I. Purpose and Scope

In this course we will examine ancient political philosophy through the intensive study of Plato’s 
*Republic*, perhaps the greatest work of political philosophy ever written. Precisely because of the depth 
and comprehensiveness of its examination of political questions, the *Republic* addresses questions which 
go far beyond what we today normally think of as the realm of the political. In this work whose 
ostensible topic is justice, Plato treats such questions as: What is morality? Why should a person behave 
morally—wouldn’t it be more satisfying to be a tyrant? Is justice good for the just person? Regarding 
society and the variety of possible regimes, the work asks: What would a perfect society look like? What 
would be its customs and institutions regarding the equality of the sexes? What would the status of the 
family be in such a society, and in what ways is the family good or bad from the standpoint of society’s 
needs? And who would rule? Regarding the individual, the work considers the many possible ways of 
life and asks which is best, all the while exploring the question of human nature and the “politics” that 
take place within the psyche itself. Beyond all that, the work asks whether we see reality as it is or else 
spend our lives amid illusion and prejudice which we mistake for reality. Because the *Republic* is a 
dialogue and not a treatise, we never receive definitive answers to these questions in Plato’s own name. 
(Plato does not appear as a character in the dialogue.) But if the dialogue form poses difficulties that a 
treatise does not, it more than compensates for them with literary and intellectual satisfactions that few if 
any treatises can match.

II. Course Requirements

By far the most important requirement is that you read all assigned passages *closely* and *before class*. 
The *Republic* is one of those great philosophic works which, although difficult to penetrate, nevertheless 
offers much to the first-time reader. But it offers even more to the persistent reader, so you are advised 
to read the assignments more than once. Those seeking further insight may wish to consult Allan 
Bloom’s Interpretive Essay (located at the back of the book), which offers a section by section 
commentary on the text, and consult me for further recommendations. But you should not consult any 
interpreter until you have first read (and, preferably, reread) the assigned portion of the text on your own. 
Grades will be based on two 6-8 page papers (30% each), a take-home final exam (30%), and class 
participation (10%).

III. Academic Honesty

Strict standards of academic integrity will be upheld in this class. Your submission of written work 
means that your work is your own, that it is in accord with Carleton’s regulations on academic integrity 
(it is your responsibility to read “Academic Honesty in the Writing of Essays and Other Papers”), and 
that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Students who are found to have violated these 
standards should expect severe sanctions.
IV. Reading Schedule

The following schedule is only approximate. We may depart from it if and when class discussion so requires. The numbers refer to the traditional Stephanus pagination, which appears in the outer margins of each page of text.

September 14: 327a-336a (first part of Book 1)

September 16: 336a-354c (remainder of Book 1: Socrates and Thrasymachus)

September 21: 357a-372e (first half of Book 2)

September 23: 372e-383c (second half of Book 2)

September 28: 386a-403c (first half of Book 3)

September 30: 403c-417b (second half of Book 3)

October 5: 419a-434c (first half of Book 4)

October 7: 434c-445e (second half of Book 4)

October 12: 449a-473c (first two thirds of Book 5)

October 14: 473c-487a (remainder of Book 5, beginning of Book 6)

FIRST PAPER DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 15, 5:00 PM

October 19: 487b-503b (“middle half” of Book 6)

October 21: 503b-511e (remainder of Book 6)

October 26: 514a-541b (Book 7)

October 28: 543a-562a (first two thirds of Book 8)

November 2: 562a-576b (remainder of Book 8, beginning of Book 9)

November 4: 576b-592b (remainder of Book 9)

SECOND PAPER DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 5:00 PM

November 9: 595a-608b (first half of Book 10)

November 11: 608c-21d (second half of Book 10)

November 16: Conclusion

TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE MONDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 5:00 PM
V. Recommended secondary reading

The following books are all on closed reserve at the Library, except for Bloom (which you already own):

- Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*
- Allan Bloom, “Interpretive Essay”
- Eva Brann, *The Music of the Republic* (title essay especially, but other essays as well)
- Leon Harold Craig, *The War Lover: A Study of Plato’s Republic*
- Jacob Howland, *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*
- Michael Kochin, *Gender and Rhetoric in Plato’s Political Thought*
- David Roochnik, *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato’s Republic*
- Stanley Rosen, *Plato’s Republic: A Study*
- Devin Stauffer, *Plato’s Introduction to the Question of Justice* (predominantly on book 1)

The following readings pertain to specific themes or sections of the dialogue. Each is on e-reserve.

Regarding the dialogue form:


Regarding the “three waves” of paradox in book 5:

- Dale Hall, “The Republic and the “Limits of Politics””
- Allan Bloom, “Response to Hall”
- Drew A. Hyland, “Plato’s Three Waves and the Question of Utopia”
- Steven Forde, “Gender and Justice in Plato”
- Jacob Howland, “The Republic’s Third Wave and the Paradox of Political Philosophy”

Regarding some of the difficult ideas and images of books 6 and 7:

- Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, pages 115-25 (pertains to book 6's discussion of “the divided line”)