

UCSD
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*
POLITICAL SCIENCE 119A
FALL 2009

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Twenty-five hundred years after its first appearance, Plato's *Republic* remains quite possibly the most provocative and brilliant book about politics ever written. In this advanced seminar in political theory, we will work our way through the ten books of the *Republic*, in which Socrates, the street philosopher, examines a variety of interlocutors on the idea of justice as it might manifest in an ideal city and in the individual soul. The schedule below is a general guide, constructed to allow us flexibility to reflect when curiosities emerge.

A seminar can thrive only with full, committed participation of its members. One of your main tasks is to come to seminar *each time* prepared to engage in active discussion of the text. There are no exams. Instead, to reflect our emphasis here on active thinking and discussion, your evaluation will be based on one in-class presentation and one paper, as follows: Once during the term, each student will be asked to guide us through a portion of the week's reading. Your performance on this presentation will serve as your mid-term grade, constituting 30% of your final grade. The final essay, 8-10 pages, will be based on questions distributed during week 7, giving you ample time to compose a serious and reflective essay. The essay is due during exam week and will constitute 60% of your final grade. The remaining 10% will be discretionary, based on overall participation and improvement.

Required texts:

Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, ed. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett).

Plato, *The Trials of Socrates: Six Classic Texts*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Hackett)

Schedule

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Week 1 (Wednesday session): Introduction: 5th century Greece **NOTE ROOM: SSB 107**
FILM: The Greeks: A crucible of civilization, part I

Week 2: Who was Plato? Who was Socrates?
FILM: The Greeks: A crucible of civilization, part II
Read: Plato, *Apology*

Week 3: *Republic* Book I

Week 5: Books II-III

Week 6: Books IV-V

Week 7: Books VI-VII (final essay questions distributed)

Week 8: cont'd

Week 9: Book VIII

Week 10: Books IX-X

Final essay due via email (ffb@ucsd.edu) on Thursday December 10 by 10pm.

Plato, *Apology*

1. Discuss Socrates' thoughts on "speaking", "language", "persuasion" and "slander" in the opening paragraphs of his defense.
2. How does Socrates account for his "unpopularity"? Why does he find older accusations against him harder to defend against than current ones?
3. What does Socrates mean when he charges Meletus of "dealing frivolously with serious matters?" (24c)
4. Why does Socrates repeatedly invoke Delphi, the god, "a voice", his divine "sign" throughout the dialogue? Discuss Socrates' defense against Meletus' charge of impiety.
5. Discuss Socrates' thoughts on obedience, shame and death (at 28b-30e). Address his claim: "I do not think it is permitted that a better man be harmed by a worse" (at 30d)

6. How does Socrates characterize his citizenship in the *Apology*? Why must a man who “really fights for justice” live a private life?

7. What does Socrates seek to demonstrate by recounting his refusal to try the ten generals after the battle of Arginusae, and his refusal to carry Leon of Salamis to his death?

8. Socrates claims he could not have corrupted his listeners and interlocutors since “I never promised to teach them anything and have not done so. If anyone says that he has learned anything from me, or that he heard anything privately that the others did not hear, be assured that he is not telling the truth.” (33b) What does he mean by this? Relatedly, what does he mean when he claims repeatedly that he *knows* nothing.

9. Explain Socrates invocation of the Homeric phrase : I am not born “from oak or rock.” (34d). What is his point?

10. Discuss Socrates’ proposal of a counter-penalty. Why does he reject exile?

Plato, *Republic*

Book I

1. What is the significance of the first three words of the *Republic*?
2. Who is Cephalus? Who is Polemarchus? Explain their views of justice and Socrates' responses to each.
3. Why does Socrates refer to Thrasymachus as "clever"? Why is he certain that Thrasymachus will "speak well"? Describe Thrasymachus, his two related attempts at a view of justice, and Socrates' responses to each. What happens to Thrasymachus at the end of Book I?

Book II

4. How does Plato's narrative change in Book II?

5. Why is Glaucon not yet convinced by Socrates' exchange with Thrasymachus? How does he proceed to frame the issue? What is the significance of his account of Gyges?

6. What does Adeimantus add to Glaucon's argument?

7. Why does Socrates respond to Glaucon and Adeimantus on the nature of justice with a discussion of the city - and particularly a distinction between a city that is healthy and one that is luxurious?

8. At what point and for what reason do the guardians emerge in Socrates' account? What sort of "nature" is suited to being a guardian? How does the city identify such natures (continued in Book III)?

9. Discuss the following, taken from Socrates account of the stories that must be told to children (future guardians): “You know, don’t you, that the beginning of any process is most important, especially for anything young and tender? It’s at that time that it is most malleable and takes on any pattern one wishes to impress upon it” (377a-b) And again, at 378d: “the opinions they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable.”

10. What should children be told about the gods? Were Socrates’ accusers correct when they accused him of impiety?

11. What is the difference between a true falsehood and a falsehood in words?

Book III

12. After his discussion of the content and style of appropriate stories for children, and of physical education, Socrates at 412b has concluded his “pattern for education and upbringing”. How does he next determine who of those so educated should rule? How does the city recognize its rulers? How are falsehoods useful in this process? Discuss the metals in particular. How is the myth useful? Why is Socrates “shy” and “hesitant” to proceed with his discussion of the metals?

13. Why do you suppose the Book ends with a discussion of the guardians’ sleeping quarters?

Book IV

14. How does Socrates respond to Adeimantus concern that the guardians might not be “happy” with their lot?

15. Why must the guardians “guard as carefully as they can against any innovation in music or poetry or in physical training that is counter to the established order?” (424b) What is “lawlessness”? Why can’t law cure a sick people?

16. The city is “established” at 427d, and Socrates proceeds to “look inside it and see where the justice and injustice might be in it”. By what method does he proceed?

17. What is wisdom (in the city)? What is (civic) courage (in the city)? What is moderation (in the city)?

18. Why does Socrates characterize his pursuit of justice as “hunters surrounding a wood?” Why does he claim that the pursuit is “impenetrable” and “shadowy”? What is justice (in the city)?

19. Discuss the following claim: "...a just man won't differ at all from a just city in respect to the form of justice; rather he'll be like the city." What does Socrates mean? How does he go about demonstrating this?

20. How does Socrates begin to differentiate "parts" within the human soul? What is the law of non-contradiction (at 436c)? Specifically, how does Socrates differentiate reason, appetite and spirit?

21. What is an ordered soul? How does it "map onto" a well ordered city?

22. What is injustice? (In the soul, in the city)

Book V (tread lightly over 474d-480a)

23. Explain Polemarchus' interruption at 449b. Why did Socrates "pass by the topic" earlier? Why is he "hesitant" to bring it up again?

24. How are women and men both different and the same, according to Socrates? Is Socrates a "feminist"?

25. Socrates divides his reflections on holding women and children in common into the "beneficial" and the "possible." Regarding the "possible" (and Socrates hesitation to discuss it), what are Socrates thoughts on the relation between theory and practice? How does he understand his project?

26. What does Socrates attempt to demonstrate at 474d with his discussion of the lover of boys?

27. What is the difference between knowledge and opinion? Why does Book V end with this?

Book VI (tread lightly over 502d-511e)

28. Describe the philosophic nature.

29. Why, according to Adeimantus, will most people disagree that philosophers should rule? Why does Socrates respond with a simile?

30. Why are the majority of “philosophers” (or those perceived by the public to be philosophers) vicious? Why does “the best nature fare worse, when unsuitably nurtured, than an ordinary one?” (491d) What does it mean to “decline” into a different sort of character? (See 497c) Who are the *real* Sophists in Socrates account, and why? (Pay attention to Socrates thoughts on the family/parents, democracy, the “mob”) How does Socrates explain his own case?

31. How do the leaders come into being? What sorts of qualities must leaders possess? What does Socrates mean when he says (at 503e) that leaders must be able to “tolerate the most important subjects?”

32. Why does Socrates “abandon the quest for the good itself” and turn instead to a discussion of the “offspring of the good and most like it”? (506e)

Book VII (tread lightly over 521d-531d)

33. Describe the cave, and why those confined within it have difficulties perceiving anything beyond it. What is truth to a cave-dweller?

34. Describe the journey of one who emerges from the cave (both of his own accord, and by force) and then returns?

35. Why must the founders of Socrates' ideal city "compel" the best natures to "ascend" and then "to go down again"? Why is this not unjust? Why must those who do not love ruling rule?

37. Explain the relation between the sun and the good.

Book VIII

38. What is the organizing principle, or method, of Book VIII? Is decline inevitable in Socrates' account of the city? Why or why not? (Pay attention to 546; and the distinction earlier at 459d between geometric and erotic necessities.) Relatedly, describe what might be referred to as the "problem of the passions" throughout the *Republic*, and the techniques that Plato/Socrates employed to master it. What do you perceive as the likelihood that these techniques can succeed?

39. What is timocracy, and how does it emerge from Aristocracy? (Describe this decline as it takes place in the city, and in the soul)

40. What is oligarchy, and how does it emerge from timocracy? (again, as it takes place in the city and in the soul)

41. What is democracy, and how does it emerge from oligarchy? (again, as it takes place in the city and in the soul) To what extent do you recognize 21st century democratic people and politics in Socrates' account?

42. How does democracy decline into tyranny?

Book IX

43. Describe the soul of the tyrannical person.

44. In the remainder of Book IX, Plato returns to Glaucon's query in Book II about the relation between justice and happiness. Briefly characterize the three responses Socrates offers, and the conclusion they sustain.

Book X

45. Why does Socrates ban poets from the city?

46. What does the myth of Er contribute to Socrates' account of justice?

To what extent is the *Republic* a work in political philosophy?