

Syllabus for Bruce Hauptli's Midcoast Senior College Course for Fall 2025

Plato's "Authoritarian" *Republic* vs. Dewey's "Pragmatic" Democracy

Thursdays, 1:00-2:30 September 14, 2017-November 2 in Room 119 of Orion Hall, UMA,

12 Sewell Street on Brunswick Landing

Copyright © 2025 Bruce W. Hauptli

Course Description:

In his *Republic* Plato provided a characterization of, and an argument for, his ideal individual and state. His view is that those who know what is good should rule, paternalistically if necessary; and that those who lack such knowledge have the best chance of living the good life if they *surrender their freedom* and accept the rule of the wise. On his account democracy (which was the sort of government in at his time) is one of the *worst* forms of government imaginable! He emphasizes the transformative role which education can play in producing good individuals and states and the importance of acquiring both knowledge of unchanging and objective essences, and the objective and unchanging nature of human virtue. His influence on our culture is immense.

Writing roughly twenty-three centuries later, John Dewey provides both a critique of Plato's views, and a defense of democracy rooted in an American pragmatism which provides some significant challenges to a number of deep contributions which Plato has made to the Western culture. Rejecting Plato's fixations with the fixed, permanent, unchanging, and singular essences (of man, justice, virtue, and knowledge), Dewey offers a contrasting view of the good life for individuals, good civic states, and the value of democracy. In this course we will study Plato's views and arguments and contrast them with Dewey's.

Required Texts:

Plato's *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, revised by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992). ISBN: 978-0872201361; \$13 on Amazon. Students may use other editions of Plato's *Republic*, but it is best if the edition includes the standard marginal numbers which refer to a collection of Plato's works (*Platonis Opera* [Paris: 1578]) edited by Henri Stephanus. That edition's pagination has become the international standard way of identifying and referring to Plato's works. We will read Books I-IX, which cover 263 pages.

John Dewey's "[The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy](#)" (click to view or download). The essay is about 19 pages long—there is a book by this title which includes many Dewey essays, but don't buy it!

John Dewey: The Political Writings, eds. Debra Morris and Ian Shapiro (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993). ISBN: 978-0872201903; \$15 on Amazon. We will be reading six of the essays in the collection amounting to 75 pages.

Recommended Supplemental Reading:

John Dewey's *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2013 [1934]. ISBN: 978-0300186116. ISBN: 0300186118, \$19 on Amazon; Kindle version: ISBN 978-0300198843, \$19 on Amazon. This is not required and there I are comprehensive Supplement on the course web site, but I believe reading this enriches our understanding of Dewey's justification and defense of American democracy. It is 80 pages long.

Total required readings for course: 338 pages, with the recommended reading: 418

Recommended readings prior to first class: I do not presume you will have studied philosophy or that you will be familiar with Plato or the Ancient period. The first class will provide an introduction to both, but I have found that it frequently helps students to have done a bit of exploration so that the new materials may take hold. Over my 40 years of college teaching, I have developed many "lecture supplements" which were designed to allow students to enhance their experiences in my courses. These can be read *before and/or after class* and will remain on my website permanently for interested individuals. Three of them are relevant for our first class: "[What Is Philosophy?](#)" "[Introduction to Plato,](#)" and "[Introduction to Plato's Republic](#)" and you might want to look at them. While I used to spend the whole of the first class introducing philosophy, I will not do so for this class because I need all eight meetings to cover the material I want to focus our attention on. So I will begin the *second* class by asking if there are any questions about the "What Is Philosophy" supplement. The first class will largely be devoted to providing an introduction to Plato and his age.

Currently the supplements are unchanged from the 2021 course. Many will be updated before the course begins, and some will be updated as the course develops. You can see if they have been updates by the copyright date and/or the "last revised" date at the end of each file.

Anticipated Course Schedule: I think this is a likely trajectory, but if discussion needs to run longer on a topic that may mean some adjustments will be called for in the later classes.

I. September 8: Introduction to Plato, and to his Republic. We will not fully cover the materials in either the "Introduction to Plato," or the "Introduction to Plato's Republic" supplements below, and I intend that what is not covered in this class will be addressed in the second week. There will be a brief characterization of the philosophical activity, a discussion of "how to read philosophy," and an introduction to Ancient Greece and Plato's views.

Supplementary materials: [these and the others for the class may be helpful before and/or after class--they are not required reading but meant as *supplements* for you]

"What Is Philosophy?", "Introduction to Plato", and "Introduction to Plato's Republic"

Assignment for next session: read Plato's **Republic 327-411d** [these numbers refer to the marginal numbers in most editions of Plato's *Republic*. They refer to a collection of Plato's works (*Platonis Opera* [Paris: 1578]) edited by Henri Stephanus. That edition's pagination has become the standard way of identifying and referring to Plato's works--thus the *Republic* begins at 327a, and I would like you to read through 374a at the top of p. 49

of the text. Students may use other translations and editions, but it is best if they include the Stephanus marginal notations. Students are encouraged to have read Books I through IX prior to the fourth week, and are encouraged to read ahead if they can. I will, however, focus our attention on the selections indicated in the **green assignments**!

II. September 15: Finish introductions and discuss Plato's preliminary overview of the answer to the questions: "What is justice?" and "What is the value of justice?"

1. Book I—A preliminary overview [327-354c]
2. The challenges of Glaucon and Adeimantus [357a-368c]

Supplementary material: Plato's *Republic* Lecture Supplement A.

Assignment for next session: read Plato's ***Republic* 412c-471e.**

III. September 22: The "construction" of Plato's ideal state," and what is justice in the state.

3. Socrates begins developing the ideas behind the ideal state [368d-373e]
4. The need for guardians—to protect our valuables and ourselves [374-376d]
5. Stories and the early education of the guardians [376e-411d]--this material may be skipped or read less carefully.
6. Rulers, Auxiliaries, the noble fiction, and the Guard Dog Problem [412c-427d]
7. The Four Virtues in the City [427e-434c]
8. Justice in the Individual [434d-445e]
9. Role of Women, and the Lives of Rulers [449-471e]

Supplementary materials: Plato's *Republic* Lecture Supplement Part A and Plato's *Republic* Lecture Supplement Part B.

You may wish to look at Some Optional Exercises after you have finished reading the *Republic*.

Assignment for next session: **finish reading Plato's *Republic*.**

IV. September 29: Justice in the individual, the necessary type of knowledge, and the lesser types of states.

10. "Is this "Ideal State" *Merely* "Ideal?"—the "Ideality" of the Ideal State and the Role of Philosophy [472-475e]
11. Knowledge and the Forms [476-480b]
12. The Parable of the Navigator and How Potential Philosopher Kings Are Mis-Understood and Mis-Educated by Existing States [484-502c]—the discussion from 490c-505e can be skipped or read with less care.
13. Analogies and allegories regarding philosophic knowledge [502c-521b]
14. Higher Education of the Rulers: Mathematics and Dialectic [521b-541b]--this material may be read less carefully.
15. The Comparison of the Just and Unjust States and Individuals and the Tyrannical Life—Plato's Three Proofs that his preferred state is the best [543-576b]

Supplementary material:

Plato's *Republic* Lecture Supplement Part B.

Assignment for next session: read Dewey's "The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy" (available online), his "The Ethics of Democracy" (pp. 59-65 of *John Dewey: The Political Writings*--most of the remaining Dewey essays are from this volume), and "Intelligence and Morals" (pp. 66-76). .

V. October 6: We will finish discussing Plato's three "proofs" and begin the introduction to Dewey.

Supplementary materials: Introduction to Dewey," and supplements to Dewey's "The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy," and "The Ethics of Democracy."

Assignment for next session: read Dewey's "The Democratic Conception in Education" (pp. 110-120), "Philosophy and Democracy" (pp. 38-47), "Democracy and Human Nature" (pp. 219-229), and "Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us" (pp. 240-245).

VI. October 13: NOTE: This class will be on ZOOM as UMABC will be closed for Indigenous People's Day. We will Continue Introduction to Dewey his significant differences with, and criticisms of, Plato.

Introduction to Dewey continued
"The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy"
"The Ethics of Democracy"

Supplementary materials:

Introduction to Dewey, and Supplements to Dewey's "The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy," and "The Ethics of Democracy"

Assignment for next session: read Dewey's "Intelligence and Morals," "The Democratic Conception in Education," "Philosophy and Democracy," "Democracy and Human Nature," "Creative Democracy--The Task Before Us" and *A Common Faith*.

VII. October 20: Continuing discussion of Dewey's conception of, and defense of, democracy.

"Intelligence and Morals"
"The Democratic Conception in Education" "and
"Philosophy and Democracy"
"Democracy and Human Nature"
"Creative Democracy--The Task Before Us"
A Common Faith.

Supplementary materials:

Supplements to Dewey's "Intelligence and Morals," "The Democratic Conception In Education," "Philosophy and Democracy," "Democracy and Human Nature," and "Creative Democracy--The Task Before Us."

Assignment for next session: finish the Dewey readings.

VIII. October 27: Finish the discussion of Dewey's "moral argument for democracy," finish critical contrast between Plato's and Dewey's views, and critically consider Dewey's view.

Supplementary material: *A Common Faith* and Supplement For Final Lecture

Recommended Readings for continued exploration of the topics:

Rebecca Goldstein, *Plato At the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Won't Go Away* (NY: Pantheon, 2014).

Tim Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (NY: Knopf, 2015).

Eli Sagan, *The Honey and the Hemlock: Democracy and Paranoia In Ancient Athens and Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton UP., 1991).

Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell UP., 1991).

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton UP., 2004).

Last revised: 08/04/25

I greatly appreciate comments and corrections--typos and infelicities are all too common and the curse of "auto-correct" plagues me!