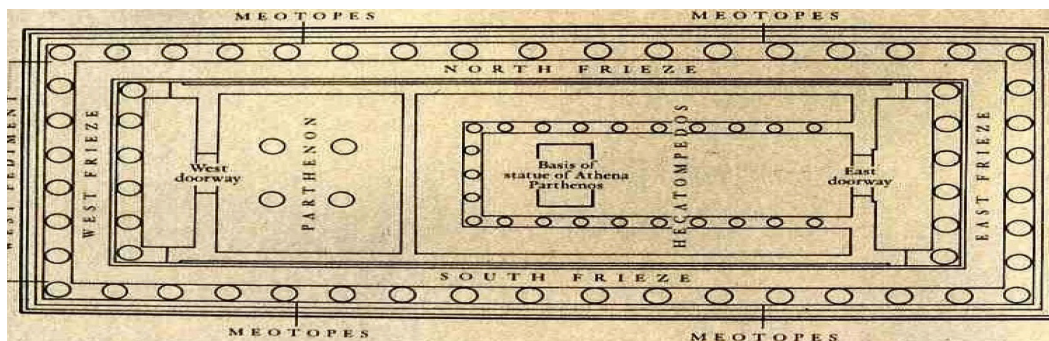


## European College of Liberal Arts

AY/BA1 Core Course, Autumn 2011

Seminar leaders: Ewa Atanassow, Tracy Colony, Cecelia Watson, Michael Weinman

Guests: Jarrell Robinson (University of Chicago), David Hayes (ECLA), Lidia Denkova (NBU), Glenn Most (SNS), David McNeil (Essex), Geoff Lehman (ECLA), Thomas Bartscherer (Bard College), Tobias Joho (University of Chicago), Claudia Baracchi (Universita di Milano-Bicocca)



### Plato's *Republic* and Its Interlocutors

Mon 10:45-12:15, 13:30-15; Wed 9-10:30, 10:45-12:15; Thu 13:30-15

The focus of this course is Plato's *Republic*, which depicts and draws us into a conversation about the kinds of values (ethical, political, aesthetic, religious, epistemic, and literary) at the heart both of ECLA's approach to education and, simply, of human life. Rather than a series of separate treatises, the *Republic* treats these values as the subject of a single conversation that transcends disciplinary boundaries as we have come to conceive them. And while it may be said to contain a "social contract" theory, a theory of psychology, a theology, a critique of mimetic art, a theory of education, or a typology of political regimes, it is reducible to none of these, nor is the list exhaustive.

In this course we shall be particularly attentive to the dialogic character of Plato's writing. Just as Socrates appears in conversation with his interlocutors, the *Republic* itself seems to be in conversation with other authors, works, genres and kinds of thought in the Greek tradition. Reading Plato's work alongside Homer's *Iliad*, Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Euripides's *Bacchae*, Parmenides's poem, Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, and Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* we will strive to better appreciate and evaluate the argument and drama of the *Republic*. As we read the *Republic* and attend to the conversations it has with its interlocutors, we aim to become informed and engaging interlocutors for Plato and for one another.

Course Readings:

*The Republic of Plato*, tr. Alan Bloom  
Homer, *Iliad*, tr. Stanley Lombardo  
Hesiod, *Works and Days*, tr. Stephanie Nelson  
Euripides's *Bacchae*, tr. William Arrowsmith (ed. by Mark Griffith and Glenn Most)  
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, tr. Stephen Halliwell  
Parmenides, Proem, tr. G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield  
Euclid, *Elements*, tr. Thomas L. Heath (ed. Dana Densmore)  
Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, tr. Steven Lattimore

#### Class Preparation and Participation:

Regular attendance is essential to the success of this course. So is class preparation. **Preparing for class means reading thoughtfully and engaging with the text**, e.g. by thinking through the argument in a particular section of the *Republic* and taking notes while reading. Try to identify questions and problems in advance: Why do the characters argue as they do? If you don't like an interlocutor's answer to Socrates, how would *you* answer? And how would you explain and justify that answer to others in conversation around the seminar table? To aid your preparatory effort, this syllabus includes short blurbs and study questions for each week of the course. Do read and use them!

**There will be an attendance sheet for each lecture to be signed up before each lecture begins. Late arrival counts as an absence.** According to college regulations, over 15% unexcused absences will result in academic probation. Lectures, seminars, and writing sessions are all separate "classes" for the purposes of counting absences.

#### Written Assignments:

The first writing assignment will be a short response paper due at the end of week 1. The aim of the short paper is to deepen your thinking about a particular passage, and to help you practice expressing yourself in writing. Over the course of the term you will participate in three seminar groups, each led by a different seminar leader. Within each segment of the term you will be assigned one substantial essay **due at the end of weeks 4, 7, and 11**. The first two essays will respond to a thematic question, and should represent your understanding of the relevant part of the reading. The final essay, which you'll have a week to complete and will be somewhat longer, should convey your most sustained reflection on the course material. To help your preparation for the written assignments there will be three writing sessions preceding each of the essay deadlines.

**Essay deadlines: 23:59 on Saturday Oct. 29, Saturday Nov. 19, and Friday Dec. 16**

#### Grading:

Writing over the term: 15%  
Two term essays (2x15%): 30%  
Final essay: 25%  
Seminar grade: 30%

Below is the weekly schedule. Unless noted otherwise, the Thursday seminars will be devoted to continuing the discussion and deepening our reflection on the readings for the week.

**Week 1: *Republic* 1 and Homer's *Iliad* 1**

Mon Oct. 3: Public Holiday

Wed Oct. 5: Republic 1 (Plenary session)

Thu seminar: Iliad 1

Sat Oct. 8, 1 6:30 The Treasures of Troy - visit with Aya to Neues Museum

Book 1 is a microcosm of the *Republic*. Through a series of radically different encounters –the “arrest” of Socrates in the beginning; the folk-wisdom of Cephalus; the first display of Socratic questioning with Cephalus’s son Polemarchus; and the vehement debate with Thrasymachus, itself a whole of different parts – it introduces the themes that stay with the dialogue throughout. These different encounters also teach us that paying attention to what participants *say* and *do* is crucial for understanding both the questions they raise (how does the philosopher relate to the city? what is the role of the gods and the afterlife? is there wisdom in poetry? what is justice?), as well as the reasons for failing to answer these questions. In the last session for this week we make our first foray into the Homeric world of gods and heroes.

Study Questions:

- \* Why does the dialogue open as it does?
- \* How does the question of justice arise? Can you see a connection between the particular definitions of justice and the persons championing them, i.e., between character and argument?
- \* Why is Thrasymachus so worked up? What, if anything, is wrong with Socrates’ refutation of Thrasymachus?
- \* Does Achilles have a definition of justice? If so, what would it sound like?

**Week 2: *Iliad* 9, 18, 21, 22 and *Republic* 2**

Mon Oct. 10: Iliad 9, 18, 21, 22 (EA)

Wed Oct. 12: Republic 2, guest lecture by Jarrell Robinson (University of Chicago)

Homer’s *Iliad* was the cornerstone of ancient Greek education. Much of the conversation in Plato’s *Republic* presents itself as a critique of Homer, and of the cosmic vision and heroic ideals depicted in the *Iliad*. We begin this week by discussing the Homeric view of the universe and the place of human beings and institutions in it. Juxtaposing Homer’s account of the paradigmatic hero Achilles, and his status vis-à-vis gods and men, with what *Republic* 2 says about the human relation to the divine and the role of poetic tradition in shaping our ethical views, we begin to outline the differences between the Homeric image of the good life and Plato’s reworking of it.

Study Questions:

- \* What motivates Homeric heroes to die in battle? How unique is Achilles in this respect?
- \* Why are Glaucon and Adeimantus dissatisfied with the way the argument has gone? What do their particular dissatisfactions tell us about each of their characters?
- \* What is wrong with the portrayal of Homeric gods and heroes, according to Socrates? And why does he insist that poetry or storytelling must be censored?

### **Week 3: Hesiod's *Works and Days* and *Republic* 3**

Mon Oct. 17: Works and Days, guest lecture by David Hayes (ECLA)

Wed Oct. 19: Republic 3 (TC)

Like the *Republic*, the *Works and Days* is about education and justice. Presented as a lesson to his unjust brother, Hesiod's work is curiously similar to Plato's: Glaucon and Adeimantus were Plato's brothers. But there are important differences as well: Hesiod's instruction is for a private farmer, not a public "guardian." And in Hesiod's myth of the metals (unlike Socrates' "noble lie") we are all irredeemably "iron." Hesiod's teaching is also saturated with a kind of religiosity that Socrates finds problematic. Through the readings for this week we'll explore Hesiod's vision of a virtuous life and Socrates' critique of that vision, as well as the Socratic account of the role that imitation and lying play in education.

#### Study Questions:

- \* What is the view of good and fulfilling human life that emerges from Hesiod's poem? What role do the gods play in this view?
- \* What is the significance of the 'Five Ages' myth (106-201) for Hesiod's account of a just man?
- \* According to Socrates, what exactly is wrong with Hesiod's poetry? Does Socrates' critique of Hesiod differ from his critique of Homer?
- \* What is the purpose of the Noble Lie? How can lying be permissible, let alone "noble"?

### **Week 4: *Republic* 4 and Euripides's *Bacchae***

Mon Oct. 24: Republic 4

Wed Oct. 26: 9-10:30 *Bacchae* seminars; 10:45-12:15 Writing session

Thu. Oct 27: *The Bacchae*, guest lecture by Glenn Most (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa)

In Book 4 of the *Republic*, after addressing Adeimantus's objection that the life of the guardians is not worth living, Socrates leads Glaucon toward a precise view of the divided nature of the human soul, and the guiding role of reason. In so doing, the two of them come to a shared understanding of how the soul can be one, how this is the very meaning of justice, and why this is the only life worth living. Exploring at once god, man, woman, society, and the poet's own tragic art, Euripides's *Bacchae* (staged posthumously in 404) appears to question precisely the kind of rationalistic view of the soul that, at the end of book 4, Socrates seems to hold as established.

#### Study Questions:

- \* Why does Adeimantus believe that the guardians will not be happy? Is happiness relevant to the problem of justice?

- \* Why is Leontius so angry with himself about looking at the corpses (440a-c)? What do we learn from this internal conflict?
- \* Why does Socrates believe that he and the others “probably hit upon an origin and model for justice” (443c)? Does that model confirm that justice in the city is like justice in the soul?
- \* Is Pentheus a tragic hero, why or why not? Does the *Bacchae* articulate a clear moral vision?

First Essay Due: Sat. Oct. 29 at 23:59

### **Week 5: *Republic 5* and Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata***

Mon Oct. 31: *Republic 5*, guest lecture by Lidia Denkova (New Bulgarian University)

Wed Nov. 2: *Lysistrata* (MW)

The *Republic* may be said to open with the assembled group “arresting” Socrates in “tragic” fashion. Book five seems to restage the seizure as comedy. As in Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata*, where the Athenian women resolve to withhold their consent for sexual activity until the war is ended, so too the comic drama of *Republic 5* is permeated with sexual politics. For Socrates, this takes the form of three radical proposals that entail the dissolution of the private family. Both political fantasies raise fundamental questions about familial life in a political community: To what extent are men and women “parts” of the city? Can men and women be perfectly equal as “human beings” or “citizens”? If different, can they be brought into harmony with one another?

#### Study Questions:

- \* Why is the conclusion reached at the end of *Republic 4* dissatisfying? What is missing?
- \* What exactly is the problem that calls for Socrates’s radical solutions? Are these solutions adequate, why or why not?
- \* In *Lysistrata*, what makes the women’s private decision to refuse sex with their husbands political?

### **Week 6: *Republic 6* and Parmenides**

Mon Nov. 7: *Republic 6*, guest lecture by David McNeil (University of Essex)

Wed Nov. 9: Parmenides' s Proem (MW)

*Republic 6* begins with the paradox that philosophy, useless as it may seem, is truly the most useful practice for life in the city. This tension is then resolved, or perhaps only deepened, through two intertwined images: (1) the sun as the good, bringing all into being through its light; (2) a line, representing all things that can be known, cut according to the proportion that holds between each of the kinds of things the soul can come to know, and at the end of which, or just beyond the end of which, one arrives at a vision of that sun. Both images owe much to Parmenides, who earlier described truth as the only light in a world of confusion and darkness, and two "ways" that a human being can follow in seeking knowledge: being and non-being.

#### Study Questions:

- \* Early in book 6 Socrates is defending the value of philosophy in light of its apparent uselessness. Are you persuaded?
- \* What is the sun? Socrates presents it as the cause of all that is, or can be, and all that is known, or can be known. But is it, itself, a thing that is? Can it be known?
- \* How is Socrates' geometrical construction ("the divided line" [509d]) as an image of the proper order of education in cultivating a philosophic soul similar to—and different from—Parmenides' "two ways" as described in the Proem?

### **Week 7: *Republic 7*, the Parthenon and Euclid's *Elements***

Mon Nov. 14: *Republic 7* (TC)

Wed Nov. 16: "The Parthenon as a Problem," guest lecture by Geoff Lehman (ECLA), followed by a plenary session on the Parthenon, proportion, and mathematics as the "prelude" to dialectics

Thu Nov. 17: Writing session

Book 7 opens with the most celebrated of all Platonic images: the allegory of the cave that culminates the discussion about philosophic education. A crucial instance of philosophical poetry, the story of the cave depicts the effect of education as a "turning-around" (*periagogē*, in Latin = "conversion") of souls that is both liberating and potentially dangerous.

The Parthenon, Greece's most famous architectural landmark, dominated the Athenian civic landscape during Plato's lifetime. Drawing on a selection from Euclid's *Elements* – a textbook of Greek mathematics, collected a few generations after Plato – we shall discuss how the building's architectural and artistic features, especially its use of the ratio 4:9 as a foundation for nearly every element of its design, illustrate what *Republic 7* has to say about the need for education to involve "problems" so as to propel the mind on the path of dialectics.

#### Study Questions:

- \* What are the political dimensions of the allegory of the cave? Why is philosophical education potentially dangerous, and how does Socrates propose to deal with these dangers?
- \* What do Socrates' references to eyesight and fire say about the character of the individual soul?
- \* How can the Parthenon be said to "educate" the Athenian citizenry? In what ways do the "problems" posed by the building "summon the intellect"?

Second Essay Due: Sat. Nov. 19 at 23:59

### Week 8: *Republic 8* and Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Books 1, 2)

Mon Nov. 21: Republic 8, guest lecture by Thomas Bartscherer (Bard College)

Wed Nov. 23: Thucydides's *History* (Books 1, 2), guest lecture by Tobias Joho (U. of Chicago)

Fri Nov. 25, 17h: *Miller's Crossing*, Film screening & Pizza

Having scaled the summits of the city-in-speech, the only way seems to be down. Book 8 charts the degeneration of the best regime of city and soul into timocracy (love of honor), oligarchy, democracy (!) and, finally, the very worst constitution – tyranny. We trace Socrates's account of this degeneration alongside Thucydides's history of the degeneration of Athens from the "golden age" of Pericles to the thirty tyrants, installed after the city's final defeat by the Spartan alliance in 404 BC. Our first reading focuses on the figure of Pericles, the very embodiment of Athenian glory and power, and the events that sowed the seeds of Athens' fall.

#### Study Questions:

- \* Why do cities and souls degenerate? Is Socrates' account of regime change simply a story of decay?
- \* Which of the regimes discussed in Book 8 is most hospitable to philosophy? Why?
- \* What, according to Thucydides, is the relationship between an individual's capacity for moral action and the broader social and political framework? What was unique about this relationship in the case of Athens in the fifth century BC?

### Week 9: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Books 3-7) and *Republic 9*

Mon Nov. 28: Thucydides's *History* (Books 3-7), guest lecture by Tobias Joho (U. of Chicago)

Wed Nov. 30: Republic 9 (MW)

Our second reading from Thucydides's *History* focuses on the events leading up to, and then resulting from, the Athenians' disastrous decision to conquer Sicily, while still engaged in a conflict with Sparta. Thucydides attributes this decision to *eros* (desire). How and why does Athens – the celebrated birthplace of Socratic philosophy and Western science – end up submitting to a tyrannical desire for conquest and empire?

Book 9 of the *Republic* is largely devoted to an account of the tyrannical man, who is there characterized as fundamentally erotic. This description, however, seems also to apply to the true guardian or philosopher. In an attempt to distinguish the two, Socrates turns to a deeper analysis of the nature of human desire. Does he succeed?

Study Questions:

- \* Does Thucydides's depiction of the Athenian mindset before and during the Sicilian expedition corroborate Socrates's account of the tyrannical soul as growing out of the democratic soul? Why or why not?
- \* What motivates the tyrannical man? Does he succeed in getting what he desires?
- \* Which, in Socrates' view, is the happiest life, and why? Do you agree?

**Week 10: *Iliad* 24 and *Republic* 10**

Mon Dec. 5: *Iliad* 24 and *Republic* 10, guest lecture by Claudia Baracchi (U di Milano-Bicocca)

Wed Dec. 7: *Republic* 10 (TC)

**Thu Dec. 8: Writing session**

Now that the study of the soul is complete, Socrates says, he and his interlocutors are in a better position to understand what is wrong with poetry as exemplified by Homer. Starting with an analogy between poetry and painting, Socrates launches a second critique of poetic imitation, leading to the conclusion that Homer and tragedy are to be expelled from the city. This second indictment of poetry paves the way for discussing the rewards of justice that take up the rest of the book. Socrates closes the conversation that is the *Republic* with a mythical vision of what awaits the soul after death showing how the powers of philosophy and the role of choice fit into the wider workings of the cosmos. In this final book, philosophy is conveyed in the medium of poetry to offer a vision of human life as an erotic transcendence toward the good.

Study Questions:

- \* What is the purpose of the analogy between poetry and painting and how does it relate to the epistemology of *Republic* 5-6? What is wrong with imitation (*mimesis*) in Socrates' view?
- \* Is the argument that Homer simply imitates images of goodness persuasive? How does this second account of poetry relate to the discussion in books 2-3?
- \* How seriously should we take the Myth of Er? Having begun with a critique of Homeric poetry, book ten closes with an example of Socratic poetry. What's up with that?

**Final Essay Due: Fri. Dec. 16 at 23:59**