Will The Real Socrates Please Stand Up?
(Phi 624)
Westminster College
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Professor David W. Goldberg                         e-mail: goldbedw@westminster.edu
Office: Patterson 319                                    
Telephone: x7153

Course Description:

Our knowledge of Socrates comes from two primary sources: Plato and Xenophon. Both were followers of Socrates and witnessed his elenchal method of questioning individuals, thus supply each with a basis to construct their presentation of Socrates. Scholarly tradition has generally agreed that the Platonist corpus represents a more accurate and fully developed presentation of the “dog faced” philosopher. Within the 35 dialogues that are traditionally ascribed to Plato, there appears to be a mixed presentation of Socrates, such that the question of who is present has been continually raised. Are the dialogues Socratic or Platonic, or a mixture of both?

The problem of presentation has been debated over the years, with maybe the most famous analysis being that of Gregory Vlastos, who in his work *The Philosophy of Socrates: A Collection of Critical Essays*, puts the problem as the “paradox of Socrates.” The question is not one on the content of the dialogues, but rather of the nature and character of Socrates as portrayed in the dialogues. The usual analysis has the Platonic dialogues divided up into 3 periods (Early, Middle, and Late), with the suggestion that as we progress through the dialogues, the character of Socrates becomes more and more Platonic, until the final dialogue, *The Laws*, in which the character becomes just the Athenian.

This Independent Study will be an examination of some of the lesser read Platonic dialogues, lesser read in the sense of dialogues that are not usually handled in undergraduate courses, with the purpose of getting a feel for the multiple presentations of Socrates that Plato offers. At the end of the course, you should have an understanding of the paradox that is Socrates.

Required Texts:


*Phaedrus*, Plato, trans. by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, Hackett Publishing,


Assignments:

For each text that we will read, a short paper on the presentation of Socrates within that text will be presented, with the aim of analyzing how Plato uses Socrates within the dialogue, and how this use might differ from other dialogues. These assignments are to be between 1000 and 2000 words long. Each assignment will be graded on a 20-pts basis, with the total of all assignments determining the final grade.