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## OPGDI – BNU Philosophy Tutorial Programme 2021

### *The Politics of Plato's Republic*

**Dr Mattia Singh**

Dear Songlin Jiang and Jieyang Liu,

Welcome to the OPGDI – BNU Philosophy Tutorial Programme. Please find below some background information in preparation for your upcoming tutorials.

**The structure of the programme** is as follows:

**Length:** 9 weeks

**Format:** Week 0: Introduction to the Programme, Introduction to Philosophy, Introduction to Oxford Tutorials and a Session on Academic Writing.

Afterwards eight one-hour tutorials occurring online on a weekly basis.

Extra: 2 compulsory academic assistance sessions and 2 non-compulsory academic assistance sessions throughout the course to provide extra help and guidance on your learning journey.

#### **Course Description:**

During these 8 tutorials, we will discuss numerous aspects of Plato's political philosophy, with a special focus on what is universally regarded his masterpiece: the Republic. The importance of this work in Plato's thought lies in its political ideas and arguments. In the Republic Plato raises, addresses, and attempts to give answers to some concerns and questions which are so broad, deep and riveting that they are still relevant more than 2000 years after its publication. Some examples of these topics and questions are: What is the true nature and meaning of justice? Who is most fit to rule? Is there a limit to the realisation of "utopia" in our world? Do immoral means justify good ends? Is there an Afterlife and what consequences does it have for us, here, today?

I have been fascinated by Plato's Republic from the first I read it; I myself tried to give answers to the questions mentioned before by publishing a book about it, La Sindrome di Siracusa. I will be delighted to share what I have learnt so far during my research.



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### Course Objectives:

- The students will be in a position to understand the importance and relevance of the most important aspects of Plato's Republic, and the philosophical ideas argued in this work.
- The students will develop the ability to think critically about Plato's philosophical thought, and ancient philosophy more generally.
- They will familiarise themselves with the secondary literature on Plato's Republic, that is to say the ideas and arguments put forward by modern scholars about it
- They will be capable of engaging in critical thinking and discussions about Plato's Republic thanks to the two essay questions that they will have to write during the course. They will receive extensive feedback about them.

### Course Assignments:

The overall mark of the course will be equally based on:

- Two essays (approximately 1500 – 2000 words each), in which the students will be required to address and answer a specific question. The question can be any essay question of their choice, provided that is selected among the tutorial topics 1-8.
- 5-minute presentation of the topic that will be discussed during the tutorial, which should show that the students have read and understood the recommended reading – mandatory for all students.
- Active participation to the tutorial discussions.

**Your course will start on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March**

**17:00 China Time: Introduction to the Programme**

**17:45 China Time: Introduction to Philosophy**

**19:00 China Time: Introduction to Oxford Tutorials**

**20:15 China Time: Academic Writing**

**Please follow this link for all the sessions of the day:**

**<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8356740108>**

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## Course Topics:

### Week 1: Thrasymachus' view that justice is the benefit of the stronger – Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> March

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**Brief Description:** In this tutorial we will discuss the view held by Thrasymachus, namely that “justice is nothing but the benefit of the stronger”. This idea is a very crude and terse characterisation of the world and consequently is opposed by Plato. We will discuss whether Plato can successfully refute Thrasymachus’ argument that “justice is the benefit of the stronger”.

#### Recommended reading:

- Plato, *Republic* I (especially 336a-354c)
- Meadows, Elizabeth, and Heesoon Bai. "What Can We Learn from How Socrates Dominates Thrasymachus in Plato's Republic?" *Paideusis* 15.1 (2006): 87-94
- Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. New York: Oxford UP, 1981. CHAPTER 2 “Thrasymachus”, pages 34-59

### Week 2: Plato's city-soul analogy – Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> March

**Brief Description:** The goal of this tutorial is to tackle the nature of a very peculiar analogy that Plato draws between the city and the soul. Plato draws this analogy to shed light on the nature of justice because he believes that only a good soul can live in a good city, and vice versa. We will discuss whether this analogy falls short of Plato's objective or not.

#### Recommended reading:

- Plato, *Republic* II (especially 368c-369b)
- Evrigenis, Ioannis. "The Psychology of Politics: The City-Soul Analogy in Plato's Republic." *History of Political Thought* 23.4 (2002): 590-610
- Kraut, Richard. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge UP, 1992. CHAPTER 7, pp, 165-202

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### Week 3: Plato's utopia? – Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> March

**Brief Description:** During this tutorial we will discuss whether Plato's goal to establish a city that is perfect in nature is a "utopian". To put it another way, the topic of the tutorial means to give an answer to the following question: can an ideal condition be ever brought about or realised in our imperfect world? Indeed, this is Plato's ambition with the Republic, the "beautiful" (Kallipolis in Greek) and ideal city where every citizen is happy.

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#### Recommended reading:

- Plato, *Republic II*, especially 368c-369b
- Evrigenis, Ioannis. "The Psychology of Politics: The City-Soul Analogy in Plato's Republic." *History of Political Thought* 23.4 (2002): 590-610
- Kraut, Richard. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge UP, 1992. CHAPTER 7, pp, 165-202

### Week 4: The totalitarian nature of Plato's city? – Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April

**Brief Description:** The goal of this tutorial is to establish whether at the core of Plato's Republic lurks the ambition of idea of "totalitarianism", namely establishing a totalitarian and authoritarian rule over the city. In particular, we will extensively focus on one of the most famous interpretations of Plato's political thought, that is Popper's work *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Popper accuses Plato of being a totalitarian thinker.

#### Recommended reading:

- Plato, *Republic II*, 369a-371c; 374a-370d; IV, 419-421c; V 473c-e, VI 484d-501 (read only the passages mentioned here, but feel free to explore additional passages)
- Karl R. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Princeton, NJ, 2020. Princeton Classics, chapter 6 and 7, 8, pag. 81-147
- Ferrari, G. R. F. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*. Cambridge UP, 2007. CHAPTER 6, pp, 138-65

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## Week 5: The figure of the philosopher-king – Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> April

**Brief Description:** Time and again throughout the Republic Plato talks about the figure of the “philosopher-king” as the person that the most fit to rule over the city as a whole. In this tutorial we will focus on the overall meaning of Plato’s remarks and whether certain aspects of the Platonic discussion can still be relevant for current political debate.

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### Recommended reading:

- Plato, *Republic* II, 369a-371c; 374a-370d; IV, 419-421c; V 473c-e, VI 484d-501 (read only the passages mentioned here, but feel free to explore additional passages)
- Klosko, G. (1981) ‘Implementing the Ideal State’, *The Journal of Politics*, 43(2) 365—389
- Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. New York: Oxford UP, 1981. CHAPTER 4 Education and philosophy of education/A sketch of the ideal state, pages. 79-109

## Week 6: The Platonic critique of art and poetry – Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April

**Brief Description:** The topic that we will discuss in this tutorial is Plato’s criticism of art and poetry which are said to be inaccurate representations of reality. The goal is to establish the validity of the Platonic arguments and whether they further our understanding about art and poetry in general.

### Recommended reading:

- Plato, *Republic* II 376c – III 403c; X 595a-608a (read only the passages mentioned here, but feel free to explore additional passages)
- Burnyeat, M.F. (1999) ‘Culture and Society in Plato’s Republic’, in *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* vol 20
- Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. New York: Oxford UP, 1981. CHAPTER 14 “Poetry”, pag 335-44

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### Week 7: Philosophical knowledge and the Forms – Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> April

**Brief Description:** The topic of this tutorial is to shed light on what philosophical knowledge is for Plato which fundamentally means the so-called ‘theory of the Forms’. We will explore the main tenets of Plato’s metaphysical theory, which to say the idea there is a “reality” that is knowable and that exists beyond what see and experience everyday with our senses.

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#### Recommended reading:

- Plato, *Republic* VI-VII
- Burnyeat, M.F. (1999) ‘Culture and Society in Plato’s Republic’, in *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* vol 20
- Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. New York: Oxford UP, 1981. CHAPTER 9 “The Theory of Forms”, 217-42

### Week 8: The eschatological nature of the Myth of Er – Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> May

**Brief Description:** In this tutorial we will explore the Myth of Er that is recorded at the very end of the Republic. This myth is, as we will see, an eschatological tale and, thus, raises numerous questions about Plato’s commitment to the existence of an Afterlife, divine retribution and punishment, and more generally the nature of justice.

#### Recommended reading:

- Plato, *Republic* X 614a-621d (read only the passages mentioned here, but feel free to explore additional passages)
- German A. (2012) ‘Tyrant and Philosopher: two fundamental lives in Plato’s Myth of Er’, *Polis: The Journal of Ancient Greek Political Thought* 29: 42-61
- Ferrari, G. R. F. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*. Cambridge UP, 2007. CHAPTER 16, pp, 445-447



**Tutorial schedule:**

Date	Time	China Time	Zoom Link
Sat 13 <sup>th</sup> Mar	10:00-11:00	18:00	<a href="https://zoom.us/j/95032477946">https://zoom.us/j/95032477946</a>
Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> Mar	10:00-11:00	18:00	<a href="https://zoom.us/j/95032477946">https://zoom.us/j/95032477946</a>
Sat 27 <sup>th</sup> Mar	10:00-11:00	18:00	<a href="https://zoom.us/j/95032477946">https://zoom.us/j/95032477946</a>
Sat 3 <sup>rd</sup> Apr	10:00-11:00	17:00	<a href="https://zoom.us/j/95032477946">https://zoom.us/j/95032477946</a>
Sat 10 <sup>th</sup> Apr	10:00-11:00	17:00	<a href="https://zoom.us/j/95032477946">https://zoom.us/j/95032477946</a>
Sat 17 <sup>th</sup> Apr	10:00-11:00	17:00	<a href="https://zoom.us/j/95032477946">https://zoom.us/j/95032477946</a>
Sat 24 <sup>th</sup> Apr	10:00-11:00	17:00	<a href="https://zoom.us/j/95032477946">https://zoom.us/j/95032477946</a>
Sat 1 <sup>st</sup> May	10:00-11:00	17:00	<a href="https://zoom.us/j/95032477946">https://zoom.us/j/95032477946</a>

Please make sure that your internet connection is of adequate speed. Be on time, in a place where you can listen and talk freely.

Also, please have your **video camera and microphone on** as you will need to actively participate and discuss in the tutorial sessions.

If you have any queries please contact the OPGDI via WeChat or Ms Georgina Thomas at [opp@regents.oxa.ac.uk](mailto:opp@regents.oxa.ac.uk).

We wish you every success! Enjoy the Tutorial Programme!

OPGDI Team  
Regent's Park College, Oxford