

**UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**  
 PHIL 1000-02: Major Texts – Fall 2015

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 Office Hours: Thursdays 11:30 to 1:30 (MACK 353)

An examination of Plato’s *Republic*, Hume’s *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and Sartre’s “Existentialism is a Humanism” (CourseLink). The 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Whitehead compared Western philosophy to a series of footnotes to Plato. This is especially true of the *Republic*, which is one of only two or three truly encyclopedic books on philosophy, and the only one written in an accessible style. It includes discussions of good & evil, political theory, art & beauty, knowledge, ultimate reality, immortality, etc. within an investigation into the nature of justice. Unlike anthologies the *Republic* enables us to see how our answers to specific questions depend on an underlying world view, as much as on the specific arguments we formulate to justify them. Most of the course will be devoted to the *Republic* which is by far the longest of the three texts, but Hume and Sartre will show us major alternatives to the philosophy of the *Republic*.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** Three 1250 word essays (20% each) and a final exam (40%). **Footnote all information and ideas taken from someone else, even if they aren’t direct quotations.** Otherwise it may be plagiarism (when in doubt ask). Listing your sources in a bibliography isn’t enough since it doesn’t show where you make use of them or which page the reference comes from. **Also see “COA Standard Statements” (CourseLink).**

**READINGS:** PLATO (below). HUME (beginning Nov 18): 1. Sections II-IV (pp. 9-25). 2. Sections V & VII (25-37 & 39-53), 3. Sections VI & VIII (37-9 & 53-69), 4. Section XII (102-114). SARTRE (Dec 2).

**FINAL EXAM:** 12/17/2015 from 14:30 to 16:30. The exam will consist of essay questions about the material covered in the lectures, drawn from study questions given out at the last class. Attendance at lectures is not mandatory, but since the final exam will test your knowledge of the material discussed in class regular attendance is a big advantage.

**SEMINARS:** To supplement and help assimilate the lectures on Plato’s *Republic*, each week two students chosen in consultation with their seminar leader will give seminars exploring material from the *Republic*, one defending the “a” side of that week’s topic, the other defending the “b” side (see next page). A 1250 word seminar takes about eight minutes to read, so there should be about half an hour afterward for discussion. Depending on the seminar enrollment, some of you may have to write essays that don’t get presented as seminars, but are handed in to your seminar leader. The essays are due at the **beginning** of the class in which the topic is discussed so that no one has an unfair advantage, and also because they’re meant to prepare you to contribute to the class discussion. For those reasons **late essays can’t be accepted**, so if you don’t finish yours in time for the beginning of the class you’ll have to switch to a later topic. **Attendance at seminars is essential** because the later material often presupposes familiarity with the earlier material. So if you miss **more than one** seminar (other than the ones assigned to you) you’ll have to write an additional 1250 word essay explaining *both* sides of the issue. The grade will be averaged with your three normal seminar assignments. This doesn’t apply to absences that are excused on medical or compassionate grounds on the basis of a note from your doctor or academic counselor.

1. Week of: Sept 14	Organization	Explain Plato’s position and the reasons he gives (if any), then defend or criticize it in accordance with “a” or “b”, as assigned in consultation with your seminar leader (both sides should be represented). Don’t assume that what you say is obvious and doesn’t need to be argued. If it <i>is</i> obvious it will be trivial and not worth much. Show you’re aware of the possible objections to your claims (including the other side of the question itself, “a” or “b”) and formulate arguments to meet them. Imagine how an unsympathetic but reasonable critic might respond. The essay should show an understanding of Plato, as well as arguments for or against. A sample essay is available on CourseLink.
2. Sept 21	topic 1	
3. Sept 28	topic 2	
4. Oct 5	topic 3	
5. Oct 12	topic 4	
6. Oct 19	topic 5	
7. Oct 26	topic 6	
8. Nov 2	topic 7	
9. Nov 9	topic 8	
10. Nov 16	topic 9	
11. Nov 23	topic 10	
12. Nov 30	topic 11	

## PHILOSOPHY 1000 SEMINAR TOPICS

### PLATO'S *REPUBLIC* BOOKS 2-3

- 1a. It's important to protect people from destructive influences, so there should be censorship.
- 1b. It's important to let all ideas be heard, so there should be no censorship.
- 2a. Beauty affects us so deeply because it signifies sensory perfection, and thereby resonates with moral goodness (behavioral perfection) and truth (cognitive perfection).
- 2b. Beauty has no deeper meaning than any other kind of pleasure. It's just a matter of taste.

### BOOK 4

- 3a. We're conflicted between appetite, spiritedness, and reason, and must control ourselves by reason.
- 3b. Sometimes intuitions are more insightful than reason, so we should be guided by our feelings.

### BOOKS 5-7

- 4a. There's a rational structure to the world. Reality is more than individual things that are governed by matter and chance (476a-480a, 505a-509c).
- 4b. Reality is only matter and chance, particles of matter interacting randomly.
- 5a. The basis of reality is "the good": our world exists because it's the best one possible (505a-509c).
- 5b. The basis of reality can't be good because reality is full of evil (crime, natural disasters, disease).
- NOTE: It may help to think of it in terms of the theological version of the problem, "God and Evil": If the world was created by God, who is good and all powerful, how can we explain the things that seem evil?*
- 6a. The highest kind of knowledge is ineffable, it can't be put into words (532e-533a).
- 6b. If something can't be put into words it's not sufficiently thought out and isn't knowledge at all (534b).

### BOOK 8

- 7a. Democracy is the best form of government because it has the most liberty and equality.
- 7b. Democracy is a poor form of government because it gives more power to uninformed easily manipulated people (since there are more of them) than to well informed people who examine issues carefully.

### BOOK 9

- 8a. The happiest life is the life of reason.
- 8b. There's no such thing as the happiest life. Everyone is happy as long as they get what they want.
- 9a. If we could get away with it, an unjust (selfish) life would give us the most happiness.
- 9b. Even if we could get away with being unjust, the key to happiness is to be just (unselfish).

### BOOK 10

- 10a. The arts are dangerous because they glamorize outward appearance and irresponsible behavior (597b-607a).
- 10b. "Art is for art's sake". It has nothing to do with morality and isn't responsible for its moral consequences.
- 11. *PREFACE: According to the myth of Er at the end of book 10, we choose our life in all its detail before birth. This can be interpreted to mean that once we're born (or even conceived) everything that will ever happen to us is already destined by the initial conditions and the laws of causality.*
- 11a. If free will means our choices are not completely determined by cause and effect, then free will is impossible because everything has a cause, even our choices.
- 11b. We do have free will because we can feel our freedom, and we feel responsible for what we do, but if everything were predetermined how can we be responsible for our actions?
- NOTE: You can see my TEDx talk on the subject at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VBihVb3hlw>.*