

## **Plato's *Republic*, Autumn 2012, Jonny Thakkar**

M/W 1:30-2:50pm, HM 102

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Office hours: M/W 3-4:30, Cobb 324

### **Course Description**

Plato's *Republic* is arguably the greatest work of philosophy in the Western tradition. A literary masterpiece from a formal perspective, its discussions of ethics, politics, psychology, aesthetics, metaphysics and epistemology somehow manage to be both foundational for Western philosophy and deeply alien to our own intuitions. It therefore richly repays close reading and spirited debate.

I expect us to pay particular attention to the relationship between philosophy and ruling, as well as to Platonic psychology, but this will be a discussion class and so the overall direction will be shaped by the questions that students bring to the text. For that reason students are required to read the text beforehand – we will be using the C.D.C. Reeve edition – and to participate fully in the biweekly Chalk assignments outlined below. Philological questions will remain off the table, but we will make use of scholarly literature to help us understand the structure of Plato's arguments and how they bear on our own world.

Although our focus will be on getting to grips with Plato, in doing so we will also hone our skills as readers, speakers and writers. As readers, we will practice close reading of specific passages in order to develop our analytical skills, getting better at finding argumentative structures and becoming more sensitive to literary and rhetorical art. As speakers, we will work on becoming more articulate and considerate conversation partners. The ideal of a discussion class is that everyone makes their points clearly and concisely and with genuine attention to what others have said. This requires taking notes as the discussion proceeds, and being willing to intervene if it seems that one class member is misunderstanding another. It also requires active participation by everyone. Some will have to make a special effort to get over their shyness; others will have to restrain themselves to make room for others to speak. As writers, we will develop our ability to produce challenging, coherent and persuasive arguments, learning when and how to deploy evidence in support of our claims, how best to deal with counter-arguments, and so on. With these goals in mind let us turn to the course requirements.

### **Course Requirements**

This is a discussion class. Attendance is therefore mandatory, and so is active participation. Active participation requires thorough preparation, so students must do all the reading for each class. Students may miss one class per term for any reason whatsoever, so long as they inform me beforehand.

Mondays will differ from Wednesdays. Monday's classes will follow the standard format: we will arrive having done all the reading (one book of the *Republic* plus a couple of articles)

and then discuss some of the most important passages. Wednesday's classes, in contrast, will be fundamentally shaped by students' interests and concerns as transmitted via Chalk. The class will be divided into four groups (A, B, C, D). Members of one group (A) will write 750-1000 words on a passage from the reading, explaining why they find it particularly interesting or challenging. For example, the passage might:

- seem like a bad argument
- seem to contradict an earlier passage
- seem to undermine our usual assumptions

You might argue that what at first looks like a problem dissolves on closer inspection; or you might argue that there is no way to sweep the problem under the carpet. The main constraint is that your post be both backed up by evidence and good for stimulating discussion – it shouldn't be obvious to someone who has read the text casually. These posts should be up on Chalk by 7pm on Tuesday night. At that point members of the second group (B) will read the posts and write a paragraph in response to any one of them, regardless of whether it has already received a response. (In fact, you can also respond to a response.) Responses should critically evaluate the claims made by the earlier post, either building upon or disagreeing with it. These responses should be up on Chalk by 10am on Wednesday morning, at which point every member of class should log in and read the discussions. Needless to say, this will require discipline and diligence on the part of each student.

Good writing requires rewriting. Although there will be only one, ten-page paper required for this course, this paper will be the subject of drafting and redrafting. This is best done collaboratively. Once the first drafts have been submitted, each student will therefore be assigned the task of coming up with a paragraph of (anonymous) comments and suggestions for a peer. This process should benefit the commenter as well as the author, since learning to evaluate and improve others' work can help one learn to do the same for oneself. Paper topics will be circulated on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> November; first drafts will be due on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> November; they will be returned to students, with two sets of comments, on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November; and then final drafts will be due on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Evaluation**

Students will be evaluated based on one paper (worth 80%) and their participation throughout the quarter (worth 20%). The chalk posts will not be graded, though they will form part of your participation assessment. Late work will not be accepted unless there is documentary evidence of an emergency. Students found to have plagiarized work will fail the course.

### **Courtesy**

Please refrain from using mobile phones, computers and other gadgets during class.

### **Books**

The only required text is Plato's *Republic*, tr. C. D. C. Reeve (Hackett 2004), which should be available at the Seminary Cooperative Bookstore. All other readings will be made available via Chalk or the Regenstein Course Reserves.

## Schedule

### 1. October 1-3: *Republic* Book I

(A&B)

Rachel Barney, 'Socrates' Refutation of Thrasymachus'

### 2. October 8-10: *Republic* Book II

(C&D)

Terence Irwin, 'Republic 2: questions about justice'

### 3. October 15-17: *Republic* Book III

(B&A)

Jonathan Lear, 'Allegory and Myth in Plato's Republic'

Malcolm Schofield, 'The Noble Lie'

*Optional:* Gabriel Lear, 'Plato on Learning to Love Beauty'; Sally Haslanger, 'But Mom, Crop-tops *Are* Cute!'; Drew Hyland, 'The Sweatiest of the Liberal Arts'

### 4. October 22-24: *Republic* Book IV

(D&C)

J. M. Cooper, 'Plato's Theory of Human Motivation'

Aryeh Kosman: 'Justice and Virtue: *The Republic's* Inquiry into Proper Difference'

*Optional:* Myles Burnyeat, 'The Truth of Tripartition'

### 5. October 29-31: *Republic* Book V

(A&B)

Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, chs. 6-9 [on 4-hour reserve]

Gregory Vlastos, 'Was Plato a Feminist?'

*Optional:* C. C. W. Taylor, 'Plato's Totalitarianism'; Plutarch, 'Life of Lycurgus'

### 6. November 5-7: *Republic* Book VI

(C&D)

Myles Burnyeat, 'Utopia and Fantasy: The Practicability of Plato's Ideally Just City'

Gail Fine, 'Knowledge and Belief in Republic V—VII'

*Optional:* Gregory Vlastos, 'Degrees of Reality in Plato'

**\*\*Paper Topics Released on Monday November 5<sup>th</sup>\*\***

**7. November 12-14: *Republic* Book VII**

**(B&A)**

Richard Kraut, 'Return to the Cave: Republic 519—521'

J. C. B. Gosling, 'Mathematics and Goodness'

*Optional:* Myles Burnyeat, 'Plato on why Mathematics is good for the Soul' in *Mathematics and Necessity*, ed. Smiley, T. [on 4-hour reserve]

**8. November 19-21: *Republic* Book VIII**

**(D&C)**

Bernard Williams, 'The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's Republic'

Jonathan Lear, 'Inside and Outside the Republic'

***\*\*First Drafts Due Monday 19<sup>th</sup> in class\*\****

**9. November 26-28: *Republic* Book IX**

G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, chs. 2 and 3

Richard Parry, 'The unhappy tyrant and the craft of inner rule'

*Optional:* Zena Hitz, 'Degenerate regimes in Plato's Republic'; Jonny Thakkar, 'The Withering of Narcissus'

***\*\*Film Screening: *The Conformist* (Bernardo Bertolucci)\*\****

**10. December 3-5: *Republic* Book X**

Alexander Nehamas, 'Plato and the Mass Media'

Myles Burnyeat: 'Culture and Society in Plato's Republic', Lectures 1-3

*Optional:* Danielle Allen, 'The Philosopher as Model-Maker' and 'The Philosopher as Shadow-Maker'; Stephen Halliwell, 'The Life-and-Death Journey of the Soul: Interpreting the Myth of Er'

***\*\*Final Drafts Due Monday 10<sup>th</sup> at 4:00, Cobb 324\*\****