

POSC 250/350

KINGS, TYRANTS, PHILOSOPHERS:

PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

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Office hours: M 5-7, Th 3-5,
and by appt.

I. Purpose and Scope

In this course we will examine ancient political philosophy through the intensive study of Plato's *Republic*, perhaps the greatest work of political philosophy ever written. Precisely because of the depth and comprehensiveness of its examination of political questions, the *Republic* addresses questions which go far beyond what we today normally think of as the political realm. In this work whose ostensible topic is justice, Plato treats such questions as: What is morality? Why should a person behave morally—wouldn't it be more satisfying to be a tyrant? Is justice good for the just person? Regarding society and the variety of possible regimes, the work asks: What would a perfect society look like? Who would rule? What would be its customs and institutions regarding the respective roles of the sexes? What would be the status of the family in such a society, and in what ways is the family good or bad from the standpoint of society's needs? Regarding the individual, the work considers the many possible ways of life and asks which is best, all the while exploring the question of human nature and the "politics" that take place within the psyche itself. Beyond all that, the work asks whether we see reality as it is or whether, to the contrary, we live amid illusions and prejudices that we mistake for reality.

Because the *Republic* is a dialogue and not a treatise, we never receive definitive answers to these questions in Plato's own name. (Plato does not appear as a character in the dialogue.) But if the dialogue form poses difficulties that a treatise does not, it more than compensates for them with literary and intellectual satisfactions that few if any treatises can match.

II. Course Requirements

By far the most important requirement is that you read all assigned passages **closely** and **before class**. The *Republic* is one of those great philosophic works which, although difficult to penetrate, nevertheless offers much to the first-time reader. But it offers even more to the persistent reader, so you are advised to read the assignments **more than once**. Those seeking further insight may wish to consult Allan Bloom's Interpretive Essay (located at the back of the book), which offers a section by section commentary on the text, and some of the works listed on the list that appears below. But you should not consult any interpreter until you have first read (and, preferably, reread) the assigned portion of the text on your own. Grades for those enrolled in POSC 250 will be based on two 6-8 page papers (30% each), a take-home final exam (30%), and class participation (10%). Grades for those opting for the POSC 350 (pre-comps) version of the course will be based on a twenty page seminar paper on a topic approved by the instructor

(60%), the take-home exam (30%), and class participation (10%).

III. Academic Honesty

Strict standards of academic integrity will be upheld in this class. Your submission of written work means that your work is your own, that it is in accord with Carleton's regulations on academic integrity, and that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Be sure you are familiar with Carleton's principles and policies on Academic Honesty: if you haven't done so already, review the website found at <https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/>. I take academic honesty very seriously: students who are found to have violated these standards should expect severe sanctions.

IV. Reading Schedule

The following schedule is only approximate. We may depart from it if and when class discussion so requires. The numbers refer to the traditional Stephanus pagination, which appears in the outer margins of each page of text.

January 4: 327a-336a (first part of Book 1)

January 9: 336a-354c (remainder of Book 1: Socrates and Thrasymachus)

January 11: 357a-372e (first half of Book 2)

January 16: 372e-383c (second half of Book 2)

January 18: 386a-403c (first half of Book 3)

January 23: 403c-417b (second half of Book 3)

January 25: 419a-434c (first half of Book 4)

January 30: 434c-445e (second half of Book 4)

February 1: 449a-473c (first two thirds of Book 5); also read Aristophanes, "The Assembly of Women"

POSC 250: FIRST PAPER DUE AT NOON ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 5:00 PM

February 6: 473c-487a (remainder of Book 5, beginning of Book 6)

February 8: 487b-503b ("middle half" of Book 6)

February 13: 503b-511e (remainder of Book 6)

February 15: 514a-541b (Book 7)

February 20: 543a-562a (first two thirds of Book 8)

February 22: 562a-576b (remainder of Book 8, beginning of Book 9)

POSC 250: SECOND PAPER DUE AT NOON ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 5:00 PM

February 27: 576b-592b (remainder of Book 9)

February 29: 595a-608b (first half of Book 10)

March 5: 608c-21d (second half of Book 10)

March 7: Catchup day or concluding discussion

POSC 350: SEMINAR PAPER DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 5:00 PM

POSC 250 and 350: TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 6:00 PM

Recommended secondary reading:

The following books are on closed reserve at the Library, except for Bloom (which you already own):

Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*

Allan Bloom, "Interpretive Essay."

Eva Brann, *The Music of the Republic* (title essay especially, but other essays as well).

Laurence D. Cooper, *Eros in Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche: The Politics of Infinity* (esp. chapter 1, "On the Dynamic Psychology of the Republic")

Leon Harold Craig, *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic*

Gene Fendt, *Comic Cure for Delusional Democracy: Plato's Republic*

Jacob Howland, *Glaucon's Fate*

Jacob Howland, *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*

Michael Kochin, *Gender and Rhetoric in Plato's Political Thought*

David Roochnik, *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato's Republic*

Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Republic: A Study*

Devin Stauffer, *Plato's Introduction to the Question of Justice* (predominantly on book 1)

The following readings pertain to specific themes or sections of the dialogue:

Regarding the dialogue form:

Drew A. Hyland, "Why Plato Wrote Dialogues" (Moodle)

Charles L. Griswold, "Plato's Metaphilosophy: Why Plato Wrote Dialogues" (Moodle)

Regarding the "three waves" of paradox in book 5:

Dale Hall, "The Republic and the 'Limits of Politics'" (Moodle)

Allan Bloom, "Response to Hall" (Moodle)

Drew A. Hyland, "Plato's Three Waves and the Question of Utopia" (Moodle)

Steven Forde, "Gender and Justice in Plato" (Moodle)

Jacob Howland, "The *Republic's* Third Wave and the Paradox of Political Philosophy" (Moodle)

Regarding some of the difficult ideas and images of books 6 and 7:

David Lachterman, "What Is 'The Good' of Plato's *Republic*?" (Moodle)

Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, pages 115-25 (pertains to book 6's discussion of the "divided line"; Moodle)

Regarding the nature and power of dialectic (book 7):

Thomas Pangle, *Ennobling Democracy*, pp. 184-94 (on reserve at the Library)