

COURSE OUTLINE/ PHIL 651 SEMINAR IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

Topic: Plato's Symposium
Winter term 2019: TH 14:00 16:00
Leacock 927

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In this course we will read Plato's dialogue on love or *eros*, the *Symposium*, and consider (i) a number of philosophical questions that emerge in it, and (ii) its influence on debates about the worth of women, the nature of desire, and the possibility of knowledge in Renaissance Italy. The *Symposium* is renowned for a number of reasons: the pleasure of reading it, the interest of the topic of *eros*, the inventiveness of the character portraits of the speakers, the exploration of sexuality through multiple lenses, the vivid representation of Platonic forms. We will begin by considering the historical context (what symposia were, what the sexual norms of Athens at the time would have been (so far as we can discern)) and establishing some of the themes of the dialogue. These include: establishing the object or aim of love, determining whether love is single or double, evaluating the moral benefits and pitfalls of erotic experience, considering the difference between men and women as sufferers and objects of erotic desire, and drawing parallels between erotic desire and satisfaction on the one hand, and the pursuit of knowledge and its achievement on the other. Then we will read through the dialogue, considering its structure, the emergence of the different themes and philosophical questions, and the relation of the *Symposium* to other Platonic dialogues (in particular, the *Phaedrus*). Finally, we will read two Renaissance dialogues on the theme of love: Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani* (1505/1530) and Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love* (Venice, 1547). Our interest here will be in the interpretation of the notion of 'Platonic love' and its deployment for moral and epistemological purposes in the Renaissance, and the feminist uses Aragona makes of the *Symposium*.

Prerequisites: Students in this course should have taken at least one course in ancient philosophy; ideally, you will have taken PHIL 345, Plato.

Texts: Two books will be available from the Word Bookstore, 469 Milton Street: Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff (trans., eb6(r)8(u)31aeW*352a3W*nBTakes of the

Policy on extensions:

No extensions will be granted without an appropriate medical note. Late work will be penalized at the rate of a third of a grade per calendar day past the due date. For example, a paper that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a grade of B-; the same paper, if two days late, would receive a C+.

Required syllabus statements:

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