

# PLATO'S REPUBLIC (in English)

MT2018

Simon-Pierre Chevarie-Cossette<sup>1</sup> ([spccossette@gmail.com](mailto:spccossette@gmail.com))

## General information on the classes

### I. Course content

Through the course, the student will be led to read the ten books of Plato's *Republic*, a lot of secondary literature, and some other of Plato's dialogues. There are different approaches to studying Plato. Some are more historical or interpretative in that they try primarily to understand what Plato said. They themselves could be more or less focussed on the text itself; or on Plato's dialogues in general; or even on Plato's writings in relation with other thinkers of Antiquity.

This class is however, not strictly historical. One of the reasons why Plato's *Republic* is still vastly read today is that it asks *quantity* of interesting philosophical questions. And it gives first approximations of theories which are still alive today. Its methodology still resembles ours. And, at the same time, it offers beautiful but sometimes strange perspectives on questions that we would tackle very differently; this invites us to reconsider some of our contemporary dogmas. And this forces us to still engage in careful interpretation of some the passages of the *Republic*.

The *Republic* covers a remarkable range of topics. The faculty reading list itself notes fifteen, and it is impossible to cover all topics in eight weeks. Hence this selection is a suggestion, intended to give a good grasp of the central themes of the work.

### II. Assignments

Each week you will write an essay of approximately 1500–2500 words on the essay question that I give for each topic, below. Email it to me and to your tutorial partner 48 hours before our meeting. During the class, you will quickly present your essay or your tutorial partner's. Make sure you are able to sketch your arguments in less than five minutes.

Here are ten tips to help you writing your essays. (1) Reread your essay at least twice before sending it to me. (2) Use topic sentences, that is reread the first sentence of each of your paragraphs: ideally, this would give you a summary of your essay. (3) Upon rereading a sentence, if you do not immediately understand it, rewrite it. (4) Never write sentences that are longer than three lines. (5) Never use technical vocabulary without defining it. If you feel like there are too many definitions, try to cut down the number of technical words you are using. (6) Always illustrate abstract principles with examples. (7) If you present a

---

<sup>1</sup> This syllabus is inspired from the syllabi of Harry Alanen and of Katherine O'Reilly, to which I am profoundly indebted.

counterexample, try not only to make it clear how it is a counterexample, but what structural reason we have for believing that the principle is false. (8) State your conclusions clearly at the beginning and end of the essay, and include plenty of ‘signposts’ throughout the essay so that the intended structure of your argument is easy to discern. (9) Spare us long and literary introductions. (10) Read the following guide and try to apply its lessons:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.htm>

It is crucial that you do the readings, especially the mandatory readings (marked with a star (\*)). Without them, tutorials will be much less valuable. There will be times (trust me) when you regret not having read more (both during finals and after, when you’re busy with other things).

### **III. Marking and late work**

If you hand in your essay on time, I will read it and supply written comments, and email it to you in the tutorial or a few hours before. *You get to decide whether you want me to give you a general grade (2.2, low-high-mid 2.1, first) or whether you prefer that I stick to qualitative comments.* If your essay is late, I can’t make any promises. It is important that you hand your essay in even if I do not have time to comment on it, as I am required to report to your college how many pieces of work you have completed to a satisfactory standard.

Notify me by email as soon as possible, and at any rate before the start of the tutorial, if you will be late handing in your essay, and/or unable to attend one of the tutorials, giving your reasons. If you are experiencing difficulties (academic or otherwise) that are affecting your ability to work at your normal standard, or you are concerned about your level of understanding of this topic, don’t suffer in silence – let me know as soon as possible.

### **IV. ‘Study questions’ and Finals preparation**

*Finals questions are quite specific. They do not simply say ‘Describe Plato’s Republic’, and you can’t count on the Finals paper containing questions that happen to match your tutorial essay questions.* Every single examiners’ report complains that many students simply recycle their tutorial essays in response to Finals questions that were asking something quite different.

To be well prepared for Finals, you will need to know (at least) two or three topics with enough depth and breadth that you can understand and intelligently discuss almost anything the examiners choose to ask on that topic. Study strategies vary, and only you can discover what works for you, but one sensible strategy would be:

- (i) As you read for tutorials: write out (in note form) your answers to the ‘Study questions’ that I’ve included with each topic. This will ensure that you are picking up most of the *basic* material from the readings.

- (ii) During the vacations, when you have more time: Choose the two or three topics that interest you most, and do further readings for that topic. Think through *your own views* in detail, and review your original answers to the Study Questions. Be original – is there anything that you think the authors whose work you’ve read have been missing? Work out what you think each of the listed past Finals questions is getting at, what you think about the issue it is raising, how you could structure an essay, *answering precisely that question*, that you could write in fifty minutes.
- (iii) Read widely around the subject (beyond these reading lists), and keep an eye out for non-core lectures and seminars related to Ethics that interest you.

## V. Version of the *Republic*

We will follow the Faculty’s recommendation and use: *Plato Republic*, tr. G.M.A. Grube, revised by C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett 1992)

## VI. References

You should use the Stanford, Routledge, and Internet *Encyclopedias* (all online). I also strongly suggest that you have a look at *Oxford Bibliography Online* (<http://oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195389661/obo-9780195389661-0006.xml?rskey=KUPOWC&result=2&q=Plato#firstMatch>).

For introductory handbooks or for line by line commentaries, please refer to the exhaustive reading list on WebLearn.

## Week 1: Thrasymachus’s Challenge

**Essay question:** What is Thrasymachus’s conception of justice? Is it convincing?

**Secondary questions:** Does Thrasymachus present one or two conceptions of justice (338c-341a, 343b-344d)? Does Socrates’s response help us to understand what goes wrong about Thrasymachus’s conception? What’s the difference between Thrasymachus’s conception of justice and Callicles’s (in the *Gorgias*)?

### Readings:

(\*) *Republic* Book I.

(\*) Barney, Rachel. ‘Socrates’ Refutation of Thrasymachus in G. Santas (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Plato’s Republic* (2006).

(\*) Reeve, C.D.C. (1985.) ‘Socrates meets Thrasymachus’ in *Archiv für Geschichte der*

*Philosophie*. Volume 67, 246-65.

(\*) Anderson, Merrick. (2016) 'Thrasymachus Sophistic Account of Justice in *Republic* i', *Ancient Philosophy*, 151-172.

*Gorgias*.

Barney, Rachel. 'Callicles and Thrasymachus', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/callicles-thrasymachus/>.

For more reading on this topic, see the entries under B.3. on the faculty reading list.

## Week 2: Socrates's Response and Glaucon & Adeimantus's Challenge

**Essay question:** Is Socrates's response to Thrasymachus satisfying? How does Glaucon's and Adeimantus's challenge compare with it?

**Secondary questions:** Why is Glaucon unhappy with Socrates reply to Thrasymachus? How does Glaucon classify different goods, and what does this add to the argument? What's the difference is Socrates's answer to their challenge and to Thrasymachus? Read (skim) *Crito*. What is absent in *both* *Crito* and *Republic I*?

### Readings:

(\*) *Republic* Book I-II (especially 357-367; you can stop at 367).

(\*) Shields, Christopher. 'Plato's Challenge: The Case Against Justice in *Republic II*' in Santas (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic* (2006).

(\*) Weiss, Roslyn. 'Wise Guys and Smart Alecks in *Republic 1* and *2*, in Ferrari (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to Plato's Republic* (2007), 90-114.

Annas, Julia. (1981.) *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Chapter 3.

*Crito*.

C.D.C. Reeve. (2008.) 'Glaucon's Challenge and Thrasymacheanism' in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 69-103.

For more reading on this topic, see the entries under B.4. on the faculty reading list.

## Week 3: Totalitarianism and the City-Soul Analogy

**Essay question:** *Plato's method of understanding justice in the city in analogy with justice in the soul could but lead to a totalitarian ideal. And it has.* Comment.

**Secondary questions:** Why does Plato turn from individual accounts of justice to considering justice in the city? How is the ideal city constructed? What role does education play? What is the element that brings the fall of the city? What is a totalitarian regime? What is an individual? What is the goal of the politician in *Alcibiades*?

### Readings:

(\*) *Republic* (367e-427d). (Note: Rep. 427c-436a, 441c-445e could also be helpful, but don't worry if you don't mention them.)

(\*) Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and its Enemies, volume i: the spell of Plato* (Routledge 2002, 5th edition), Chapter 6 (4 may also be helpful).

(\*) Blössner, Norbert. 2007. 'The City-Soul Analogy,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*. Ed. G. R. F. Ferrari. Cambridge: CUP.

(\*) *Alcibiades*;

Brown, L.: 'How Totalitarian is Plato's Republic?', in Ostenfeld, E.N. (ed.) *Essays on Plato's Republic* 13-25.

Burnyeat, M.F.: 'Utopia and Fantasy: the practicability of Plato's ideal city', in J. Hopkins & A. Savile, ed. (1992.) *Psychoanalysis, Mind and Art*, 175-87, reprinted in Fine, G., ed. *Plato 2*, 297-308.

Julia Annas, 'An Introduction to Plato's Republic', Chapter 4

Kenny, A.J.P. (1969.) 'Mental Health in Plato's Republic', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 229-253.

Williams, Bernard. 'The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's Republic', reprinted in Fine (ed.) *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul* (OUP, 1999), 255-264.

For more reading on this topic, see the entries under B.5, 7. on the faculty reading list.

## Week 4: The Division of the Soul

**Essay question:** Does Plato offer a plausible account of the soul/mind, and why?

## Readings:

- (\*) *Republic*, Book IV (in particular 436a-441c; VIII and IX 580-588 could be useful);
- (\*) Lorenz, Hendrick. 'The Analysis of the Soul in Plato's Republic' in G. Santas (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*, (2005.) 146-165.
- (\*) Moss, Jessica. 'Appearances and Calculation: Plato's Division of the Soul', in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, (2008.) 35-68.
- (\*) Ferrari, G.R.F. 'The Three-Part Soul', in G.R.F. Ferrari (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, 165-201.
- Protagoras*.
- Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 1981, chapter 5.
- Cooper, J.M. (1984.) 'Plato's Theory of Human Motivation', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 3-21, reprinted in G. Fine (ed.) (2000.) *Plato 2: ethics, politics, religion and the soul*, 186-206.
- Robinson, R. (1971.) 'Plato's Separation of Reason from Desire', *Phronesis*, 38-48.

For more reading on this topic, see the entries under B.6. on the faculty reading list.

## Week 5: Feminism in the City

Essay question: Is Plato's Republic feministic?

## Readings:

- (\*) *Republic* 442-472, in particular 449-466.
- (\*) Calvert, Brian. (1975.) 'Plato and the Equality of Women', *Phoenix*, 231-243.
- (\*) Saxonhouse, Arlene W. (1976.) 'The Philosopher and the Female in the Political Thought of Plato' 95-113.
- (\*) McAfee, Noëlle. (2014.) 'Feminist Political Philosophy', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Annas, Julias. (1976.) 'Plato's *Republic* and Feminism', *Philosophy*, 307-21.

For more reading on this topic, see the entries under B.14. on the faculty reading list.

## Week 6: Knowledge, Belief, and Forms

**Essay question:** Outline and assess critically Plato's distinction between belief and knowledge in *Republic* 5.

**Secondary question:** What does Plato mean when he says belief is of 'what both is and is not'? What is knowable and what is not? What kind of objects can really be known and why?

### Readings:

(\*) *Republic* 473c-480;

(\*) Fine, Gail. 'Knowledge and Belief in Republic V–VII' in G. Fine (ed.) *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, (1999) 215-246.

(\*) Lee, D.C. (2010.) 'Interpreting Plato's Republic: Knowledge and Belief' *Philosophy Compass*, 854–864.

(\*) *Meno*

For more reading on this topic, see the entries under B.8. on the faculty reading list.

## Week 7: Three Images and Technocracy

**Essay question:** What is the common purpose of the three images (sun, line, cave)? What does it tell us about whether ruling is a craft?

### Readings:

(\*) *Republic* 480-541, in particular 506-518;

(\*) *Charmides*;

(\*) Barney, Rachel. 'The Carpenter and the Good' in Cairns, Herrmann & Penner (eds.) *Pursuing the Good* (2007), 293-319.

(\*) Denyer, Nicholas. 'Sun and Line: The Role of the Good', in G.R.F. Ferrari (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic* (2007), 284-309.

(\*) Santas, Gerasimos. (1980.) 'The Form of the Good in Plato's *Republic*' in *Philosophical Inquiry*, 374-403, reprinted in Gail Fine (ed.) *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (1999), 247-274.

Rowe, Christopher. 'The Form of the Good and the Good in Plato's Republic' in Cairns, Herrmann & Penner (eds.) *Pursuing the Good* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 124-153.

Sedley, David. 'Philosophy, the Forms and the Art of Ruling', in G.R.F. Ferrari (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, 256-283.

For more reading on this topic, see the entries under B.9. on the faculty reading list.

## Week 8: Happiness and Justice

**Essay question:** Does Plato successfully show that justice brings happiness and that injustice brings unhappiness?

**Secondary questions:** Think about the tyrant and why he is unhappy. What happens to the different people in the Myth of Er? What makes them choose poorly? Does the fact that philosophers would have to be forced to rule show that the happiest life is not the just one?

### Readings:

(\* *Republic* 541-621;

(\* Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 1981, chapter 12.

(\* Dahl, Norman. (1991.) 'Plato's Defence of Justice', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 809-834. Reprinted in G. Fine (ed.) *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul* (Oxford: OUP, 1999).

(\* Demos, Raphael. (1964.) 'A Fallacy in Plato's Republic?', *Philosophical Review*, 395-398.

(\* Sachs, David (1963.) 'A Fallacy in Plato's Republic', *Philosophical Review*, 141-58.

*Gorgias*;

Irwin, Terrence. *Plato's Ethics*, Chapter 15.

Kraut, Richard. 'The Defense of Justice in Plato's Republic' in R. Kraut (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992)

Kraut, Richard. 'Return to the Cave: *Republic* 519-521' in Fine (ed.) *Plato 2 Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, 1999, 235-254.

Parry, Richard. 'The Unhappy Tyrant and the Craft of the Inner Rule' In G.R.F. Ferrari (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, 2007.

Cooper, J.M. (1977.) 'The Psychology of Justice in Plato', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, pp.151-157.

For more reading on this topic, see the entries under B.11. on the faculty reading list.