



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

PLATO'S POLITICAL THOUGHT - 56048

Last update 28-09-2015

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: political science

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: English

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Jeffrey Macy

Coordinator Email: Jeffrey.Macy@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Monday 16:15-17:30

Teaching Staff:

Dr. Jeffrey Macy

Course/Module description:

This course is designed to present an overview and an analysis of the political thought of Plato, the outstanding Greek philosopher and political thinker. The course will examine central questions that are raised by Plato in his political thought, such as: What is justice?; Who or what should rule in the political regime?; What are the characteristics of the best political regime and the corrupt political regimes -- and are there worthy alternatives if the best political regime is unattainable?; What is the nature of human beings and the goal of human life?. In the context of the examination of these and other central questions that are raised by Plato, we will also examine the idealized representation of Socrates presented by Plato.

Course/Module aims:

As stated above, the aim of the course is to identify and analyze the central political issues raised by Plato and to attempt to determine his positions regarding these questions. The course will also try to place Plato within the context of the development of Western political thought.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

Ability to read, appraise and analyze the political writings of Plato; Ability to identify the key questions raised in ancient political philosophy, in general, and in the writings of Plato, in specific; Ability to evaluate Plato's critique of traditional Athenian religious and political doctrines as well as his critique of the sophists.

Attendance requirements(%):

At least 75%

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: The method of instruction will be based on careful reading of a significant number of the political writings of Plato and critical analysis of the contents of these texts. The class will combine emphasis on central issues that are raised in the texts with comparisons between the positions presented by Plato (or Socrates) and the positions held by the other participants in the Platonic dialogues. While the class discussions will frequently be directed by the lecturer's analysis of the texts under discussion, active participation of the students in class discussion will be encouraged.

Course/Module Content:

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1. Overview of the political thought of Plato and the historical and intellectual context of Athens in the late 5th and early 4th centuries B.C.E.
 2. The Apology of Socrates: The Issues raised by Socrates in the recounting of the trial by Plato. Discussion of the innocence or guilt of Socrates.
 3. Attempts to gain a fuller understanding of Socrates' position on piety, following the law of the city, and the meaning of life and death. (Readings from Plato's Crito, the end of the Phaedo and the Euthyphro.)
 4. Plato, Republic (Books 1+2): Introduction to the Republic and discussion of the various views regarding justice that were prevalent in Athens -- and that will be criticized by Socrates.
 5. Plato, Republic (Books 2-3): The search for justice, good education and the proper use of religious myths.
 6. Plato, Republic (Books 4-5): Justice, the equality of women and men, the elimination of private property and the community of children (the elimination of the nuclear family) in the ideal political regime.
 7. Plato, Republic (Books 5-7): The Philosopher-King and the Rule of Wisdom in the Just Regime -- The Parables of the Ship, The Divided Line, and the Cave.
 8. Plato, Republic (Books 8-9) and Statesman (selections): The Critique of the Corrupted Regimes and the possibility of non-ideal alternatives based on law.
 9. Plato, Republic (Book 10): The dangers and proper use of Poetry, Religion and Myth. Summary of the Republic.
 10. Plato, Laws (Books 1-2): Introduction to the Laws, preliminary comparison between the Laws and the Republic. Centrality of the "Divine" laws in the Laws and the importance of confronting the challenges of pleasure and pain as central factors that affect the citizens of the political regime through education, habit and law.
 11. Plato, Laws (Books 7-9): The education and upbringing of children; the importance of stability and the danger of change; what crimes are serious crimes and how should they be punished?.
 12. Plato, Laws (Books 10 and 12): The Gods and the response by the political regime to unbelief that undermines the belief in their existence or stature, the political importance of belief in the gods, the Nocturnal Council and the challenge of making changes in the "Divine" law in order to improve it or modify it to respond to changes in circumstances. General summary of the Laws and a concluding overview of the political thought of Plato.

Required Reading:

Plato, Apology of Socrates.
Plato, Crito.
Plato, Phaedo (final pages 115a-118a).
Plato, Euthyphro.
Plato, Republic.
Plato, Statesman (selections).
Plato, The Laws.

Additional Reading Material:

Suggested optional readings of secondary sources will be distributed to students and/or referred to in the context of class discussions.

Course/Module evaluation:

End of year written/oral examination 100 %

Presentation 0 %

Participation in Tutorials 0 %

Project work 0 %

Assignments 0 %

Reports 0 %

Research project 0 %

Quizzes 0 %

Other 0 %

Additional information:

The lecturer reserves the right to give a limited bonus to the final grade for active participation that makes a special contribution to class discussions.