C C304C/PHL301K: Ancient Philosophy

Fall 2019

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Alfred North Whitehead once wrote, “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.”

The *Republic* is not only one of Plato’s richest dialogues, but one of his most influential. In it, Plato confronts some of the most fundamental philosophical questions: What can we know? How is knowledge different from belief? Is the world we encounter with our senses real or just an illusion? Is fate real? If it is, how can we be responsible for anything? How should we live?

Despite being written over two thousand years ago, the reader also encounters in this work some especially salient questions for our time. For example, one overarching question asks what a just society looks like and who should be in charge. The anonymity afforded by online communities evokes Book II’s Ring of Gyges, which asks about the effect of invisibility on human action. Freedom is touted as one of the advantages of a capitalist democracy, but Book III’s Noble Lie interrogates whether any of our desires are truly free from ideology. Book VIII then asks how a democracy deteriorates. And finally, with media outlets warning us about the rising danger of deepfake technology, we are reminded of the shadows on the walls of Book VII’s Allegory of the Cave.

In this course, we will focus on Plato’s answers to these and other questions in the *Republic*. Along the way, we’ll stop to look at different and dissenting responses to these questions from other figures in ancient and Hellenistic philosophy, such as Heraclitus, Aristotle, the Skeptics, and some of the so-called Sophists.

The goal of this course is to introduce students to the history of philosophy and the study of arguments by practicing the skills of extracting, interpreting, and evaluating arguments that are situated in difficult, historical sources. While these arguments may, at first, seem mysterious and outdated, they represent the origins of the western philosophical tradition and help us understand the trajectory of this tradition into today. By forcing us to confront and understand difficult texts from a context that is very different from our own, study of the history of philosophy deepens both the care with which we read and the depth with which we think, listen, and empathize.

Course Materials

Plato’s *Republic* (trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C Reeve). 1975. Hackett Publishing. 2nd edition.

Please use only this translation and edition. All other readings will be made available on Canvas.

Evaluation Breakdown

In-Class Weekly Quizzes: 10%

Argument Summaries (5% each x5): 25%

Short Papers (15% each x2): 30%

Final Paper: 35%

A = 100-93, A- = 92.9-90, B+ = 89.9-87, B = 86.9-83, B- = 82.9-80, C+ = 79.9-77, C = 76.9-73, C- = 72.9-70, D+ = 69.9-67, D = 66.9-63, D- = 62.9-60, F = 59.9-0

Description of Assignments

**In-Class Weekly Quizzes (11 quizzes = 10%):** Each week, students will be given a short quiz on the day’s readings, to be completed in the first 5-7 minutes of class (make sure you are on time!) There will only be one quiz each week (total 13 quizzes), and the day of the quiz (T or Th) will be chosen at random. The two lowest quiz scores will be dropped from each student’s grade. No make-up quizzes will be permitted for missed quizzes.

**Argument Summaries (5% each x5 = 25%)**: Students will complete six argument summaries (1-2 pages double spaced). Students must summarize the argument from a section of text that will be posted one week in advance of the due date. This assignment is practice for picking out the conclusion and premises (both explicit and implicit) of an argument, as well as explaining its logical flow. Summarizing an argument charitably is an important skill, and doing well on these assignments will ultimately help with writing the papers, and with being a more efficient, critically engaged reader. The argument summary with the lowest score will be dropped from each student’s grade.

Summary 1 Due **Thursday, September 5**

Summary 2 Due **Thursday, September 12**

Summary 3 Due **Thursday, September 19**

Summary 4 Due **Thursday, October 17**

Summary 5 Due **Thursday, October 24**

Summary 6 Due **Thursday, November 14**

**Short Papers (15% each x2 = 30%):** Students will choose one prompt from a list and write a short paper (5-6 pages) responding to it. Roughly half of the short paper should be a summary of the relevant argument, and the other half should be your critical evaluation of the argument.

Short Paper 1 Due **Thursday, October 3**

Short Paper 2 Due **Thursday, November 7**

**Final Paper (35%):** Students will choose one prompt from a list and write a 7-8 page paper responding to it. Students who scored a C+ or lower on both of the short papers will have the option to revise and expand one of those papers for this assignment. Roughly 1/3 of the paper should summarize the relevant argument, 1/3 should critically evaluate it, and the final 1/3 should develop objections and replies to the main response.

Final Paper Due **Thursday, December 5**

There is no final exam for this class.

**The assignments and papers are to be submitted on Canvas by 11:59pm on the day they are due. \*\*Please do not write your name on anything you submit—only include your UT eid.\*\***

“Late Days”

Each student gets four “late days” to use however they like throughout the course. These allow you to turn in assignments late, without penalty, and without official documentation (e.g. doctor’s note) for up to a total of four days. For example, you could turn in one assignment four days late, without penalty, or you could turn in four assignments, each one day late, without penalty. One late day will excuse lateness up to 24 hours from when the assignment is due. Once the late days run out, 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted for each additional day the assignment is late (unless the student has been in touch with me in advance of the due date, or can provide proper documentation). It is my recommendation that you save your late days. You don’t need to tell me when you use a late day; I’ll keep track of your late days, and assume, unless you contact me, that if you turn in an assignment late, you are using a late day.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken in lecture. Each student gets four excused absences. Students who show a pattern of missing class beyond this (without a documented reason) will be demoted 1/3 of the letter grade earned on the assignments. Please make sure you are in class on time. Lateness will count as an absence.

Class Expectations

**Plagiarism:** Any assignment that exhibits plagiarism, a failure to cite sources, or any form of academic dishonesty whatsoever will be given an automatic failing grade and the student will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students. Students who are uncertain as to what constitutes academic dishonesty are encouraged to meet with me. See also: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism/index.html>

**Readings**: Students are expected to come prepared, having completed the readings for each session.

**In-class Etiquette:** (1) Laptops are not permitted in lectures. If you need to use one, please get in touch with me. (2) Phones are not to be out during lecture under any circumstances. Please make sure they are away and on silent. (3) I expect all students to come to class ready to participate, which means not only sharing your own contributions, but listening to and considering the contributions of others.

**Some Ground Rules for Discussion:** (1) Disagreement is a part of philosophy, but so is being respectful towards your peers. I will do my best to foster a friendly and inclusive learning environment, and I encourage students to approach one another with patience, kindness, and a collaborative spirit, both in and outside of the classroom. I highly encourage you to exchange email addresses with your peers, to form study groups, and to edit each other’s work. (2) Be ready to point to a section of text to support your ideas. (3) Contributions related to philosophers or philosophical works, arguments, or positions outside of the day’s readings must be restricted to material that is on the syllabus. If you think something not on the syllabus would make for an interesting discussion, be prepared to provide some background for your peers who might be unfamiliar with the content.

Special Accommodations

Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) will provide a letter that formally communicates approved accommodations for students who require them. If you need accommodations, you should get in touch with SSD as soon as possible and request a letter of verification. I also encourage students needing accommodations to get in touch or meet with me within the first two weeks of class to discuss what I can do to ensure that their learning needs are met throughout the semester, regardless of whether an SSD letter has been acquired.

In addition, throughout the semester, some students become subject to unusually difficult circumstances which make it difficult to meet course objectives. If this happens, please get in touch with me even if you don’t have documentation. Special conditions can be negotiated individually.

To contact SSD, see <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/accommodations-and-services>

Contact

Students must have an updated email address in UTDirect. Class announcements will be made on the Canvas page (go to <http://canvas.utexas.edu/> and log in).

I am happy to set up appointments and answer questions about basic course mechanics via email but please avoid emailing me substantive questions about the material. For these, come to office hours, or better yet, bring them to class with you.

I will try to respond to emails within 48 hours of receiving them. I will not respond to questions about assignments that are emailed fewer than 24 hours before they are due. This is to ensure I have enough time to answer your email before the assignment is due, and that you have enough time to take my feedback into consideration. I also ask that you make sure you have read and reflected on feedback on assignments, and wait 24 hours after receiving grades to email me about them.

Helpful Resources

Philosophy Undergraduate Advising: <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/philosophy/undergraduate/advising.php>

Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu>

Counseling & Mental Health: <http://cmhc.utexas.edy>

Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Reading Schedule

\* = on Canvas

† = optional reading

Week Date Reading Assignment

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Introduction & Background | Th 8/29 | Introduction & Background |  |
| 2. What is Justice? | T 9/3  Th 9/5 | Plato, *Republic* I  Plato, *Republic* I | Argument Summary 1 Due |
| 3. Nature and Convention | T 9/10  Th 9/12 | Plato, *Republic* II  Plato, *Republic* II  - Suler, *The Online Disinhibition Effect* \*† | Argument Summary 2 Due |
| 4. The Sophists on Nature and Convention  The Noble Lie | T 9/17  Th 9/19 | Antiphon, *On Justice* \*  Anonymous, *Dissoi Logoi \**  Plato, *Republic* III | Argument Summary 3 Due |
| 5. Soul Parts and Inner Conflict | T 9/24  Th 9/26 | Plato, *Republic* IV  Plato, *Republic* IV |  |
| 6. Knowledge vs. Opinion | T 10/1  Th 10/3 | Plato, *Republic* V (471c-end)  [catch up?] | Short Paper 1 Due |
| 7. The Sun, Goodness and Truth | T 10/8  Th 10/10 | Plato, *Republic* VI  Plato, *Republic* VI |  |
| 8. The Ship, the Divided Line, and the Allegory of the Cave | T 10/15  Th 10/17 | Plato, *Republic* VII  - Rini, *Deepfakes Are Coming. We Can No Longer Believe What We See*\*†  - Jennings, *Facetune and the Internet’s Endless Pursuit of Physical Perfection*\*†  Plato, *Republic* VII | Argument Summary 4 Due |
| 9. Heraclitus & Aristotle on Knowledge and What There Is | T 10/22  Th 10/24 | Heraclitus (Fragments)\*  Aristotle, *Categories* 1-5, *Posterior Analytics* I.1-3, II.19, *Metaphysics* I.1-3\* | Argument Summary 5 Due |
| 10. Skepticism | T 10/29  Th 10/31 | Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines* I. 1-30, 100-117, III.1-12 \*  [same as 10/31] |  |
| 11. Plato on the Unjust Society | T 11/5  Th 11/7 | Plato, *Republic* VIII  [catch up?] | Short Paper 2 Due |
| 12. Aristotle on Virtue | T 11/12  Th 11/14 | Aristotle, *NE* I.1-2, 7, 8, 13 \*  Aristotle, *NE* II. 1, 6-7 \*  Aristotle, *NE* X. 6-9 \* | Argument Summary 6 Due |
| 13. Plato’s Final Answer | T 11/19  Th 11/21 | Plato, *Republic* IX  Plato, *Republic* IX |  |
| 14. Thanksgiving Break |  |  |  |
| 15. Fate & Responsibility in Plato and the Stoics | T 12/3  Th 12/5 | Plato, *Republic* X  The Stoics, Causation & Fate; Moral Responsibility\* | Final Papers Due |