* and Derrida's "Double Session"

Michael Naas
DePaul University
Autumn 2017
M: 3:00-6:15

Office: Clifton Corners 150.5
(773) 325-1150
Office Hrs: M, W: 2:00-3:00
(or by appointment)

Description and Objectives

What is pleasure? That is the central question of Plato's late dialogue *Philebus*. In order to approach that one question, however, Plato ends up investigating everything from the nature of perception, memory, knowledge, dialectic, the finite and the infinite, measure, time, truth, and the Good, to imitation, painting, grammar, and rhetoric. In this course we will work through Plato's dialogue as slowly and methodically as possible in order to see why it became necessary for Plato to take detours through all these other questions in order to approach the single question of pleasure. To help us read this difficult text, we will take our own detours through other Platonic dialogues (*Alcibiades I*, *Statesman*, *Sophist*, and *Timaeus*, to name just a few) as well as Derrida's "The Double Session," an essay that juxtaposes a reading of *Philebus* on the question of imitation with Stéphane Mallarmé's "Mimique." My hope is that, by the end of the quarter, we will have learned something not only about Plato's understanding of pleasure, memory, imitation, the Good, and so on, but, even more importantly, about how both Plato and Derrida went about thinking and addressing these questions.

Required Reading

Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); ISBN 9780226143347; *La dissemination* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972).

Plato VIII (*Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Ion*), Loeb Classical Library; ISBN 9780674991828

Requirements

1. A final 10-12 page research paper due at noon on the Friday following our final class. Absolutely no extensions will be given for this paper. If a student is unable to hand in a paper by this time, he or she should come to the department to take a final exam.
2. Class Presentations and Preparation: each student will be asked to make one 15-20 minute in-

class presentation on the material we have already covered or the material we are preparing to cover. (We will discuss this further and assign topics during our first meeting.) I will also expect every student to come to class with 1-2 pages of prepared comments and/or questions related to the readings or the previous class. As a way of beginning or motivating discussion, I will often call on one or two seminar members to present their prepared questions. Ideally, these brief reading responses will provide us all with a set of themes or questions to pursue in final papers.

3. Attendance: everyone is allowed one absence for the quarter. Any more than one absence will result in the lowering of the final grade one to two notches (e.g., from A to A- or B+). (Two late arrivals *for* class or early departures *from* class—e.g., after the break—will count as one absence.) Class attendance, attention, and participation are, therefore, *extremely* important, so come tired, come with a hangover, come with a friend if you like, but come.

Grades

The final paper will count for 75% of the final grade. Class presentations, participation, prepared questions and responses, and attendance will make up the balance of the grade. Incompletes will be granted only in the most extenuating circumstances (like a coma—and even then...).

Schedule

Because it is difficult to predict exactly how much material we will cover in a given class, definitive reading assignments will be given out only the class before. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to contact a friend in the class to get the exact assignment. Since this is a graduate class, I will simply assume that *everyone* will have done *all* the reading by the beginning of a given class. I will not try to verify this through quizzes, but I will not hesitate to ask questions that anyone who has done the reading should be able to answer and I will ask students at random to present to the class the 1-2 page question or reading summary they will have prepared for each session. So please come prepared; it will make the seminar much more interesting and productive for us all.

Other Considerations

Students seeking disability-related accommodations are required to register with DePaul's *Center for Students with Disabilities* (CSD), which helps students to access accommodations and provides support services to assist in student success.

There are two office locations that can provide information about these services:

Loop Campus: Lewis Center #1420, (312) 362-8002

Lincoln Park Campus: Student Center #370, (773) 325-1677

Students can also inquire via email at csd@depaul.edu.

Students are also invited to contact me privately to discuss their challenges and how I may assist them with accommodations for the course. Note that this is best done early in the quarter.

Students can rest assured that our conversation will remain completely confidential.