

## HERTOG 2022 POLITICAL STUDIES PROGRAM

### PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

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Our opening week is devoted to a close reading of selections from Plato's *Republic*.

#### Course Materials

- Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom with introduction by Adam Kirsch, (Basic Books, 2016)

#### Resources:

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites.

In particular, the pages dedicated to [Plato](#) and [Allan Bloom](#) may prove useful.

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#### Monday, June 20, 2022

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9:30 AM to 12:30 PM ET

Session I

#### Readings:

- *Republic*, Books I–II, 327a–375a (pp. 3–52)

#### Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why does Socrates engage in this conversation about justice? Is he persuaded or forced to lead this discussion? Why might this be significant?
- 2) What sort of character is Cephalus? What is good and what is problematic in his definition of justice? What sort of character is Polemarchus? What is good and what is problematic in his definition?
- 3) What is Thrasymachus's first understanding of justice, as expressed at 339a? How does his position on justice and injustice evolve or shift as the discussion proceeds? Does Socrates succeed in refuting Thrasymachus by the end of Book I?
- 4) What sort of people are Glaucon and Adeimantus? Why are they dissatisfied? What is it that they want from Socrates? What approach does Socrates take to answering their objections?

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**Tuesday, June 21, 2022**

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**9:30 AM to 12:30 PM ET**

**Session II**

**Readings:**

- *Republic*, Books II–IV, 375a–392b, 412–423e, 427d–445e (pp. 52–70, 91–101, 105–25)

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) What is “spiritedness”? What might be good and bad about “spiritedness” from a political perspective? How does Socrates propose to educate the spiritedness of the guardians?
- 2) What, if anything, is noble about the “noble lie”? How does it complement and continue the education of the guardians? Do you think it will be effective in achieving the ends for which it is intended?
- 3) What objection does Adeimantus present to all of this at the beginning of Book IV? How does Socrates respond to his concerns? What shift in the argument does this produce?
- 4) What are the three parts of the soul? What are the three parts of the city? What does it mean to say that virtue is the health, beauty, and good of the soul? How is this definition related to Socrates’ account of justice in the city at 433b?

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**Wednesday, June 22, 2022**

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**9:30 AM to 12:30 PM ET**

**Session III**

**Readings:**

- *Republic*, Books V–VI, 449a–487a (pp. 127–67)

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) What is Socrates’ argument for the equality of the sexes? Is it a good argument? Why or why not? What specific aspects of it strike you as persuasive or problematic?
- 2) What is Socrates’ argument for sexual communism? Is it a good argument? Why or why not? What specifics of it strike you as persuasive or problematic?
- 3) What does Socrates mean when he speaks of “philosopher-kings”? What is the argument for why they should rule? Are you convinced? Should they rule in real cities?

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**Thursday, June 23, 2022**

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**9:30 AM to 12:30 PM ET**

**Session IV**

**Readings:**

- *Republic*, Books VI–VII, 487a–511d, 514a–541b (pp. 167–92, 193–220)

## Discussion Questions:

- 1) How does the portrait of the philosopher in Book VI compare to the portrait of the philosopher-king in Book V? Who or what exactly does Socrates have in mind when he describes “a man who has his understanding turned towards the things that are” (500b)?
- 2) What is life like inside the cave described by Socrates? What does it mean to say that the prisoners are “like us”? Are our lives today in any way similar to the lives of those imprisoned in the cave?
- 3) Who escapes from the cave? How do they escape? What do they eventually see? And what does this have to do with “a life better than ruling” (521a)?
- 4) What does Socrates mean when he calls this an allegory of education? How does the education described here compare to the education that the guardians received—or the kind of education we provide in schools today?
- 5) What is the difference between seeing and knowing? What specifically is “intellection,” and why is it important if we hope to know the idea of the good?

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Friday, June 24, 2022

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9:30 AM to 12:30 PM ET

Session V

## Readings:

- *Republic*, Books VIII–X, 543–592d, 611b–621d (pp. 221–75, 295–303)

## Discussion Questions:

- 1) How does Socrates describe the social and political conditions of democratic life? What aspects of democratic life are attractive? Which are more problematic?
- 2) How does Socrates describe the soul of the individual living in democracy? What sorts of things does a democratic person desire, and why? Why does he think that tyranny necessarily follows democracy?
- 3) What sort of life does the tyrant lead? Is he happy? Why or why not? How might Socrates’ portrait of the tyrant’s life serve as a response to Thrasymachus’ praises of the tyrant’s life in Book I?
- 4) Why does Plato end the *Republic* with the Myth of Er? What is the story of this myth, and why does Socrates think it’s important for these young men, interested in questions of justice and the best life, to hear?