

**PHIL 3301 – PLATO**  
**University of New Orleans**  
**Fall 2012 | TR 9:30 – 10:45 | Room: Liberal Arts Bldg. 210**

Chris W. Surprenant  
 Office: Liberal Arts Bldg 387  
 Office Hours: M:3:30-5:00pm , T/TH: 12:15 – 1:30pm ; and by appointment  
 Email: csurpren@uno.edu  
 Phone: (504) 298-8330

Course Description

*Prerequisite: three hours of philosophy or consent of department. A close reading of the most famous and influential dialogues of the fourth-century B.C. Athenian Plato, the first great systematic thinker of Western philosophy and the creator of some of the basic concepts of Western culture.*

This semester, our primary focus will be on one of the most important works in the history of Western thought: Plato's *Republic*.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will explore various areas of interest, including ethics and political philosophy, philosophy of mind and language, philosophy of religion and philosophy of art, as well as particular historical periods or individual thinkers.
2. Students will deepen their ability to work with philosophical concepts and methods, and to construct and evaluate arguments.
3. Students will participate in classroom discussion, developing and displaying an ability and readiness to defend one's own point of view while listening openly but carefully to others. Written work should be reflective and well-argued, demonstrating an appropriate level of mastery of the material.

Requirements and Grading

*All assignments are graded on a 4.0 grade scale: A = 4.0, A- = 3.67, B+ = 3.33, B = 3.0, etc. In accordance with UNO policy, all final grades are whole letter grades (A, B, C, D, or F)—no + or – letter grades are awarded. In calculating and determining final grades, numerical averages will correspond with the following letter grades: A = 3.5 and above, B = 2.5 to 3.49, C = 1.5 to 2.49, D = 0.5 to 1.49, and F = below 0.5. If you ever have any questions about your grades or how your final grade will be calculated, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

Intelligent Class Participation, Attendance, and Response Papers (25%)

(1) **Attendance and intelligent participation at all class meetings is expected.** A student may miss up to three classes without penalty. For each class missed beyond the third, that student's final grade will be reduced by 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a letter grade. (2) **At the beginning of each class, each student must submit 250-word response paper. Failing to submit a response paper will count as an absence.** Your response should address one of the reading response questions listed on the syllabus for that day (if there is more than one listed, pick one). Simply submitting a paper does not guarantee that you receive credit for it. Your response must be thoughtful.

Additionally, you can receive extra credit towards your course participation grade by attending lectures sponsored by the philosophy department or our affiliated faculty. See the “Bonus” section below.

First Paper (special grading rules, see below)

**A paper of no longer than 1000 words is due by Sunday, September 2 at 11:59pm. Your paper should be submitted via the assignment upload feature on Moodle.** Paper topics will be discussed in class and distributed in advance, and students are strongly encouraged to meet with me in advance to discuss their papers and again to discuss revisions. Papers will be returned with substantial comments no later than one week after they are submitted. **The short paper must be revised and resubmitted until it earns a grade of “B” or better.** (See note below on how papers are graded.) **Papers must be resubmitted no later than 1 week after they are returned with comments. For each day that your short paper or resubmission is late, your final grade will be lowed by 1/6<sup>th</sup> of a letter grade.**

Final Paper and Presentation (75%)

**Your final paper will develop a complex, interpretive account of a topic relevant to the works and/or topics studied.** You may choose to provide an explicative account of some historical issue particular to Plato or examine Plato in the context of contemporary philosophical discussions (for example: Plato is often considered to be the first feminist philosopher. How does Plato differ from contemporary feminists on the roles of women and the family? Does the contemporary breakdown of traditional gender roles present a problem for the family and/or society?). **At a minimum, you should incorporate (and reference in the paper) five scholarly articles or books from outside of the course reading list** (from peer-refereed journals or published by academic presses; be wary articles from the popular press and do not cite things like newspapers or Wikipedia).

**A prospectus for your final paper is due, uploaded to the assignment section on Moodle, by Sunday, October 21 at 11:59pm.** This prospectus should contain the first paragraph(s) (i.e., thesis paragraphs) of your paper, a discussion of the argument central to each section of you paper, and a preliminary list of secondary sources. You will need at least 15 sources on this list. To find these sources, you should consult the books in the UNO library, and online resources like the Philosopher’s Index and JSTOR. While you will not have to have read all of these sources thoroughly by the time you submit your prospectus, it must be clear that they are relevant to your paper. I will comment on this prospectus and suggest further questions and areas for further research. **For each day that your prospectus (or resubmission, if necessary) is late, your final grade for the assignment will be reduced by 1/6<sup>th</sup> of a letter grade.**

**A 2500-word draft of your final paper is due, uploaded to the assignment section on Moodle, by Sunday, November 18 on 11:59pm.** As you prepare this paper, you will want to show how the scholars have interpreted the passages you are examining and indicate how your account differs from theirs and indicate why your view is better. I strongly encourage you to come and meet with me in advance to discussion your paper topic, the argument you plan to present, and any other concerns related to the paper. The most successful papers will be those that are completed well in advance of the deadline and revised multiple times before the final version is submitted. **For each day that your draft is late, your final grade will be lowed by 1/6<sup>th</sup> of a letter grade.**

**During the last week of class, each student will have 10-15 minutes to present the thesis of his/her paper, the central argument being developed, and to field questions about the topics.** Students should prepare handouts or whatever deemed necessary to convey these points clearly. **Presentation quality (including, but not limited to, clarity of the argument presented, knowledge of the relevant**

secondary literature, and ability to field questions related to the topic) will be a determining factor when calculating each student's final paper grade.

Final papers are due on Friday, December 7 by 11:59pm. They should be uploaded to the assignment section on Moodle. For each day that your final paper is late, your final grade will be lowered by 1/6<sup>th</sup> of a letter grade.

#### General Paper Guidelines

1. **A note on how papers are graded.** All papers are graded on the A – F scale, with a grade of “C” awarded to papers that are consistent with my expectations of what a student in a 3000-level course should be able to produce (a clear thesis; a reasonably clear and developed line of argumentation in support of that thesis; when relevant, appropriate integration of secondary literature; and few, if any, typos, syntactical errors, or grammatical errors). Papers that fall short of this mark earn a grade of D or F. Papers that are exceptionally clear and concise (see my note above concerning condensing content); contain well-developed arguments, show thorough knowledge of the relevant secondary literature and integrate this literature into the discussion presented in the paper; and contain few to no grammatical, stylistic, or syntactical errors will earn a “B”. For your paper to earn an “A” it must contain all of the elements of the “B” paper plus it must be interesting, make me think, or teach me something. To put it very crudely, the time I spend reading papers earning grades of “B” and below benefits you; the time I spend reading “A” papers benefits both you and me. **Finally, papers are late 1 minute after the deadline. Late papers are assigned a penalty of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a letter grade for each day they are late.**

2. I will read your papers and think about the argument that you are trying to present. You should write something that you want me to read and think about. **If your paper lacks a clear thesis or intelligent argument development, I will stop reading.** It is not the job of the reader to put your argument together. That is your job. Let me repeat myself. **If the discussion in your paper stops making sense, I will draw a line across the page at that point, write “I stopped reading here,” and hand it back to you.** I am here to help you with your writing, but it is not my job to read tealeaves and compile an argument from disconnected and/or unclear sentences.

3. **If your paper contains significant grammatical, syntactical, spelling, or usage errors, or is otherwise poorly written, I will return the paper to you without comment.** A former colleague described bad writing as “word salad”: “Throw together some nouns, adjectives and verbs (adverbs are unusual), and then toss, adding some conjunctions and expletives here and there, while you make sure to misuse articles and pronouns. For extra flavoring, *always* make sure to mix up ‘there,’ ‘their,’ and ‘they’re’ and make sure you employ possessive forms when inappropriate and skip them when appropriate.” Take pride in your work. Don’t submit garbage. It will be returned to you.

4. The most successful papers will start out as a draft two or three times as long as the length guidelines permit, and then are made more concise through a process of revision, editing, and argument analysis. **If you set out to write a 1000-word paper and stop once you hit 1000 words, it is highly likely you will earn a grade of D or lower on the assignment.** These papers are short. I am expecting them to be exceptionally well-written and full of content. Avoid fluff and sentences that lack significant content.

Bonus (possible +1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a letter grade and reduction of absences, see below)

The primary reason for attending college is to begin the process of becoming a scholar by reflecting on complicated questions related to the human experience. To this end, you will receive a **bonus of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a letter grade added to your final grade (e.g., from a “B” to a “B+”)** for attending scholarly lectures sponsored by either the Philosophy Department or my Alexis de Tocqueville Project on Democratic

Ideals and Institutions. **To receive this bonus, you must attend at least 3 lectures during the semester. Further, for each of these talks you attend, I will reduce your course absences by 1.**

For the fall 2012 semester, the following talks are scheduled for 5:30pm on Friday, August 31; Thursday, September 20; Friday, October 26; Friday, November 9; and Friday, December 7. All talks will be held in Room 140 of the Liberal Arts Building. More information about these talks will be provided in class. You can also get additional information by visiting the Philosophy Department website ([www.phil.uno.edu/](http://www.phil.uno.edu/)) or the website for the Tocqueville Project ([www.tocquevilleproject.org](http://www.tocquevilleproject.org)).

All deadlines are firm and **no grades of “Incomplete” will be given at the end of the semester** except in cases of documented medical illness or a family emergency.

*Disability Statement: It is university policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. If you have any questions, contact the Office of Disability Services at UC 260, (504) 280-6222 (voice).*

*Statement on Academic Honesty: Academic honesty is fundamental to the process of learning and to evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarizing, tampering with academic records or exams, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. If you are foolish enough to do one of these things, you’ll be caught, expelled from the course with a failing grade, and I will pursue further penalties available to me. For more information, please consult UNO’s Academic Honesty Policy: [www.studentaffairs.uno.edu/pdfs/AcademicDishonestyPolicy.pdf](http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu/pdfs/AcademicDishonestyPolicy.pdf).*

#### Required Texts.

Aristophanes and Plato, *Four Texts on Socrates*, translated by West and West (Cornell, 1988)

Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, translated by Bloom (Basic Books, 1968)

#### Course Schedule

Aug. 21: COURSE INTRODUCTION; PLATO, PHILOSOPHY, AND POLITICS

Required reading:

“Introduction” to *Four Texts on Socrates*

Aug. 23: PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION, AND PIETY

Required reading:

“Euthyphro,” in *Four Texts on Socrates* (pp. 41-62)

Response paper topics:

What is the central question (related to the concept of piety) that this dialogue aims to address? How is this question resolved at the end of the dialogue? Is this resolution satisfactory?

Aug. 28: : PLATO’S DEFENSE OF SOCRATES AND PHILOSOPHY

Required reading:

“Apology,” in *Four Texts on Socrates* (pp. 63-98)

Response paper topics:

(1) One charge leveled against Socrates is impiety, but throughout the dialogue Socrates constantly makes reference to his devotion to “the god.” Why does Socrates believe he is pious? Why would some Athenians believe is impiety?

- (2) After Socrates is found guilty, both he and the prosecutors each propose a penalty to the jury. The prosecution proposes death. What does Socrates propose? Why does he believe that this punishment is more fitting for the crime he has committed?

Aug. 30: THE NATURE OF JUSTICE

Required reading:

“Crito,” in *Four Texts on Socrates* (pp. 99-114)

Response paper topics:

- (1) According to Socrates, whose opinions should be valued? What is the difference, if any, between the position taken by Socrates and our position in a democracy?
- (2) Commentators often identify the “Crito” as one of the earliest examples of social contract theory. What is the position taken by Socrates as it relates to the social contract? How does this position differ from other social contract theories that you’ve encountered?

Sept. 2: **Short Paper Due by 11:59pm**

Sept. 4: PHILOSOPHY OR SOPHISTRY?

Required reading:

“Clouds,” in *Four Texts on Socrates* (pp. 115-176)

Response paper topics:

- (1) How does Aristophanes use the dialogue form to convey his thoughts about Socrates and his teaching? What is a dialogue able to convey that traditional, academic prose is not?
- (2) Based on your own knowledge of philosophy, is the account of philosophy provided in the “Clouds” accurate?

Sept. 6: CEPHALUS AND POLEMARCHUS: PIETY, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE PROBLEMS OF HUMAN LIFE

Required reading:

*Republic*, 327a-336a

Response paper topics:

- (1) What is Cephalus’ account of justice? Why must he leave the conversation for the ensuing discussion of justice to take place? Does Socrates’ refute Cephalus’ definition? If not, why is he unable to?
- (2) Why must Cephalus leave for the discussion to continue? Is there a conflict between traditional piety/values and philosophy? If so, why?
- (3) What is the definition of justice presented by Polemarchus? Is it different from the definition presented by Cephalus? If so, how? Is this definition refuted?

Sept. 11: THRASYMACHUS ON JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE

Required reading:

*Republic*, 336b-354c

Response paper topics:

- (1) What is Thrasymachus’ account of justice? How is it different from the views of Cephalus and Polemarchus? Is it coherent?
- (2) How is Thrasymachus “tamed” by Socrates?

- Sept. 13: GLAUCON, AND ADEIMANTUS: JUSTICE, INJUSTICE, AND THE GROWTH OF THE CITY  
Required reading:  
*Republic, 357a-372e*  
Response paper topics:  
 (1) In what terms do Glaucon and Adeimantus praise injustice? How is their praise of injustice different from Thrasymachus'? How and why do their speeches differ from one another?  
 (2) Why does Socrates propose the city-soul analogy? Is the analogy sound?
- Sept. 18: PAIDEIA I: THE LUXURIOUS CITY AND "NEGATIVE EDUCATION" OF PLATO'S GUARDIANS  
Required reading:  
*Republic, 372e-399e*  
Response paper topics:  
 (1) What are the different types of cities and how are they different? How do the virtues and/or vices of each city correspond with their different natures?  
 (2) What is the point of the guardians' learning gymnastics? What is the point of the guardians' learning music? In what ways does Socrates propose censoring music and the poets? Why?
- Sept 20: PAIDEIA II: PURGING THE CITY AND THE "NOBLE LIE"  
Required reading:  
*Republic, 399e-427a*  
Response paper topics:  
 (1) What is the "noble lie"? At whom is the lie directed? What is the point of the lie? Why is it necessary? In what way is the lie noble (or beautiful)?  
 (2) Is the "noble lie" described by Socrates really the lie that holds the city together? Consider the connection between justice and happiness, especially as it relates to the guardian class. Is there another lie that is stronger and more fundamental to maintaining the city?
- Sept 25: PLATO ON JUSTICE IN THE CITY AND THE SOUL  
Required reading:  
*Republic, 427b-451b*  
Response paper topics:  
 (1) What are the parts of the soul? What arguments does Socrates use to establish the truth of his account? Are those arguments sound?  
 (2) What are the virtues (courage, wisdom, temperance, justice) in this city? What are they in individual souls? Why doesn't this account of the virtues fully answer Glaucon's challenge to Socrates (i.e., why does the *Republic* not end at here at 451b?)  
 (3) What is the difference for Socrates between justice and temperance?
- Sept. 27: WOMEN AND THE FAMILY  
Required reading:  
*Republic, 451c-471e*  
Response paper topics:  
 What are Socrates' arguments for the equality of women and for the communism of women and children? Are they serious? or is Socrates' purpose here ironic? Are these institutions oppressive? Or do they make possible the attainment of real human goods?

- Oct. 2: ON POSSIBILITY AND THE EDUCATION OF THE PHILOSOPHER-KINGS  
Required reading:  
*Republic*, 472a-480a  
Response paper topics:  
 Why are philosopher-kings necessary? Of what do they possess knowledge? What education must they have received in order to attain that knowledge?
- Oct. 4: THE PHILOSOPHICAL NATURE  
Required reading:  
*Republic*, 484a-507a  
Response paper topics:  
 Consider the image of the ship presented by Plato at 488a-489a. Plato claims that this image “resembles the cities in their disposition toward the true philosophers.” What does he mean? Is this analogy sound? Why or why not?
- Oct. 9: THE GOOD, THE DIVIDED LINE, AND THE CAVE  
Required reading:  
*Republic*, 507a-521b  
Response paper topics:  
 (1) At the end of Book VI, Plato presents us with two metaphors: that of the sun and the divided line. What is the function of these metaphors? Are they successful? You may choose to address both or focus on only one.  
 (2) Consider the image of the cave. In what way is the city said to be like the cave? What do the parts of this extended simile signify? How is the image of the cave related to the divided line? to the sun?  
 (3) What are the ideas, and what role do they play in the overall argument of the *Republic*?
- Oct. 11: *No Class, Fall Break*
- Oct. 16: THE EDUCATION OF THE PHILOSOPHER KINGS  
Required reading:  
*Republic*, 521c-541b  
Response paper topics:  
 What does Socrates mean by dialectic education? How does it differ from the traditional method of dogmatic instruction and/or catechistic education where students learn through repetition? What are some advantages and disadvantages of this mode of instruction? Is dialectic suitable for everyone? Why or why not?
- Oct. 18: POLITICAL DECAY AND THE REGIMES  
Required reading:  
*Republic*, 543a-580a  
Response paper topics:  
 What is Plato's assessment of democracy? Is it really second-worst, as Socrates' argument suggests? Or can we find a certain defense of democracy inside the critique?
- Oct. 21: **Final Paper Prospectus due by 11:59pm**

Oct. 23: HAPPINESS AND PLEASURE

Required reading:

*Republic*, 580b-592b

Response paper topics:

Is there a connection between justice and happiness? Explain your answer on both the level of the city and of the individual soul.

Oct. 25: THE QUARREL BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

Required reading:

*Republic*, 595a-608c

Response paper topics:

How does the quarrel between philosophy and poetry resolved? Do the poets have a role in the city in speech? If so, what is this role and why are they necessary?

Oct. 30: PLATO ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

Required reading:

*Republic*, 608c-621d

Response paper topics:

What is Socrates' argument for the immortality of the soul? Why does he introduce this and the subsequent story of Er at the end of the *Republic*? What do these add to the argument of the work as a whole?

Nov. 1, 6, 8, 13, 15, 18, and 20: READING TBD (CATCH-UP OR ARTICLE FROM SECONDARY LITERATURE)

Nov. 18: **Draft of Final Paper due by 11:59pm**

Nov. 22: *No Class – Thanksgiving Break*

Nov. 27: Paper Presentations I

Nov. 29: Paper Presentations II