**PH145: PLATO AND DESCARTES**

**Seminar Schedule**

**Module Tutors: Dr. David Woods (Plato) and Prof. Stephen Butterfill (Descartes)**

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**How to do well in this module:** There is a direct correlation between the marks students tend to get for modules like this one and the amount of reading they do independently outside the classroom in preparation for lectures and seminars. The first thing you should do in preparation for each seminar is to read the indicated sections from Plato’s *Republic* or Descartes' *Meditations*. But it is recommended to read at least one or two of the items from the list of secondary readings indicated for each week (items marked ‘\*\*’ are essential; items marked ‘\*’ are strongly recommended). The recommended readings will help you to test and develop your own understanding of the main text.

**Seminar Topics**

**Week 2: Socrates and Thrasymachus on Justice**

**Reading:**

\*\**Republic* Book I.

\*\*Rachel Barney, “Socrates’ Refutation of Thrasymachus”.

1. What is Thrasymachus’ view about justice? Is it plausible?
2. What is Socrates’ “nature of craft” argument? Is it convincing? What can be said in response to Thrasymachus’ use of the comparison of ruling with shepherding?
3. What is Socrates’ “gang of thieves” argument? Does it show that being just is more profitable than being unjust?

**Week 3: The Case against Justice**

**Reading:**

\*\**Republic* Book II.

\*\*Christopher Shields, “Plato’s Challenge: the Case against Justice in Republic II”.

1. How should we understand Glaucon’s distinction amongst three kinds of good? Try to give examples of each kind of good, and explain why they fit into their allotted kind.
2. Which kind of good is justice according to (a) Glaucon’s arguments and (b) Socrates’ arguments.
3. What is Glaucon’s account of the origin of justice? Is it plausible? And How does it support his classification of justice?
4. How, if at all, does Glaucon’s account of Gyges support his classification of justice? Is his argument here convincing?

**Week 4: Was Plato a Feminist?**

**Reading:**

\*\**Republic* Book V.

\*\*Julia Annas, “Plato’s Republic and Feminism”.

\*\*Harry Lesser, “Plato’s Feminism”. Republic V.

1. Why does Annas think that Plato’s argument is ineffective against an antifeminist? Is she right?
2. Why does Annas think that Plato’s argument fails to take into account women’s desires? Is she right?
3. Why does Annas think that Plato’s argument fails to capture the injustice of sexual inequality? Is she right?
4. What is Annas’ view of Plato’s proposal that the nuclear family should be abolished? Is she right?
5. To what extent do Annas’ objections count against the claim that Plato defends a feminist position?

**Week 5: Plato on Poetry**

**Reading:**

\*\**Republic* Books III and X.

\*\*Alexander Nehemas, “Plato and the Mass Media”.

1. What does Nehemas mean by saying, “for Plato representation is transparent”?
2. How does this idea of transparency figure in Nehemas’s interpretation of Plato’s attitude towards poetry?
3. How is the idea of transparency supposed to support Nehemas’s comparison of Plato’s attitude towards poetry with some contemporary attitudes towards television? Does it?
4. Does Nehemas’s comparison of Athenian poetry and television support, or undermine, Plato’s attitude towards poetry?

***Week 6: Reading Week; no lectures of seminars***

**Weeks 7-10** *The reading and tasks for these seminars will be set a week before each seminar.*