

PHIL 681, Section 001
Spring 2017 **R 4:30 – 7:10 PM**
Selected Dialogues of Plato

Instructor: Prof. Cherubin

Office: Robinson B461

Office Hours: W R 2:00 – 3:00 PM; further times available by appointment

Office hours are “student hours”: times faculty have set aside specifically to meet with students.

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Description

This course will study Plato's *Republic* and, time permitting, at least one other dialogue.

Plato's dialogues shed light on questions that we grapple with today:

- Is it possible to have knowledge of the good, the right, or the just? If so, what kind of knowledge is this, and how might it be attained? What is the relationship between justice and knowledge?
- Do we really need to be just, if we want a community worth living in?
- What might be a legitimate basis for political authority, and why? Is there any possible basis for political authority that does not ultimately reduce to, or camouflage, rule by the will of the strongest?
- What is an appropriate role for knowledge in political deliberation?
- What do we need to know about in order to benefit our families and communities?
- What do we need to know about in order to deliberate well within ourselves?
 - Do we need to know how the universe works?
 - Do we need to know how to persuade?
 - Do we need to know what is good or right?
 - Do we just need to know what we like?
- Can we have knowledge that transcends our personal beliefs or cultural assumptions? If so, how is this to be attained? If this knowledge exists, are we obligated to seek it?
- Is there a relationship between the order of nature (if any) and the best social orders (if any)? If so, what might that relationship be, and how could we tell? If not, why not, and how if at all can we find the best ways to live?
- Is there a relationship between good and the order of the universe?
- Is there a relationship between justice and the order of the universe?

Philosophers today are revisiting the *Republic* and *Timaeus* with an eye to reviving and developing Platonic conceptions and concerns that may have been overlooked or devalued in modern philosophy. We will discuss some of these contemporary works in class, and students are encouraged to address others along with Plato in their papers for the course.

Within the GMU PHIL MA program, this course fulfills the ancient/medieval philosophy requirement for the Traditional and Contemporary Focus and for the Philosophy and Cultural

Theory concentration; and the history of philosophy requirement for the Ethics and Public Affairs concentration.

Aims

The course aims to give students a background in Plato's work. We will focus on primary sources. Students will develop skill in reading ancient philosophical texts closely and critically; in writing both analytically and constructively; and in assessing secondary sources. Students will develop familiarity with current approaches to reading Plato, and will develop an understanding of current interpretations of the *Republic* and *Timaeus*.

Students will also investigate whether or to what extent the questions, ideas, and ways of thinking developed by ancient philosophers may be used to address issues of present-day significance; and they will learn to assess, criticize constructively, and further develop these ancient contributions.

Technology Skills

By the end of the semester students should be able to use e-mail; to use the Blackboard course management system; to use on-line library catalogs and other library databases including but not limited to *Philosopher's Index* and *Web of Science*; to find reserve and non-reserve materials such as books and journal articles; to use word-processing programs to format documents with correct margins and footnotes or endnotes; to be able to access documents on the course web site, on other web sites, and on the GMU electronic reserve system.

Please be sure that your GMU e-mail account is activated, and please check it regularly. University policies now **require** students to activate their GMU e-mail accounts and to check their GMU e-mail regularly. (See <http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=29&navoid=6185#OFF> .) Many official university communications (announcements; messages from Financial Aid, the Library, instructors, etc.) are sent by GMU e-mail to students' GMU email addresses, and students are responsible for knowing the information conveyed in this way. If I need to contact you for any reason outside of class hours, I will do so via your GMU e-mail address.

Important general note from the University concerning enrollment

Check PatriotWeb regularly to verify that you are registered for the classes for which you think you are registered. This is particularly important since students are no longer dropped for nonpayment. Faculty are not to grade the work of students whose names do not appear on the official class roster. If you are registered for a class you do not attend, you will not necessarily be dropped automatically. Therefore if you wish to drop a class, do so through PatriotWeb. Once the add and drop deadlines have passed, instructors do not have the authority to approve requests from students to add or drop/withdraw late.

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. (Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Website <http://registrar.gmu.edu>.) After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

Course Requirements

Required Texts

1. Plato, *Republic*. Trans. Reeve. Hackett.
2. Plato, *Timaeus*. Trans. Kalkavage. Hackett.

These should be available in the GMU Bookstore. They are also readily available via your favorite online bookstores.

If you already own other translations, you are welcome to use them, as long as they meet two conditions:

- they must be unabridged and complete;
- and they must include Stephanus numbers (numbers and letters in the margins of the pages, as e.g. 327a at the beginning of the *Republic*).

The translations by Jowett violate the first condition; **do not use them.**

If you do use translations other than the ones ordered for this course, please bring up in class any ways in which these translations differ from the ones ordered for the class, as these differences can be instructive.

3. Some additional short texts (original translations, supplements to lecture notes, etc.) will be made available on Blackboard. See the Reading Assignments, Course Content, and Further Reading and Reference tabs. Some of these will be marked as required, some as recommended, and some as optional.

4. Further readings, some but not all of them required, will be placed on reserve, either in the Johnson Center Library or on electronic reserve.

5. Some supplementary materials in the form of journal articles will be found either in the Periodicals Section of Fenwick Library, or in on-line journal databases. Some of these will be required, and others optional reading.

Please check Blackboard under the Reading Assignments tab at least once per week to see new postings and links concerning supporting materials (required secondary readings, recommended readings, things you might find useful in your papers, etc.).

Classwork

Class sessions begin at 4:30 PM. Students are expected to come to each class session having read the material assigned for that day, and prepared to discuss it or to ask thoughtful questions about it. Thoughtful class participation is expected. Please bring to class each day the text we will be discussing that day.

If you don't have questions you haven't done the reading.

Written Work

1. **Two short papers** (about 5 pages each) **OR one short paper plus an in-class presentation.** One of these must be selected from the options offered in the first half of the course (due on or before March 23) and one must be selected from the options offered in the second half of the course.

Most weeks, I will assign either an exegesis (a passage of text to explicate) or a question or both. Twice during the semester, you will select *one* of these passages to explicate **OR one** question to answer. Due dates and topics will be posted to the course web site. In other words, some weeks you will explicate one passage or answer one question, and some weeks you

will do neither. (If you choose to do more than 2 short papers, or more than one short paper and a presentation, I will count the 2 highest grades.)

(a) Each of the short papers you write should be about 5 pages in length. Papers must be in either .doc, .docx, or .pdf format. Submit them via Blackboard.

(b) If you elect to do an in-class presentation, it must be EITHER be on the topic assigned for the short paper due that day OR on a topic approved at least one week in advance by the instructor; it must be no more than fifteen minutes in length; and notes or a written version must be submitted on the day of the presentation. Submit the notes or written version via Blackboard.

2. Two longer papers

You'll be able to find instructions for these papers under the Writing Assignments tab in Blackboard. Papers must be in either .doc, .docx, or .pdf format.

(a) One, on a topic pertaining to the first seven Books of the *Republic* and using that text (plus others including secondary sources) will be due on March 20. It is to be 8-10 pages in length. Submit this via Blackboard.

(b) The second, on a topic pertaining to the last three Books of the *Republic* and/or to the *Timaeus* and using that text (plus others including secondary sources) will be due on May 11. It is to be 10-15 pages in length. Submit this via Blackboard.

(c) Students **must** submit a research question and a preliminary annotated bibliography for each longer paper. These are due on February 10 for the first longer paper, and on April 3 for the second. Submit these via Blackboard.

(d) There will be in-class peer-review sessions on drafts of the longer papers, on March 9 and May 4, respectively.

Students are also encouraged to show drafts of their longer papers to the instructor for comments (in-office conferences) before submitting the papers.

3. There is no in-class final exam for this course. Instead, your second longer paper is due on the day assigned for final exams for Thursday 4:30 - 7:10 courses.

4. For guides to writing in philosophy, a link to an online Greek-English dictionary, and other helpful resources, check the Writing Resources tab of our Blackboard page.

5. The GMU Writing Center is an excellent resource for writing-related questions: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu> (see the web page for locations and their phone numbers).

Grading

1. The short papers (or one short paper and one presentation) each account for 15% of your grade. The "long" papers each account for 30% of your grade. The remaining 10% of the grade reflects class participation. Half of this will be drawn from thoughtful contributions to class discussions. The other half will be drawn from thoughtful participation in the peer-review sessions and conferences.

Regular and thoughtful class participation is helpful to your grade, especially in situations where your numerical average comes out in between two letter grades. Participation includes contributing thoughtfully to in-class discussions either by speaking or by submitting discussion

questions. If there is student interest (and if Blackboard can be made to support a cross-section discussion board), discussions in a Blackboard discussion board will also count. If signs indicate that students are not preparing for class by doing the reading, reading quizzes will be instituted and the results will become part of the participation grade.

To earn an A on a paper, you need to: answer the research question(s) correctly (there may be several ways to do this); cover your topic thoroughly; follow all instructions; *explain* how you came to your conclusions if any; support your conclusions (if any) or explain why you have doubts; show your reasoning; make no factual errors; write clearly. You must do this in a way that shows a high level of understanding and clarity (for example, presenting an especially comprehensive explanation or an especially detailed analysis or an especially nuanced conclusion).

A paper that earns a B is one that gets most parts of the question(s) right, but makes some noticeable and relevant factual error OR does not answer the question(s) completely (leaves out something fairly important) OR makes a relevant error in answering the question OR makes a relevant error in reasoning or in understanding of the point or text studied OR does not clearly show the student's understanding or reasoning OR does not adequately support its conclusions.

A paper that earns a C is one that answers the question somewhat, but leaves out crucial points OR makes several significant factual errors OR includes little explanation or shows little reasoning OR combines several of the problems mentioned in the paragraph on "B" papers and exams OR is not written clearly enough to convey your understanding of certain important points.

A paper that earns a D shows minimal understanding of the texts OR covers little of the question(s) correctly OR makes major factual errors that undermine your answers OR is so unclear that I can only tell whether a few parts are right OR includes no explanations.

A paper will get an F if it covers less than 60% of the question(s) or topic correctly OR if it does not address the question(s) OR if it is so unclear that I cannot tell what you are saying.

Grades of A-, B+, B-, C+, etc. will also be given. An A- paper is between an A paper and a B paper but closer to an A paper; a B+ paper is between an A paper and a B paper but closer to a B paper, etc.

As required by University policy, a letter grade of A+ is equivalent to a numerical grade of 4.0; a grade of A is also equivalent to a numerical grade of 4.0; a grade of A- is equivalent to a 3.67; a B+ is equivalent to a 3.33; a B is equivalent to a 3.0; etc.

For a full listing of the University's policy for converting letter grades into numerical grades to compute your GPA (grade-point average), see the University Catalog online at <http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=29&navoid=6177>.

2. Late assignment policy: Work that is submitted **late with a documented legitimate excuse will be accepted without penalty**. Examples of documented legitimate excuses include a doctor's note or emergency room receipt if the absence was due to illness; a receipt from a mechanic for emergency car repairs on the day of class; an official document (such as a syllabus) from one of your other courses proving that you had a required field trip for that class on the day our class meets; an official document from your workplace proving that your job sent you out of town on the day our class meets; an official document from an athletic team proving that you had a competition on the day our class meets; etc. **The documentation must account for the lateness:** for example, a medical note indicating that you were treated for an illness of a week's

duration would **not** be sufficient documentation to excuse submitting an assignment a month late.

Because the short papers cover material that is to be discussed in class on the day each paper is due, short papers will NOT be accepted late UNLESS you have a documented legitimate excuse.

Other work (such as long papers) that is submitted late, without a documented legitimate excuse, will lose one grade increment per day that it is late. For example, an assignment that would have received a B+ if handed in on time will receive a B if submitted within 24 hours of its deadline, a B- if submitted between 24 and 48 hours late, and so on. The maximum penalty is two full letter grades: assignments will not be accepted more than 1 week late without a documented legitimate excuse.

3. Policy on assignments that are not submitted at all: Any required assignment that you do not submit by the time that the last assignment is due will receive a grade of F, **unless** you have requested a grade of IN (see #4 below).

4. Policy concerning grades of IN (incomplete): Grades of IN will be given **only** in either of the following situations:

(1) If you request a grade of IN in writing at least 24 hours before the last assignment is due AND submit an Incomplete Grade Contract (available at <http://registrar.gmu.edu/forms/IGC.pdf>), OR

(2) If a sudden emergency arises less than 24 hours before the assignment is due AND you can provide appropriate documentation of this emergency (as described in the section on late assignments, above) AND a written request for a grade of IN along with the Incomplete Grade Contract mentioned above.

If you do not make a written request for a grade of IN and cannot provide documentation of emergency, you will receive a grade of F for each assignment that is missing.

University policy specifies that instructors are to assign an IN only if the student has a very limited amount of work to complete and there is a non-academic reason that prevents them from completing the work within the semester.

5. Policy on plagiarism/ Honor Code policy: You are responsible for knowing, understanding, and obeying the University Honor Code and the Honor Code Statement for this course. For details please see the Honor Code Statement later in this syllabus. The policy for this class is in accordance with University policy as outlined in the online University Catalog at <http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=29&navoid=6196> ; see also oai.gmu.edu. If you have any questions, please ask your instructor.

6. Academic accommodations: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2474. See also this page: <http://ds.gmu.edu/> .

All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. By ‘disability’ I mean a learning disability, physical disability, or other condition that requires that you receive modified assignments, note-takers, extended exam time, etc.

The need for accommodations must be identified to the ODS and the instructor at the beginning of the semester (unless the need for accommodations develops after that point, in which case it should be identified as soon as possible after it arises). Please get the proper documentation from the Office of Disability Services concerning the specific accommodations you will need at the beginning of the semester, or as soon as it is available, so that we can set up appropriate arrangements. Then please take a moment (before or after class, in office hours, etc.) to show me the documentation and to make sure I understand exactly what you will need.

Schedule

Please note that this schedule may change slightly should that become necessary. Any changes that occur will be announced as soon as the instructor knows of them. For details of reading assignments for each week, see our Reading Assignments tab in Blackboard.

Jan. 26: *Republic* Book One
Feb. 2: *Republic* Book Two
Feb. 9: *Republic* Book Three
Feb. 16: *Republic* Book Four
Feb. 23: *Republic* Book Five
March 2: *Republic* Book Six
March 9: *Republic* Book Seven
March 23: *Republic* Book Eight
March 30: *Republic* Book Nine
April 6: *Republic* Book Ten
April 13: *Timaeus* 17a-34c
April 20: *Timaeus* 34c-53c
April 27: *Timaeus* 53c-72e
May 4: *Timaeus* 72e-92c

Important Dates this Semester

Last day to add classes: Jan. 30
 Last day to drop classes with no tuition liability: Jan. 30
 Last day to drop classes: Feb. 24
 Selective withdrawal for undergraduate courses: Feb. 27 – March 31
 Spring Break: March 13 - 19
 Last class meeting for this course: May 4

Resources: philosophy and research

The GMU Library page: <http://library.gmu.edu>

The Library's "Ask a Librarian" service: <http://library.gmu.edu/ask>

GMU Philosophy Department: <http://philosophy.gmu.edu>

Some other useful resources at GMU

GMU Writing Center, Robinson A114: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): <http://caps.gmu.edu>: SUB I Room 3129, 703-993-2380

Learning Services (academic skills, tutoring, etc.) : <http://caps.gmu.edu/learning-services/>

Disability Services (ODS): <http://ds.gmu.edu> : SUB I Room 2500, 703-993-2474

University Catalog: <http://catalog.gmu.edu>

University policies: <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu>

Graduate fellowships: <http://gradfellows.gmu.edu/>

Career Services: <http://careers.gmu.edu>

Honor Code Statement

This course is conducted in accordance with the GMU Honor Code, as outlined in the University Catalog. The GMU Honor Code is as follows:

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the University Community have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

See also the online version of the most recent catalog <http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=29&navoid=6196>

See <http://oai.gmu.edu> for more detailed information.

Each student is to do his or her own work; collaboration on required written assignments (exams, papers, etc.) is not permitted.

All answers on written assignments must be in the student's own words.¹ Short quotations from the class texts or from other sources may be used, provided that all quotations are properly attributed (you must cite the author's name, the title of the source, and the page number or URL if any). **If you do not know how to do this, please see your instructor and I will be glad to help you.**

The Mason Honor Code on Plagiarism: <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/plagiarism/understanding-plagiarism/>

The Mason Honor Code on Cheating: <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/cheating/>

Further clarification: Earlier versions of the University Catalog provided good general

¹ Hint: Assignment questions and prompts will be such that you cannot answer correctly or sufficiently simply by copying sentences from the class texts or other sources. You will need to be able to show that you have understood what you have read. (In general, I ask that quotations make up no more than 20% of your answer to each numbered exam question and no more than 20% of the total length of your papers; this gives you space to answer the questions adequately and to discuss your quotations.)

accounts of what is meant by ‘plagiarism’ and ‘cheating’ here, and as these are consistent with the current GMU Office of Academic Integrity accounts I **will continue to use these earlier descriptions for purposes of clarification:**

Earlier versions of the University Catalog included under the heading ‘Plagiarism’ two kinds of thing. First is “[p]resenting as one’s own the words, the work, or the opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgment.”² This means that if you quote from any source without giving proper credit to that source, what you have done counts as plagiarism, and will not be permitted. By ‘source,’ I mean printed material, electronic material (information from internet sites, e-mail, etc.), films, videotapes, audiotapes, radio, television, human beings other than yourself, or any other presenter of verbal information. By ‘proper credit’ I mean clear identification of the source of each quotation you have used, including the title of the source, the name of the author (where available), the URL if the source is a web site, the journal title if the source is a journal article, the date of publication (or of download from a web site), and the publisher if the source is a book. **If you have any question as to whether what you are doing constitutes quotation from a source, or if you are unsure about how to quote a source or how to give proper credit, please see your instructor.**

The second kind of plagiarism outlined in the Catalog was “[b]orrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment.” This means that if you take a passage from something you have read, and change a few of the words—without changing the meaning—and then claim that these ideas are yours (or simply fail to mention whose they are), that is also plagiarism, and is not permitted. There is nothing wrong with quoting (briefly) from sources; just acknowledge when you do it. If a source you find says exactly what you yourself think, show why you think it is correct. As long as you explain this in your own words, there is no problem. **If you have any questions about what counts as “borrowing the sequence of ideas...,” please see your instructor, and I will be glad to help.**

Both kinds of plagiarism are forbidden at GMU.

Examples of plagiarism and examples of proper (non-plagiarizing) citation are provided at <http://mason.gmu.edu/~rcherubi/plagiarism.html> .

According to the earlier catalogs whose descriptions this class will follow, **“cheating encompasses the following: (1) The willful giving or receiving of an unauthorized, unfair, dishonest, or unscrupulous advantage in academic work over other students.**

(2) The above may be accomplished by any means whatsoever, including, but not limited to, the following: fraud, duress, deception, theft, trick, talking, signs, gestures, copying from another student, and the unauthorized use of study aids, memoranda, books, data or other information.

(3) Attempted Cheating.”

² This and all quotations in this Honor Code Statement are taken from the 2003-2004 GMU Catalog, p. 29.

All such cheating and attempted cheating are forbidden at GMU. Since required assignments for this course specify that students are not to collaborate, any collaboration between students in the writing of required assignments will be considered to be a case of giving and receiving of “unauthorized and unfair advantage in academic work over other students.”

Again, if you have any questions about whether something you intend to do on a paper or exam is acceptable, please speak to your instructor before the assignment is due. I will be glad to help you—really.

Penalties/Responses to Plagiarism and Cheating:

A. For a first offense in this course, on assignments other than the final assignment: If there is **evidence** that a student has collaborated with others, or **evidence** that a student has presented others’ words or sequences of ideas as his or her own, that student’s paper will be invalidated, and the student will be required to complete a paper on a different topic, in a satisfactory manner within a one-week deadline. The work submitted will be assessed a penalty of one letter grade. Work submitted after the one-week deadline will be assessed a late penalty as outlined above under “Late Assignment Policy.” No credit will be given until the work is re-submitted satisfactorily. If the work is not re-submitted satisfactorily, that assignment will receive a grade of F.

B. On the final assignment, or for a second offense on earlier assignments: If there is **evidence** that a student has collaborated with others or has presented others’ words or sequences of ideas as his or her own, **the case will be reported to the Honor Committee.** No credit will be given unless the case is resolved with a finding of “Not Guilty.”

Note. By ‘evidence’ I mean something in writing that clearly shows proof of plagiarism or illegitimate collaboration. For example, if two students submit identically-worded answers; if two students hand in assignments written in the same handwriting when they have previously had different handwritings (if you are injured and suddenly cannot write, let me know of this before making arrangements for another student to “help you”!); if a student submits a paper which I find to consist substantially of material copied from a book or web site without attribution and I can get hold of a copy of the book or can access pages from the web site—all of these are cases where I would say that there is evidence of an Honor Code violation. If there is any question in my mind, I will speak to the student(s) involved before making the determination as to whether to take action.

Diversity Statement

Philosophia began in respect for diversity in ideas, cultures, beliefs, and ways of thinking. It first developed in Miletus, a crossroads for a variety of cultures including Greeks, Persians, Egyptians, Babylonians, and other cultures of the Middle East, southern Europe, and northern and eastern Africa. In Miletus, the first philosophers sought out, investigated, and tested a variety of ideas and ways of thinking, treating foreign ideas and familiar ideas with equal respect — including subjecting them to equal scrutiny. The fact that an idea or person was Greek in origin

did not incite in philosophers more respect or less respect than was due a foreign person or idea; and the fact that an idea was new did not make it any more suspect than an older one.

For the first philosophers, respect for the diverse and the familiar was compatible with — it even required — inquiry and testing. This is because what these philosophers valued was understanding, even where this went beyond and challenged what passed for understanding in their communities.

PHIL 681 endeavors to continue this philosophical project. Only by respectful yet critical systematic questioning will we be able to discover and move beyond the prejudices and gaps in knowledge we might not yet realize we have, to a more comprehensive and powerful understanding.

To this end, the course will function in keeping with the University Diversity Statement, <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-statement/>, and the Women and Gender Studies Program Commitment to Diversity Statement, <http://wmst.gmu.edu/faculty/faculty-diversity-statement>:

“We seek to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across identities. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.”