

Fall 2015

PHIL 3301

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The University of New Orleans
Dept. of Philosophy

PHIL 3301: Philosophy of Plato (3 credits)

SECTION 476/585: Online

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Chris W. Surprenant
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Office Hours: Monday (via Skype): 2:00pm – 4:00pm
Tuesday (via Skype): 11:00am – 12:00pm
Thursday (office): 1:00pm – 4:00pm
Office Phone: (504) 280-6819
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Course Webpages: Accessed via Moodle.

Required Texts

1. Aristophanes and Plato, *Four Texts on Socrates*, translated by West and West (Cornell, 1988)
2. Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, translated by Bloom (Basic Books, 1968)

Course Description

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: A close reading of the most famous and influential dialogues of the fourth-century B.C. Athenian Plato, the first great systematic thinker of Western Philosophy and the creator of some of the basic concepts of Western culture.

COURSE OVERVIEW: This semester, this course will focus on a close reading of one of Plato's most important dialogues: *Republic*. By the end of the semester, you should have attained a solid understanding of the major claims made in the *Republic* and achieved a substantial appreciation of this works' enduring claims to greatness. You should also have developed the ability to advance a sustained interpretive argument based on your own reading of the texts and a critical assessment of some of the major works in the secondary literature on Plato.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to do the following:

- understand theories central to Plato's philosophy, and how these theories can be applied to contemporary problems
- work with philosophical concepts and methods
- construct and evaluate arguments
- learn how to construct an analytical essay
- participate in classroom discussion, developing and displaying an ability and readiness to defend one's own point of view while listening openly but carefully to others
- demonstrate a willingness to entertain criticism, formulate and reply to reasonable objections, and represent opposing views both critically and sympathetically
- read both primary and secondary texts, and analyze the arguments contained in them correctly

Grading

Requirements

Participation = 20% (20 points)
Paper Prospectus = 10% (10 points)
Short Version = 20% (20 points)
Long Version = 20% (20 points)
Final Version = 30% (30 points)

Final Grade

A = 100 – 89.5 points
B = 89.4 – 79.5 points
C = 79.4 – 69.5 points
D = 69.4 – 59.5 points
F = 59.4 – 0 points

Course Requirements

ONLINE PARTICIPATION: Our only means of interacting as a class is through the discussion forums on Moodle. Since interaction with each other and me is important, during each week you must post a substantive response that addresses the following issues: (1) your thoughts as to the most important or most interesting issue covered in the lecture and/or reading, and (2) why you thought this issue was the most important or most interesting. Each student is required to post a response within days of when the lecture should be completed, so, by Thursday of each week. If you don't post your response until Saturday or Sunday, I will consider your response to be late.

COURSE PAPER: There is only one assignment for the course, a final course paper. But there are many steps to this assignment, and so you can consider it to be four connected assignments and not simply one big assignment.

There are four parts to this assignment: (1) prospectus, (2) short paper version, (3) long paper version, (4) final version.

- (1) The prospectus should identify the thesis of the paper, provide some initial account of what the argument in support of this thesis is going to be, how you plan to develop that argument, and at least five scholarly articles or texts that are relevant to this discussion and that you can draw from to provide a foundation for your position. It would be wise for you to discuss your topic with me in advance of submitting the prospectus.
- (2) The short paper version will be a 1000 word defense of your thesis and should contain all of the relevant elements of a full paper. For you to get the kind of content you need here, I suggest that you write a short paper that targets between 1500 and 2000 words, and then you cut it down to 1000 words without losing any content. All undergraduate papers are far too wordy. If a sentence or phrase isn't doing anything to advance the argument, it should be deleted. You should make reference to at least five scholarly articles and show how previous work has helped to advance your own thinking on this topic.
- (3) The long paper should be a complete defense of your position. There is no word or page limit, although a complete discussion will likely take at least 12 to 15 pages of text. You should make reference to at least five scholarly articles and show how previous work has helped to advance your own thinking on this topic. You should consider the long paper version to be the final version of the paper. Additional instructions will be provided as we get closer to the long paper deadline.
- (4) Instructions for the final version will be provided after the long version has been completed. One aim of the "final version" of the paper is to help philosophy majors complete the department's 3030 graduation requirement.

Prospectus Due: Sunday, September 27 by 11:59pm
 Short Version Due: Sunday, October 18 by 11:59pm
 Long Version Due: Sunday, November 29 by 11:59pm
 Final Version Due: Sunday, December 13 by 11:59pm

Course Policies

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at <http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu>.

DISABILITY STAMENT: It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to <http://www.ods.uno.edu>.

STUDENT CONDUCT: Civility in the classroom and respect for the opinions of others is very important in an academic environment. In this class you should be prepared to have your positions challenged, as well as to challenge the positions of your classmates. It is likely you may not agree with everything that is said or discussed in the classroom, but courteous behavior and responses are expected.

LATE WORK POLICY: Work is late one minute after the posted deadline. All late work is penalized 1/3rd of a letter grade for each day (24 hours) it is late.

Course Schedule

8/19 – 8/22: COURSE INTRODUCTION; PLATO, PHILOSOPHY, AND POLITICS

Required reading:

“Introduction” to *Four Texts on Socrates*

8/23 – 8/29: PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION, AND PIETY

Required reading:

“Euthyphro,” in *Four Texts on Socrates* (pp. 41-62)

“Apology,” in *Four Texts on Socrates* (pp. 63-98)

Response topics:

- (1) What is the central question (related to the concept of piety) that this dialogue aims to address? How is this question resolved at the end of the dialogue? Is this resolution satisfactory?
- (2) One charge leveled against Socrates is impiety, but throughout the dialogue Socrates constantly makes reference to his devotion to “the god.” Why does Socrates believe he is pious? Why would some Athenians believe is impious?
- (3) After Socrates is found guilty, both he and the prosecutors each propose a penalty to the jury. The prosecution proposes death. What does Socrates propose? Why does he believe that this punishment is more fitting for the crime he has committed?

8/30 – 9/5: PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION, AND PIETY (CONT.)

Required reading:

“Crito,” in *Four Texts on Socrates* (pp. 99-114)

“Clouds,” in *Four Texts on Socrates* (pp. 115-176)

Response paper topics:

- (1) According to Socrates, whose opinions should be valued? What is the difference, if any, between the position taken by Socrates and our position in a democracy?
- (2) Commentators often identify the “Crito” as one of the earliest examples of social contract theory. What is the position taken by Socrates as it relates to the social contract? How does this position differ from other social contract theories that you’ve encountered?
- (3) How does Aristophanes use the dialogue form to convey his thoughts about Socrates and his teaching? What is a dialogue able to convey that traditional, academic prose is not?
- (4) Based on your own knowledge of philosophy, is the account of philosophy provided in the “Clouds” accurate?

9/6 – 9/12: PIETY, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE PROBLEMS OF HUMAN LIFE

Required reading:

Republic, Book I, 327a-354c

Response topics:

- (1) What is Cephalus’ account of justice? Why must he leave the conversation for the ensuing discussion of justice to take place? Does Socrates’ refute Cephalus’ definition? If not, why is he unable to?
- (2) Why must Cephalus leave for the discussion to continue? Is there a conflict between traditional piety/values and philosophy? If so, why?
- (3) What is the definition of justice presented by Polemarchus? Is it different from the definition presented by Cephalus? If so, how? Is this definition refuted?

- (4) What is Thrasymachus' account of justice? How is it different from the views of Cephalus and Polemarchus? Is it coherent?
- (5) How is Thrasymachus "tamed" by Socrates?

9/13 – 9/19: GLAUCON, AND ADEIMANTUS: JUSTICE, INJUSTICE, AND THE GROWTH OF THE CITY

Required reading:

Republic, 357a-372e

Response topics:

- (1) In what terms do Glaucon and Adeimantus praise injustice? How is their praise of injustice different from Thrasymachus'? How and why do their speeches differ from one another?
- (2) Why does Socrates propose the city-soul analogy? Is the analogy sound?

9/20 – 9-26: THE "NEGATIVE EDUCATION" OF PLATO'S GUARDIANS

Required reading:

Republic, 372e-427a

Response topics:

- (1) What are the different types of cities and how are they different? How do the virtues and/or vices of each city correspond with their different natures?
- (2) What is the point of the guardians' learning gymnastics? What is the point of the guardians' learning music? In what ways does Socrates propose censoring music and the poets? Why?
- (4) What is the "noble lie"? At whom is the lie directed? What is the point of the lie? Why is it necessary? In what way is the lie noble (or beautiful)?
- (4) Is the "noble lie" described by Socrates really the lie that holds the city together? Consider the connection between justice and happiness, especially as it relates to the guardian class. Is there another lie that is stronger and more fundamental to maintaining the city?

9/27 – 10/3: PLATO ON JUSTICE IN THE CITY AND THE SOUL

Required reading:

Republic, 427b-451b

Response topics:

- (1) What are the parts of the soul? What arguments does Socrates use to establish the truth of his account? Are those arguments sound?
- (2) What are the virtues (courage, wisdom, temperance, justice) in this city? What are they in individual souls? Why doesn't this account of the virtues fully answer Glaucon's challenge to Socrates (i.e., why does the *Republic* not end at here at 451b)?
- (3) What is the difference for Socrates between justice and temperance?

10/4 – 10/10: WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

Required reading:

Republic, 451c-471e

Response paper topics:

What are Socrates' arguments for the equality of women and for the communism of women and children? Are they serious? or is Socrates' purpose here ironic? Are these institutions oppressive? Or do they make possible the attainment of real human goods?

10/11 – 10/17: THE PHILOSOPHICAL NATURE

Required reading:

Republic, 472a-507a

Response topics:

- (1) Why are philosopher-kings necessary? Of what do they possess knowledge? What education must they have received in order to attain that knowledge?
- (2) Consider the image of the ship presented by Plato at 488a-489a. Plato claims that this image “resembles the cities in their disposition toward the true philosophers.” What does he mean? Is this analogy sound? Why or why not?

10/18 – 10/24: THE GOOD, THE DIVIDED LINE, AND THE CAVE

Required reading:

Republic, 507a-521b

Response paper topics:

- (1) At the end of Book VI, Plato presents us with two metaphors: that of the sun and the divided line. What is the function of these metaphors? Are they successful? You may choose to address both or focus on only one.
- (2) Consider the image of the cave. In what way is the city said to be like the cave? What do the parts of this extended simile signify? How is the image of the cave related to the divided line? to the sun?
- (3) What are the ideas, and what role do they play in the overall argument of the *Republic*?

10/25 – 10/31: DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

Required reading:

Republic, 521c-541b

Response paper topics:

What does Socrates mean by dialectic education? How does it differ from the traditional method of dogmatic instruction and/or catechistic education where students learn through repetition? What are some advantages and disadvantages of this mode of instruction? Is dialectic suitable for everyone? Why or why not?

11/1 – 11/7: POLITICAL DECAY AND THE REGIMES

Required reading:

Republic, 543a-580a

Response topics:

What is Plato's assessment of democracy? Is it really second-worst, as Socrates' argument suggests? Or can we find a certain defense of democracy inside the critique?

11/8 – 11/14: THE QUARREL BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

Required reading:

Republic, 580b-608c

Response topics:

- (1) Is there a connection between justice and happiness? Explain your answer on both the level of the city and of the individual soul.
- (2) How does the quarrel between philosophy and poetry resolved? Do the poets have a role in the city in speech? If so, what is this role and why are they necessary?

- 11/15 – 11/21: PLATO ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL
Required reading:
Republic, 608c-621d
Response paper topics:
What is Socrates' argument for the immortality of the soul? Why does he introduce this and the subsequent story of Er at the end of the *Republic*? What do these add to the argument of the work as a whole?
- 11/22 – 11/28: **No Class, Thanksgiving Break**
- 11/29 – 12/4: Course Conclusion