

VITAL REMNANTS

A GUIDE TO THE LAST DAYS OF SOCRATES



McCONNELL CENTER
LEADERSHIP ★ SCHOLARSHIP ★ SERVICE

OF
LOUISVILLE



Recommended Text

Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*
Translated and with Introductions
and Notes by Christopher Rowe
(Penguin Books, 2010)



Accompanying Podcast

Vital Remnants Season 3
The Last Days of Socrates
Available May-August, 2020 on:
Apple Podcasts, Spotify &
Google Podcasts

VITAL REMNANTS

A GUIDE TO THE LAST DAYS OF SOCRATES



INTRODUCTION

The Text: Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*. Translated with Introductions and Notes by Christopher Rowe (New York, Penguin Books, 2010)

Accompanying Podcast: *Vital Remnants* | Season 3 | The Last Days of Socrates
Listen, like, comment, share and subscribe on:



APPLE
PODCASTS



Spotify®



Listen on
Google Podcasts

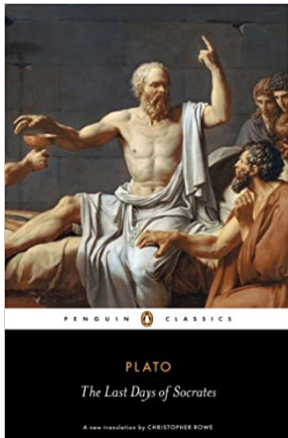
Plato never wrote a book entitled *The Last Days of Socrates*. He did, however, write several smaller dialogues that take place during the last few days Socrates spent in Athens before his execution. This book is a collection of four of those closely related discourses that raise essential questions about the order of human politics and the place human beings have in the order of the cosmos.

These dialogues begin with Socrates having been charged with corrupting the youth of Athens. Before his trial, he explores what obligations human beings have to the gods. His interlocutor is a man charging his own father with murder, believing divine justice demands it. Socrates's trial is the setting of the second dialogue and, along with the Republic, is probably the most celebrated of the Platonic corpus. The third dialogue picks up when he is in prison and faced with an opportunity to escape. The final dialogue ends with Socrates's taking the hemlock and, fittingly, is a meditation on the immortality of the soul.



Gary L. Gregg, PhD | ggregg@louisville.edu
SBS Lead Faculty & Director, McConnell Center

OVERVIEW OF READINGS



THE TEXT

Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*

Translated with
Introductions and Notes
by Christopher Rowe (New
York, Penguin Books, 2010)

SESSION I: MAY 4

Read: “Euthyphro,” pp. 6-26

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 3, Episode 1

SESSION II: JUNE 1

Read: “The Apology,” pp. 32-62

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 3, Episode 2

SESSION III: JULY 6

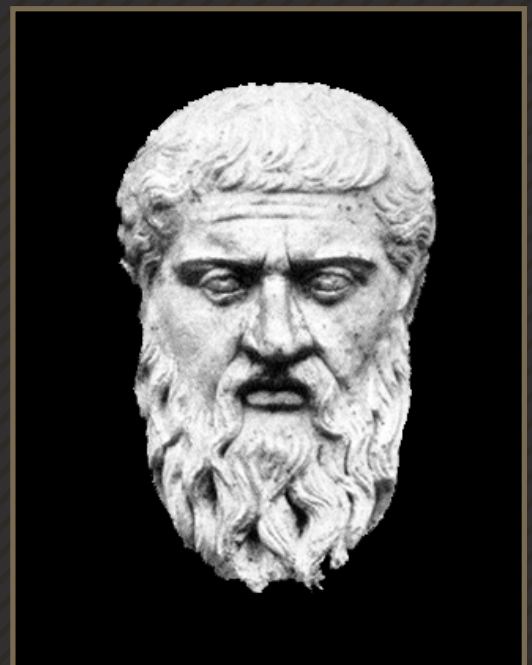
Read: “The Crito,” pp. 66-81

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 3, Episode 3

SESSION IV: AUGUST 3

Read: “The Phaedo,” pp. 87-169

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 3, Episode 4



VITAL REMNANTS | THE LAST DAYS OF SOCRATES

SESSION I | EUTHYPHRO

Read: “Euthyphro,” pp. 6-26

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 3, Episode 1

OVERVIEW

The big question in the “Euthyphro” revolves around piety: what do we owe the gods and what should be the nature of our relationship to the divine? Socrates happens upon a man who is taking that relationship so seriously that he is indicting his own father for breaking a moral law. Socrates pokes at the man’s strong convictions by asking him to explain whether certain things are good because the gods love them or if the gods love them because they are good. That is a profound question to start on!

CONSIDER

- *What is the relationship between divine injunctions and legal responsibilities?*
- *What is Plato saying about theology and philosophy?*
- *What does it mean to be pious?*
- *Is Euthyphro justified in his determination to indict his father?*
- *How does Socrates seek to undermine Euthyphro?*



VITAL REMNANTS | THE LAST DAYS OF SOCRATES

SESSION II | THE APOLOGY

Read: “The Apology,” pp. 32-62

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 3, Episode 2

OVERVIEW

The trial of Socrates is one of the most celebrated (and condemned) moments in the history of democracy, philosophy and human rights. The trial was conducted in one day with 501 jurors making a democratic decision on guilt or innocence. There were no lawyers, simply an accusation, and Socrates chose to provide his own defense.

CONSIDER

- *What was the nature of the charges against Socrates?*
- *Do you think they were contrived or real concerns?*
- *Does the fact that a democratic jury convicted this great teacher say anything about the possibility of a democracy being just?*
- *Note the underlying tension between making a persuasive argument and telling the truth. What can we learn about rhetoric from this dialogue?*
- *What does Socrates mean by calling himself a “gadfly,” and do you agree that societies need these figures or are they dangerous to the point they should not be encouraged?*
- *The American founders knew the story of the trial of Socrates, and it is referenced in *The Federalist Papers*. Does understanding this event better help you understand why the founders sought to create a republic and not a direct democracy?*



VITAL REMNANTS | THE LAST DAYS OF SOCRATES

SESSION III | THE CRITO

Read: “The Crito,” pp. 66-81

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 3, Episode 3

OVERVIEW

The third dialogue in this collection finds Socrates having been convicted and awaiting the execution of his sentence in prison. This dialogue raises more questions about public opinion and democratic rule.

CONSIDER

- *Democracy is based on the rule of the majority, but does being part of a majority make your opinion worth listening to or deserving of having power?*
- *We must value not just living, but living well, Socrates tells us. How does that sentiment speak to modern America—particularly an America disrupted under social distancing and stay-at-home orders?*
- *When the laws of Athens come down to visit him, what do they say?*
- *What does this dialogue say about our responsibilities to the laws we live under?*
- *What does it mean for the possibility of civil disobedience?*
- *What is this dialogue’s relationship with the Apology in which the individual gadfly seems to be more celebrated?*



VITAL REMNANTS | THE LAST DAYS OF SOCRATES

SESSION IV | THE PHAEDO

Read: “The Phaedo,” pp. 87-169

Listen: *Vital Remnants* | Season 3, Episode 4

OVERVIEW

The translator of the book says the Phaedo might have more variety of subject matter than is covered in any other Platonic text. He also, quite intriguingly, says the text resembles Russian nesting dolls with a variety of topics nested skillfully within a text about the immortality of the human soul. You will encounter questions of pain and pleasure, suicide and what a good life looks like. We also see an explanation of the “Forms” that is so essential to Platonic thought. This is a deep one dealing with really long-term concerns and will demand some serious thought, but the subject matter couldn’t be more worth the time!

CONSIDER

- *What do you make of his argument that education is a kind of recollection of knowledge we knew in a previous life but forgot at birth?*
- *If the soul is immortal, as Socrates insists it is, this life is about caring for the soul as an eternal entity, not just about caring for ourselves for the moment. How does his account resemble or diverge from admonitions given by other religious traditions?*
- *What do you think of his account of ghosts and hauntings here on Earth or of his account of the “true Earth”?*

