

SYLLABUS

PHIL 421/521 ~ Plato: *The Republic*

Spring 2013

CRN: 36554/36555

M W 1800-1950, 123 MCK

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The *Republic* is a great book simply because it has given rise to so many varied and controversial interpretations. At the same time, Platonic philosophy or "Platonism" represents more than merely one example of philosophical work within the Western tradition. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Whitehead and Derrida, among others, have famously claimed that our tradition remains inescapably defined by Platonism. This means that even before we begin to read Plato, simply by virtue of this historical legacy, we are already approaching this text indebted to the tradition of Platonism. The most basic linguistic and conceptual resources that we employ in our attempt to understand Plato have been given to us by a tradition that can be traced back to a Platonic beginning. How are we to deal with this circularity in our attempt at giving Plato a fair reading?

While the search for the one "correct" interpretation of the *Republic* will be set aside in this course, this does not mean that any interpretation is as good as the next. A good interpretation should take into account in a coherent way as many aspects of the text as possible. It should avoid claims that rely on extremely reductive approaches and that must therefore disregard textual moments in order to appear compelling. As much as possible we want to make explicit to ourselves what interpretive prejudices we are bringing to the text, precisely because in this way it might be possible for the text itself to challenge and transform these prejudices. How are we to approach a text, for example, that first establishes the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, when we inevitably take this distinction for granted even before we begin to read?

While this course is devoted to reading, discussing and interpreting only one Platonic text, this will give us the opportunity to consider more generally how our assumptions about philosophical reading inform our possible interpretation of Plato as a whole. In particular, we will take seriously the dialogical form of the text and consider what interpretive challenges this presents. This will result in a reading of Plato that accounts for more than simply the argumentation one finds presented within the dialogue. We will resist, for example, viewing any philosophical viewpoint put forward by Socrates as the position that represents Plato's philosophy or something like "Platonism." Along with the dialogical character of the text, we will consider its dramatic and mythic dimensions as equally relevant to how this text might speak to us. In this way, word (*logos* and dialogue), deed (*ergon*) and story (*mythos*) will each be taken as irreducible dimensions of the text that inform each other and complicate our experience of reading. The actions of a character within the dialogue can help us to interpret, for example, what that character says. The comedic, playful and ironic aspects of the dialogue are also allowed to become interpretively relevant in this way.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation in class discussion.

Undergraduates (Phil 421) will be asked to write two papers, 6-8 pages in length, double-spaced. The first paper will be due May 6; the second will be due at the end of the term, on June 12.

Graduate students will be asked to write one paper, 15-20 pages in length, double spaced, due at the end of term. This paper either will focus on a Platonic dialogue other than the Republic, or it will work with a theme or question as it arises in the Republic itself.

TEXTS (required)

1. *Plato Republic*. Trans. Joe Sachs. (Focus Philosophical Library)

Joe Sach's translation of Plato's *Republic* may be purchased at "Black Sun Books" (2455 Hilyard, 484-3777), just south of 24th and Hilyard, behind Sundance Grocery, near Taste of India.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RECOMMENDED SOURCES

- Adam, James. 2010. *The Republic of Plato*. 1 Reissue. Cambridge University Press.
- Baracchi, Claudia. 2001. *Of Myth, Life, and War in Plato's Republic*. 1ST ed. Indiana University Press.
- Benardete, Seth. 1992. *Socrates' Second Sailing: On Plato's Republic*. University Of Chicago Press.
- Brann, Eva. 2011. *The Music of the Republic: Essays on Socrates' Conversations and Plato's Writings*. Reprint. Paul Dry Books.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1983. *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*. Translated by P. Christopher Smith. Reprint. Yale University Press.
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- Howland, Jacob. 2004. *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*. 1st ed. Paul Dry Books.
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- Klein, Jacob. 1998. *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*. University Of Chicago Press.
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- Sallis, John. 1996. *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues*. 3rd ed. Indiana University Press.
- Strauss, Leo. 1978. *The City and Man*. University Of Chicago Press.
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- Warnek, Peter. 2005. *Descent of Socrates: Self-Knowledge and Cryptic Nature in the Platonic Dialogues*. Indiana University Press.