

Summer Courses, Summer 2017

PLATO

Instructor: Bryan Garsten
Washington, D.C.

This course will focus on Plato's *Republic*, perhaps the greatest work of political philosophy ever written. With close and sensitive study, we will examine central questions that are raised by Plato, such as: What is justice? Who should rule? What are the characteristics of the best political regime—and are there worthy alternatives if the best political regime is unattainable?

Books:

- Plato, *The Republic* (trans. Allan Bloom)

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. These sites are aimed at introducing important thinkers in Western thought, with a particular emphasis on politics and philosophy.

Relevant pages include Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Thucydides (on The Great Thinkers).

Monday, June 26, 2017, 9:00 am to Noon

Readings:

- Plato, *The Republic*, Book One

Discussion Questions:

1. Consider the opening scene carefully. Why does a book about justice begin with a philosopher playfully forced into discussion with powerful young men?
2. Analyze carefully the main definitions of justice offered during the course of the discussion. Which definition is best?
3. Does anyone in the dialogue successfully refute Thrasymachus's position? Do you emerge from Book One with a good reason to act justly?

Tuesday, June 27, 2017, 9:00 am to Noon

Readings:

- Plato, *The Republic*, Book Two

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is Glaucon not satisfied by Socrates's arguments from Book One? What does Glaucon want most of all?
2. Why does war arise in the course of creating an ideal city in speech? What is the significance of war for the domestic politics of the city?

Wednesday, June 28, 2017, 9:00 am to Noon

Readings:

- Plato, *The Republic*, Books Three and Four

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the purpose of the so-called "noble lie" (414c–415d)? Does Socrates endorse the view that all political communities are ultimately built on lies?
2. What is the purpose of the restrictions on poetry? Does Socrates offer a good case for censorship?
3. Socrates argues that the soul has three parts, rather than the two (desire and reason) that are most often cited. Why does he think a two-part model is insufficient to account for human politics?

Thursday, June 29, 2017, 9:00 am to Noon

Readings:

- Plato, *The Republic*, Books Five and Six

Discussion Questions:

1. Evaluate the arguments for the communism of property.
2. Evaluate the arguments for the communism of women and children.
3. Should philosophers rule?

Friday, June 30, 2017, 9:00 am to Noon

Readings:

- Plato, *The Republic*, Books Eight and Nine

Discussion Questions:

1. Socrates introduces a science of politics according to which one type of regime decays into another. Pay special attention to the causes behind each change. What role does debt play? What roles do ambition, envy, and other passions play?

2. What are the strengths of democracy as a regime type? What are its weaknesses? What is the likely means by which democracy decays into tyranny?