7AAN2026 Greek Philosophy I: Plato
Syllabus – Academic year 2016/17

Basic information

Credits: 20
Module Tutor: Raphael Woolf
Office: room 712, Philosophy Building
Consultation time: Wed 12-1, Thurs 1-2
Semester: 1
Lecture time and venue*: Thurs 12-1, K1.28

*Please note that tutorial times and venues will be organised independently with your teaching tutor

Module description (plus teaching arrangements, aims and objectives)

The course is designed to give not only an overview over some of the most important topics in Plato’s philosophy, but also to raise critical points and offer different interpretative strategies, thus providing the student with the knowledge and skills required to study Plato independently. The course will be arranged around one of the most important questions in Plato’s career, ‘Why should I be just?’. By working through two of Plato’s works centrally devoted to this topic, the Gorgias and the Republic, we will cover aspects of Plato’s Ethics, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Political Philosophy and Moral Psychology, allowing us to see not only these topics in isolation but how they work together in addressing the question of what is the best way to live.

Assessment methods and deadlines

- Formative assessment: 2 essays X 2,000 words each – deadline: Friday December 9, 2016 at 4pm.
- Summative assessment: one two-hour exam to be taken in May/June
Outline of lecture topics (plus readings)

(* = available electronically through the library)

Week One (Sep 29): Justice and Power
Reading:
primary (p): *Gorgias* 447a-461b
secondary (s): J. Doyle, ‘Socrates and Gorgias’, *Phronesis* 55 (2010)*
further (f) J. Cooper, ‘Socrates and Plato in Plato’s *Gorgias*’, in J. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*

Week Two (Oct 6): Justice and Shame
Reading:
(p): *Gorgias* 461b-481b
http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/20065/Shame,_Pleasure_and_the_Divided_Soul.pdf

Week Three (Oct 13): The Case for Immoralism
Reading:
(p): *Gorgias* 481b-499b

Week Four (Oct 20): Why should I be just?
Reading:
(p): *Republic* Book II, 357a-383c;
(s): T. Irwin, ‘Republic 2: Questions about Justice’ (in G. Fine (ed.), *Plato 2*);

Week Five (Oct 27): Parts of the Soul
Reading:
(p): *Rep. IV*, 434d-441c;
(s): J. Cooper, ‘Plato’s Theory of Human Motivation’ *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1 (1984)*; also in J. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*;

READING WEEK

Week Six (Nov 10): Justice in the city and in the soul
Reading:
(s): G. Vlastos, Justice and Happiness in the *Republic* in G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies*
Outline of lecture topics (plus readings) – continued

**Week Seven** (Nov 17): What knowledge is (and is not)
Reading:
(s): G. Fine, 'Knowledge and Belief in *Republic 5*, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60 (1978); also in G. Fine, *Plato on Knowledge and Forms*
(f): F. Gonzalez, 'Propositions or Objects? A Critique of Gail Fine on Knowledge and Belief in *Republic 5*, *Phronesis* (1996)*

**Week Eight** (Nov 24): Attaining the Good: Sun and Line
(p): *Rep. VI,* 504d-511e;
(s): G. Fine, 'Knowledge and Belief in *Republic 5-7*, in S. Everson (ed), *Epistemology*; also in G. Fine (ed.), *Plato 1*; and in G. Fine, *Plato on Knowledge and Forms*;

**Week Nine** (Dec 1): The Cave: Escape and Return
Reading:
(p): *Rep. VII,* 514a-541b
(s): R. Kraut, 'Return to the Cave' in G. Fine (ed.) *Plato 2*

**Week Ten** (Dec 8): Justice and Pleasure
Reading:
(p): *Rep. IX,* 571a-592b
(s) D. Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy,* Ch 5,
(f) D Russell, *Plato on Pleasure and the Good Life* Ch 4*
Formative essay questions

You must choose one essay question from the ‘First essay’ section for your first formative essay; and one essay question from the ‘Second essay’ section for your second formative essay.

First essay:
- a) Does Socrates refute Gorgias?
- b) Does Socrates refute Polus?
- c) What, if anything, is wrong with Callicles’ conception of justice?
- d) How convincing is the case against justice in Republic Book II?
- e) Does Socrates make a good case that the soul has three parts?

Second essay:
- a) Does the theory of the tripartite soul give us good reason to be just?
- b) Explain and discuss the distinctions drawn in Rep. V.474-80 between knowledge and belief.
- c) Explain and critically assess the role of the Form of Good
- d) ‘The philosopher escapes from the Cave only to be compelled to return’. Discuss
- e) Is the philosopher’s life the most pleasant one? Discuss with reference to Republic IX
In general, reading more Plato is the best way to improve one’s understanding of Plato. The Hackett volume *Plato: complete works*, edited by John Cooper, is very handy and worth having.

For the *Gorgias*, a good translation and commentary is:
D. Zeyl’s translation of the *Gorgias* in the Hackett series is also good

On the historical *Gorgias* and the rhetorical background see:
R. Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric*

Two good translations of the *Republic* are:
G. Grube/C. Reeve, *Plato, Republic* (Hackett)
G. Ferrai/T. Griffith, *Plato the Republic* (CUP)

Two useful collections of articles on the *Republic* are:
G. Santas (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Plato’s Republic*
G. Ferrari (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*

J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic* is an accessible and interesting introduction (though slightly dated).

For those reading Greek, the revised OCT text by Slings should be the first choice.

A helpful commentary on the Greek is that of