

Plato's Republic

Lecturer: D. Gregory MacIsaac

Series Description:

In this course we will read and discuss Plato's *Republic*. Through the construction of an ideal city, as a model for the human soul, Socrates argues that it is Justice rather than Injustice that makes human beings happy.

The course assumes no previous instruction in Philosophy or familiarity with Ancient Greek culture.

Schedule of Topics:

1. What is Justice? (Republic I)

'Justice' (*dikaionês*) is the term used by Ancient Greeks to describe what makes someone a 'good person'. In Book I, Socrates shows that popular Athenian conceptions of Justice are inadequate, because they don't give any reason to be just rather than unjust.

2. Glaucon's Social Contract (Republic II. 357a-368c)

Glaucon explains the popular (mostly unvoiced) support for Injustice over Justice. The unjust person simply gets more from his unscrupulous behaviour than does the just person, and in so doing he satisfies his natural desires for pleasure and power.

3. Justice in the City and in the Soul (Republic II.368c-IV)

Socrates gives an account of human nature in opposition to the one outlined by Glaucon, by constructing an ideal 'city in speech'. He shows that we are more complex than mere 'desiring machines'. In addition, we have the capacities for anger, honour, and pride, and we have the ability to make rational judgements about our desires. Justice satisfies our natures more fully than Injustice, because it speaks to the whole person rather than just to our appetites. So it is the just, rather than the unjust person who is happy.

4. The Three Waves (Republic V-VI. 502c)

Socrates faces three 'waves of laughter' with proposals that are in conformity with nature, but that are contrary to Athenian practice: that women have the same jobs as men, that the private family be abolished in favour of city-wide family ties, and that philosophers hold the position of rulers in the city.

5. The Sun, the Line, and the Cave; the Education of the Philosopher (Republic VI. 502c-VII)

Socrates explains what 'nature' itself is — the immaterial Forms upon which material things are patterned — by means of the three analogies of the Sun, the Divided Line, and the Cave. He describes the education of the philosopher-rulers in mathematics and dialectic, culminating in a

vision of the Form of the Good, which allows them to rule the city in conformity with human nature.

6. The Decline of Justice in the City and in the Soul; the Myth of Er (Republic VIII-X)

Because the happy regime and perfect rulers Socrates describes are ideal, it is unlikely that they will exist anywhere on earth. Socrates gives an account of how actually existing regimes fall short of the ideal, culminating in the most unhappy person and the worst regime: the Tyrant who holds a Tyranny. Finally, he discusses the relationship of the poets and tragedians to philosophy, and finishes with a Myth that encapsulates the argument of the book.

A Note on the Reading:

You can take this course without reading the *Republic*, because I will convey the argument of the book while I am explaining it as we go along. However, you will get more out of the course if you do read it. Any modern translation will do, but the best are:

- Grube, G.M.A. (1992). *Plato: The Republic*. Revised by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett. [THIS IS ALSO THE TRANSLATION IN THE COMPLETE WORKS OF PLATO, PUBLISHED BY HACKETT. GRUBE'S UNREVISED TRANSLATION IS ALSO FINE.]
- Bloom, Allan (1991) [1968]. *The Republic of Plato*. Translated, with notes and an interpretive essay. New York: Basic Books.

Also good are:

- Rowe, Christopher (2012). *Plato: Republic*. London: Penguin.
- Waterfield, Robin (1994). *Plato: Republic*. Translated, with notes and an introduction. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics.

The following are probably fine, but I have not looked at them:

- Griffith, Tom (2000). *Plato: The Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Allen, R.E. (2006). *Plato: The Republic*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sachs, Joe (2007). *Plato: Republic*. Newburyport: Focus Publishing.

Please DO NOT read Jowett's, which coincidentally is the one most readily available for free online:

- Jowett, Benjamin (1871). *Plato: The Republic*.