Greg Kirk
Philosophy Department
Northern Arizona University

Presents:

The Imperative to Change:
The Demanding Initiation into the Socratic Way of Life

Thursday, March 7th
Liberal Arts Building, Room 114
3:45 – 5:00 pm

This paper is a reflection on Socrates’ practice of questioning or cross-examining (i.e. the elenchus). I argue that his practice is not directed primarily at the accomplishment of knowledge of moral truth, but rather at initiating others into a way of life devoted to questioning one’s own prejudices, in order to orient oneself to perpetually strive for knowledge of moral truth. I take this practice to be synonymous with soul-care. I argue that Socrates’ primary focus on initiating young people into the practice of being purged of their accumulated prejudices is motivated by key insights into the ways of the human soul: first, that we build lives around (typically unarticulated) conceptual commitments that, over time, become increasingly entrenched; second, that challenges to those unarticulated commitments is increasingly experienced as a threat to a way of life we either are unwilling to or take ourselves to be unable to change. This demonstrates how demanding Socrates’ challenge is, and demonstrates why being initiated into the philosophical way of life is rare in adulthood. My discussion focuses primarily on opening moments from Plato’s Theaetetus and Euthyphro, with some reference to the Apology and the Charmides.

For more information, please contact the Philosophy Department at 523-2648.