

# **Phil 770: Seminar in a Classical Author (Plato & Platonism)**

*Plato's Political Philosophy*

Prof. Jeremy Reid

## **Course and Contact Information**

Meeting times: M 4:00pm–6:45pm

Location: Humanities Building 383

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Office: Humanities Building 360

Office hours: M W, 11am–2pm, or by appointment

## **Course description**

This seminar focuses on Plato's *Republic*, *Statesman*, and *Laws*; we will also read excerpts from the *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, *Crito* and *Seventh Letter*, and some of the latest secondary literature on these dialogues. While the *Republic* is the most well known of Plato's political dialogues, scholarship is blossoming on his later dialogues, the *Statesman* and *Laws*. Together, these dialogues reveal various aspects of Plato's political ideals and their practical applications, along with a number of related issues in philosophical methodology, metaphysics, ethics, and moral psychology (all of which students are welcome to explore in their own research). In particular, the seminar will include discussion of the following questions: (a) What is the best political constitution and why is it the best? (b) What are the second-best forms of constitutions and on what basis does Plato rank them? (c) Does Plato think that democracy and democratic institutions have a positive role to play in a constitution? (d) Plato claims that good political institutions will foster virtue in the citizens: what does he mean by virtue in the various dialogues, and how are the political institutions supposed to foster virtue? (e) What kind of knowledge do rulers need in order to rule well in a Platonic polis? (f) What is the role of rhetoric in a Platonic polis? (g) Are Plato's proposals feasible and what is their contemporary relevance?

## **Assessment**

50% Class presentations and participation

50% Final paper (5000–8000 words)

## **Schedule of Readings**

Ideally, you would do all assigned readings. Historians of philosophy need to get used to reading a lot. That being said, I like non-ideal theory. For those who have not read

these texts previously, focus on the primary readings (underlined). Those with more of a background in ancient philosophy and those with a familiarity with the primary texts should focus on the secondary readings. Please note that the secondary readings often clarify the primary texts assigned and raise interesting philosophical issues and so will be helpful for you in coming up with good paper topics.

1. Jan 27: Plato, *Republic* 1
  - a. Barney, "Socrates' Refutation of Thrasymachus"
  - b. Watch: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeKxo\\_180U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeKxo_180U)
2. Feb 3: Plato, *Republic* 2–4
  - a. Green, "The First City and the First Soul of Plato's *Republic*"
  - b. Kamtekar, "Social Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*"
3. Feb 10: Plato, *Republic* 5–7
  - a. Annas, "Plato and Feminism"
  - b. Brown, "Justice and Compulsion for Plato's Philosopher-Rulers"

Note: there is a *very* long but very good and famous article by Myles Burnyeat called "Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul." 10/10 nerd reading.

4. Feb 17: Plato, *Republic* 8–10
  - a. Brennan, "The Nature of the Spirited Part of the Soul and Its Object"
  - b. Lane, "Placing Plato in the History of Liberty"
5. Feb 24: Plato, *Gorgias* (first half, up to the end of Polus' elenchus at 481b)
  - a. Russell, "Virtue, Pleasure, and Happiness in the *Gorgias*", from *Plato on Pleasure and the Good Life*
6. Mar 2: Plato, *Gorgias* (second half, Callicles to end)
  - a. Kamtekar, "The Profession of Friendship: Callicles, Democratic Politics, and Rhetorical Education in Plato's *Gorgias*"
7. Mar 9: Plato, *Statesman* (first half, beginning to 291d)
  - a. Carone, "Reversing the Myth of the *Politicus*"
  - b. Lane, "Jobs for Philosophers"
8. Mar 16: Plato, *Statesman* (second half, 291d to end)
  - a. Trivigno, "Lawlessness and Violence in the Ideal Regime"
  - b. Lane, "Political Expertise and Political Office in Plato's *Statesman*"

SPRING RECESS

9. Mar 30: Plato, *Phaedrus* (second half, 257b–end)—intermezzo on natural character, art, and rhetoric
    - a. Leunissen, *From Natural Character to Moral Virtue in Aristotle*, chapter 1
    - b. Moss, “What is Imitative Poetry and Why is it Bad?”
  10. Apr 6: Plato, *Laws* 1–2
    - a. Annas, *Virtue and Law in Plato and Beyond*, chapters 4–5
    - b. Wilburn, “Akrasia and Self-Rule in Plato’s *Laws*”
  11. Apr 13: Plato, *Laws* 3
    - a. Laks, “Freedom, Liberty, and Liberality in Plato’s *Laws*”
    - b. Reid, “The Mixed Constitution in Plato’s *Laws*”
  12. Apr 20: Plato, *Laws* 4–5
    - a. Lane, “Persuasion and Force in Platonic Politics”
    - b. Greene, “Freedom and Legislation in Plato’s *Laws*”

OR

    - c. Fossheim, “The Prooimia, Types of Motivation, and Moral Psychology”
    - d. Warren, “Comparing Lives in Plato, *Laws* 5”
  13. Apr 27: Plato, *Laws* 6–9
    - a. Reid, “Changing the Laws of the *Laws*”
    - b. Reid, “Plato on Love and Sex” (optional)
    - c. Wilburn, “Tripartition and the Causes of Criminal Behavior in *Laws* IX”
  14. May 4: Plato, *Laws* 10–12
    - a. Annas, *Virtue and Law in Plato and Beyond*, chapter 6
    - b. Laks, “Legislation and Demiurgy in Plato’s *Laws*”
  15. May 11: Plato[?], *Seventh Letter*
    - a. Irwin, “The Inside Story of the Seventh Letter”
- OR
16. Plato, *Crito*
    - a. Harte, “Conflicting Values in Plato’s Crito”

## **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Liberal & Creative Arts will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

## **Disability Access**

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/415-338-2472, video phone/415-335-7210) or by email (dprc@sfsu.edu).

## **Student Disclosures of Sexual Violence**

SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Title IX Coordinator by completing the report form available at <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>, emailing vpsaem@sfsu.edu or calling 338-2032.

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- The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; [http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe\\_plc/](http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/)
- Counseling and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208;  
<http://psyserve.sfsu.edu/>
- For more information on your rights and available resources:  
<http://titleix.sfsu.edu>