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 political realm. 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 respective roles of the sexes? What would be the status of the family 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 whether, to the contrary, we live amid illusions and prejudices that 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 some of the works listed on the list that appears below. 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 for those enrolled in POSC 250 will be based on two 6-8 page papers (30% each), a take-home final exam (30%), and class participation (10%). Grades for those opting for the POSC 350 (pre-comps) version of the course will be based on a twenty page seminar paper on a topic approved by the instructor (60%), the take-home 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, and that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Be sure you are familiar with Carleton’s
principles and policies on Academic Honesty: if you haven’t done so already, review the website found at https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/. I take academic honesty very seriously: 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 15: 327a-336a (first part of Book 1)
September 17: 336a-354c (remainder of Book 1: Socrates and Thrasytus)
September 22: 357a-372e (first half of Book 2)
September 24: 372e-383c (second half of Book 2)
September 29: 386a-403c (first half of Book 3)
October 1: 403c-417b (second half of Book 3)
October 6: 419a-434c (first half of Book 4)
October 8: 434c-445e (second half of Book 4)

**POSC 250: FIRST PAPER DUE AT NOON ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10**

October 13: 449a-473c (first two thirds of Book 5)
October 15: 473c-487a (remainder of Book 5, beginning of Book 6)
October 20: mid-term break
October 22: 487b-503b (“middle half” of Book 6)
October 27: 503b-511e (remainder of Book 6)
October 29: 514a-541b (Book 7)
November 3: 543a-562a (first two thirds of Book 8)
November 5: 562a-576b (remainder of Book 8, beginning of Book 9)

**POSC 250: SECOND PAPER DUE AT NOON ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7**

November 10: 576b-592b (remainder of Book 9)
November 12: 595a-608b (first half of Book 10)

November 17: 608c-21d (second half of Book 10)

November 19: Conclusion

**POSC 350: SEMINAR PAPER DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 5:00 PM**

**POSC 250 and 350: TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 5:00 PM**

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**Recommended secondary reading:**

The following books are 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*
- Gene Fendt, *Comic Cure for Delusional Democracy: 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:
