

Introduction to Philosophy

What is Philosophy?

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- Plato, *Apology*.

Background

In 399BC, Socrates was brought to trial before an Athenian popular court for impiety and corruption of the youth. Plato's *Apology* presents Socrates defense against these charges. In attempting to prove his innocence, Socrates provides a passionate defense of philosophy (then still in its infancy) and its practice. In the end, this was not enough to convince his jury of 501 male fellow citizens; he died in prison by drinking hemlock as required by law.

Questions

1. How do Socrates' accusers characterize the activity of philosophy? Do they see it as beneficial or dangerous to society? For what reasons might they see philosophy in this way?
2. What story does Socrates tell about Chaerephon's visit to Delphi? How does Socrates respond to the Oracle's statement? What does he learn from doing this? Throughout, Socrates what type of ignorance does Socrates profess? How does all this exemplify the practice of philosophy and its subject matter?
3. Socrates claims he will never cease to practice philosophy, even under pain of death. What reasons does he give for this? Do you agree or disagree with his decision? Why or why not.