



Ancient Philosophy | PIP77072

Year	MPhil
ECTS Credits	10
Semester	2
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Module Outline:

The aim of this M.Phil seminar is to work together on a research project that I am currently undertaking on Plato and the Care of the Soul. To set out the project, I have written the following research proposal and proposal for a monograph. This gives, I think, a good idea of the topic, what it will concentrate on and the tasks it will involve.

Title of proposed monograph: *Plato and the Care for the Soul*

Aim:

It is more than a hundred years ago that John Burnet argued, to my mind plausibly and attractively, that if there is a single thing that characterizes Socrates as we find him in Plato (Burnet confined himself to the Apology), it is his exhortation that we, each of us, care for his or her soul and self. A similar view has been defended more recently by Michel Foucault in his 1982 Lectures to the College de France. However, with the exception of the Apology and Alcibiades I, little work has been done on this topic—the care for the soul and self (epimeleia psychēs/heautou) in Plato—and no attempt has been made to treat of the topic comprehensively and systematically in Plato. The aim of the present monograph is to do just this.

Rather than starting with the Apology (which I treat of at the end of the monograph), in regard of which the topic of care for the soul has been treated extensively by scholars, I begin with the Phaedo and argue that the care for the soul is the one master-theme in the dialogue, the other being, as is familiar, the arguments for and against the immortality of the soul. I then treat of the topic in the Statesman, and argue that, though not immediately visible, the care for the soul is a central theme in the dialogue.

I go on to consider this topic in book X of the Laws. There, Plato works out the care of the soul in relation to God and his care for us. I then treat of the topic in Alcibiades I (considerable work has been done on this by critics) before I take another look at the care of the soul in the Apology. I end with an appendix, in which I ask how innovative was, at his time, Plato's account of the care for the soul; a question that requires considering how innovative was, at his time, Plato's very notion and conception of the soul.



I argue, throughout the monograph and most especially in Chapter 3, that my treatment of the topic of the care for the soul and self in Plato is distinctive and works out a particular angle on this topic. This distinctive angle says that, for Plato, the care for the soul and self means the care for the individual life and soul of each person. I argue (especially in Chapter 1) that, for Plato, the care for the soul and self is required first and foremost to create an individual and unitary self in the first place. This means that, for Plato, the absence of the care for the soul and self amounts to a serious neglect (*ameleia*) of oneself, and a neglect that issues in the dissolution of oneself.

Chapters:

Chapter 1. The Care for the Soul and Arguments for Immortality. Two Mater-Themes in the *Phaedo*

Chapter 2. Plato's Argument in *Statesman* 274a6–c1 for a Rule that is Without Laws

Chapter 3. Plato's Acquaintance-Reliant, Particularist Account of Kingly Knowledge and Rule. *Statesman* 295a10–b5

[Chapter 4. Nurturing the Human Herd. The Care for the Individual in the *Statesman*]

[Chapter 5. God's Care for Humans in *Laws* 10]

[Chapter 6. The Care for the Soul as a Preparation for Politics in *Alcibiades I*]

[Chapter 7. Another Look at the Care for the Soul in the *Apology*]

[Appendix. How Innovative was Plato's Account of the Care for the Soul?]

The current state of the project:

I have, as of now (June 2023), written complete and polished drafts of the first three of the six projected chapters. So far this amounts to a total of 45000 words. It amounts to almost half of the projected monograph.

Timeline:

I intend to submit the manuscript no later than Christmas 2024.

Intended audience:

While the intended audience includes in the first instance primarily ancient philosophers and scholars of Plato, the topic of the care for the soul and self is (as witnessed by the extremely wide interest in Michel Foucault's work on the topic and likewise the work by Pierre Hadot and, more recently, John Cooper) of very wide interest. This should, all going well, make this monograph popular and significant beyond the boundaries of ancient philosophy and Plato scholarship and, potentially, the boundaries of academia.

Vasilis Politis, June 2023