

(Un)Common Read: Plato's *Republic*
IDH2930 (Fall 2023)

Class #: 28704

Tuesdays, Period 6 (12:50 PM – 1:40 PM)

Little Hall 0117

Instructor: Allen Porter, Ph.D.

Email: allenporter@ufl.edu

Office Hours: email for appointment

Course Description

If you read only one book of philosophy in your lifetime, make it Plato's *Republic*. While A.N. Whitehead's famous declaration that Western philosophy is essentially "a series of footnotes to Plato" may be hyperbolic, *Republic* is indisputably the single most influential work in the history of Western philosophy.

If Socrates, the protagonist of *Republic* as of so many of Plato's dialogues, is the founder of Western moral philosophy, it is Plato who founds Western political philosophy (not to mention that Plato's texts are our primary source for knowledge of Socrates, who was Plato's teacher and who never set his own thoughts down in writing). And it is above all to *Republic*—centered on the question "What is justice?"—that Plato owes this title.

Republic is not merely a work of political philosophy or a treatise on the ideal city-state, however. It is also the most influential presentation of Plato's metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of education, theory of the soul, and more. It is also a literary masterpiece—moreover, one free of technical jargon and accessible to everyone regardless of background or prior study.

In this course, we will read and discuss the entirety of the *Republic*, both for its own sake and with an eye to its applicability to modern times and to our own lives. Students will receive an introduction to moral philosophy, political philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology, and more by way of their reading of Plato. We will discuss a wide variety of topics from the text, including: the Allegory of the Cave; Plato's philosophy of Forms; the idea(l) of the "philosopher king"; the roles played by gender equality, socialism, eugenics, censorship, and more in Kallipolis, Plato's ideal city-state; the nature of the good life; the relation between power and justice; Socratic "elenchus" and Platonic "dialectic"; Socratic irony and humility; the purpose of education; the "Noble Lie"; the legend of the Ring of Gyges (an inspiration for Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*); Plato's criticisms of democracy; and more.

Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes

Students will engage in the primary reading of the entirety of a major classic of Western philosophy, Plato's *Republic*. In addition to learning about and bringing their own lived experience to bear on the book's content, they will learn how to read, write, think, and speak critically about a historical and philosophical text like this, with a focus on explication, evaluation, application, and communication. Students will practice these skills through in-class discussion, short writing assignments, and a final paper. They will also have ample opportunity to practice civil discourse and intellectual cooperation, as the bulk of class time will be spent in discussion.

Required and Recommended Texts

Because this is an (Un)Common Read course, there is only one required text, the correct edition of which all students must purchase a hard copy of (to bring to every class):

Plato (2004). *Republic*. Transl. C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Links for more information and/or purchase:

- Amazon page: <https://www.amazon.com/Republic-Hackett-Classics-Plato/dp/0872207366>
- Publisher's page: <https://hackettpublishing.com/republic>
- UF Bookstore page: <https://www.bkstr.com/floridastore/course-materials-results?shopBy=course&divisionDisplayName=&departmentDisplayName=IDH&courseDisplayName=2930§ionDisplayName=28704&programId=945&termId=100079253>

Because of the nature of this course, it is crucial that all students complete the assigned readings in full and before the class for which they are assigned (and come prepared to discuss them).

Students may find the following recommended readings helpful for context and further information:

- *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (SEP), "Plato": <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato/>
- SEP, "Presocratic Philosophy": <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/presocratics/>
- SEP, "Socrates": <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/socrates/>
- *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (IEP), "Plato": <https://iep.utm.edu/plato/>
- IEP, "Presocratics": <https://iep.utm.edu/presocra/>
- IEP, "Socrates": <https://iep.utm.edu/socrates/>
- IEP, "Ancient Greek Philosophy": <https://iep.utm.edu/ancient-greek-philosophy/>

The Readings

Most men pursue pleasure with such breathless haste that they hurry past it. They fare as did that dwarf who kept guard over a captured princess in his castle. One day he took midday nap. When he woke up an hour later, the princess was gone. Quickly he pulled on his seven-league boots; with one stride he was far beyond her.

- Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*

A book like this, a problem like this, is in no hurry; we both, I just as much as my book, are friends of lento. It is not for nothing that I have been a philologist, perhaps I am a philologist still, that is to say, a teacher of slow reading:—in the end I also write slowly. Nowadays it is not only my habit, it is also to my taste—a malicious taste perhaps?—no longer to write anything which does not reduce to despair every sort of man who is 'in a hurry'. For philology is that venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow—it is a

goldsmith’s art and connoisseurship of the word which has nothing but delicate, cautious work to do and achieves nothing if it does not achieve it lento. But for precisely this reason it is more necessary than ever today, by precisely this means does it entice and enchant us the most, in the midst of an age of ‘work’, that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to ‘get everything done’ at once, including every old or new book:—this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read well, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers... My patient friends, this book desires for itself only perfect readers and philologists: learn to read me well!

- Friedrich Nietzsche, 1886 letter, in *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*

Plato’s *Republic* is not a short book, so this course involves a lot of reading, though the average assignment is only 21 pages. The edition of the text I’ve selected is the most readable—and is often a pleasure to read—but *Republic* is nonetheless a text of philosophy, dense with ideas and arguments.

Philosophy texts are not like popular novels or “page-turners”, in which the reader is largely passive, swept up in and carried along by the flow of the plot. They require reading that is both “slow” and “active”, and indeed slow *because* active: they require you to actively think about what you’re reading, not just “go along with” its flow. You will probably find that some passages of *Republic* fly by with ease, while others require you to stop and puzzle out the precise argument.

I encourage you to set aside more time than you think you will need for the reading assignments, to take your time in doing the readings, and to take notes (which will also help slow you down).

Course Schedule

Nota bene: Roman numerals refer to the ten books of the *Republic*, while the numbers in parentheses are the edition’s page numbers (those in brackets are the number of pages for that reading assignment).

Class #	Date	Text	Deadlines (TBD)
Class #1	8/29	I (1-35) [35pp]	
Class #2	9/5	II (36-65) [29pp]	
Class #3	9/12	III.386a-398c (66-80) [14pp]	
Class #4	9/19	III.398d-3417b (80-102) [21pp]	
Class #5	9/26	IV [33pp]	
Class #6	10/3	V.449a-464c (136-155) [19pp]	
Class #7	10/10	V.464d-480a (155-175) [20pp]	
Class #8	10/17	VI (31pp)	
Class #9	10/24	VII.514a-521d (208-215) [7pp]	
Class #10	10/31	VII.521e-541b (215-237) [21pp]	
Class #11	11/7	VIII.543a-555b (238-251) [13pp]	
Class #12	11/14	VIII.555c-569c (251-269) [17pp]	
Class #13	11/21	IX [27pp]	
Class #14	11/28	X.595a-607e (297-312) [14pp]	
Class #15	12/5	X.608a-621c (312-326) [14pp]	

Assignments and Assessment

This course has four categories of assessment:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| (1) Class attendance: | 10% of total grade |
| (2) Class discussion: | 35% of total grade |
| (3) Short writing assignments: | 30% of total grade |
| (4) Oral Exam or Essay: | 25% of total grade |

Class Attendance

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies. You can read the university attendance policies by clicking this link: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>. In particular, please consult what this webpage says about “planned” vs “unplanned” absences. For this class, it is important that you attend as many classes as possible. All excused absences must include documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note if you are absent due to illness). Each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 10 points from your class attendance grade (out of 100).

Class Participation

Because this is a reading- and discussion-centered small seminar, it is crucial that all participants complete the readings before class and come to class prepared to discuss them. This *should* be the easiest part of the class for you to get an “A” on (besides class attendance), since I will only deduct points from this part of your grade if you don’t participate in class discussions or come to class without having done the reading.

Short Writing / Forum Posting

Students will complete weekly short writing assignments of 250-450 words. These will take the form of “Discussion” posts on Canvas, such that students can see and respond to each other’s posts. Further details on these assignments are TBD (dependent on number of students enrolled: if we have more rather than fewer, students will make an original post every other week and comment on at least one other student’s post on off weeks; if we have fewer students, it will just be weekly original posts).

Final Examination

Students will choose between the options of an oral exam or a written essay for their final assignment. Students must notify the instructor which option they prefer by email no later than November 5 (one month before the final class).

- The oral exam will take place after the final class and will consist of a 15-30 minute conversation about topics covered in the course text and class discussions. You should be prepared to explain major episodes, ideas, and arguments in the text, such as the Ring of Gyges in Book 2, the analogies in Books VI-VII (e.g., Divided Line, Cave Allegory), and so on. An outline of major topics to study will be provided before the exam.
 - *Nota bene*: a good way to practice for the oral exam is to email me for an office hours appointment to discuss the week’s readings one-on-one.
- The essay will be 2000-4000 words, due either at the start or at the end of the exam period (students may choose which deadline they prefer). A list of potential topics will be provided, but students are encouraged to come up with their own. Regardless, paper topics must be emailed to the instructor for approval no later than November 14 (3 weeks before the final class). More details (e.g., formatting) will be provided in the course of the semester.
 - Students may submit an outline or draft of their paper for feedback up to 1 week before the deadline. If a student requests feedback *less* than a week before the deadline, I will try to provide it, but it is not guaranteed.

For various reasons I will discuss more in class, I recommend students opt for the oral exam unless they intend to pursue a career in academia or in a writing-intensive profession.

Late Submission Penalties

Short writing assignments and essays submitted after the 11:59pm deadline will be penalized 2/3 letter grade per 24 hours late. Hence, if you submit a short writing assignment between 12:00am and 11:59pm on the day after the deadline, the *highest* grade you will be able to receive on it would be an A-; if 12:00am-11:59pm on the following day, a B; if three days late, a C+; etc.

File Format

Short writing assignments and essays should be submitted as Microsoft Word (.docx) files. If you cannot do that, you must submit them as PDFs. Other file formats (e.g., .pages) will not be accepted.

UF Grading Policy

Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points can be accessed by clicking this link: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>.

Free Speech and Civil Discourse

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution reads as follows:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

As a public land-grant institution, the University of Florida is a governmental entity for First Amendment purposes. Students, staff and faculty at UF thus possess First Amendment rights that may protect their right to engage in speech. To learn more about freedom of speech and expression at UF, students may consult freespeech.ufl.edu.

Freedom of speech is one of the hallmarks of modern liberal democracies like the United States, but free speech is not absolute in the United States. For example, while the First Amendment protects offensive speech, it does not protect “true threats”, i.e., “statements where the speaker means to communicate a serious expression of an intent to commit an act of unlawful violence to a particular individual or group of individuals” (*Virginia v. Black*, 538 U.S. 344).

Moreover, free speech can only truly flourish in a context of civil discourse, in which participants who hold a variety of viewpoints converse together in good faith and with respect for certain norms designed to ensure civility. This is especially important for a discussion-centered class like this one. In this class, all students will be expected not only to respect their fellows’ First Amendment rights, but also basic norms of civil discourse. For example, insulting fellow students may be constitutionally protected speech, but it is inappropriate in the context of an academic discussion in the classroom and may even constitute “disruption” of the class’s academic activity.

In this class, all students should feel not just free but also comfortable in expressing their viewpoints, exploring historical and conventional (and unconventional!) viewpoints, and interrogating the viewpoints of others—regardless of whether they are controversial, offensive, etc. There is no expectation that students will agree with each other’s views or those of the instructor, with one exception, namely, regarding the norm of civil discourse. In other words, we must all agree to respect each other in the classroom and in our academic interactions with each other. I cannot say it better than Prof. Robert P. George:

My philosophy of teaching is straightforward and rather simple: My job is not to tell students what to think or induce or encourage them to think as I do; it is, rather, to help students to think more deeply, more critically, and for themselves. What I ask of students is open-mindedness, tolerance of those whose opinions differ from yours, a willingness not only to challenge others but to be challenged in turn, and a genuine and deep desire to learn--and to learn by seriously engaging authors and fellow students whose ideas differ, even radically differ, from your own.

For further information on the sort of behaviors considered unacceptable in a UF classroom environment, students should consult the Regulations of the University of Florida (https://regulations.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/4-040_2021-12-06.pdf)—in particular, section (3)(d) (“Interference with an Academic Activity”) and section (4)(c) (“Disruptive Conduct”).

Electronics Policy

In order to encourage participation and focus attention, electronics are prohibited in the classroom unless explicitly permitted by the instructor on a case-by-case basis.

Moreover, this is a seminar-style class in which the bulk of class time will be devoted to discussion, and in which there is only one required text, which all students are required to purchase a hard copy of and bring to each class. Thus, there should be no need for a student to use an electronic device in the classroom. Any note-taking in class should be done by hand.

If a student feels they need to use an electronic device for some reason, they should consult with me in advance of class. That includes students with relevant disabilities (see the Disability Statement below) and students who wish to record class (see the statement on In-Class Recording below).

Disability Statement

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. Click this link to get started with the Disability Resource Center: <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>.

It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are an extremely important part of the university’s assessment of teachers and classes, and they can have a great impact on instructors’ future ability and opportunities to teach.

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

UF Conduct Code

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of

behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Click here to read the Conduct Code: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

In-Class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website (<https://umatter.ufl.edu/>) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website (<https://counseling.ufl.edu/>) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- *Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website (<https://shcc.ufl.edu/>).
- *University Police Department*: Visit UF Police Department website (<https://police.ufl.edu/>) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website: <https://ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center>.
- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services*: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website (<https://gatorwell.ufsa.ufl.edu/>) or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources

- *E-learning technical support*: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk (<http://helpdesk.ufl.edu/>) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- *Career Connections Center*: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services. <https://career.ufl.edu/>
- *Library Support*: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. <https://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>
- *Teaching Center*: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>
- *Writing Studio*: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>
- *Student Complaints On-Campus*: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-%20code-student-conduct-code/>.
- *On-Line Students Complaints*: View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process: <https://distance.ufl.edu/state-authorization-status/#student-complaint>.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

Extra Credit

You may receive extra credit by attending events hosted by the Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education:

- BONUS OPTION 1: attend three or more of these events
- BONUS OPTION 2: attend one of these events and write a 500-800 word short essay about it (not a “journal” type essay about *your experience attending* the talk, but rather your thoughts about the *content* of the talk)

If you do either of these, you will receive bonus credit. You may also do BOTH of these, in which case you will get the extra credit twice.

- The extra credit will take the form of a letter grade boost to your lowest short writing assignment grade (e.g., if your lowest is a C+, it would become a B+).

Hamilton Center events for Fall 2023:

TBD