

## Writing 20: *Living Justly in an Unkind World*

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**Instructor:** Joel Schlosser

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**Office hours:** M and W, 4:05 – 5 PM, in Trinity Café  
(in the Marketplace) and by appointment

**Dates:** August 24, 2009 – December 2, 2009

**Times:** M and W 2:50 – 4:05 PM

**Place:** Carr 241

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

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What makes a community just? What does it mean to live justly? Since the inception of civilization, justice has served as an organizing principle for collective life; today nearly all of us live under the banner of justice, whether it be the Constitution of the United States or the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. But what does justice really mean? This course will introduce you to the questions of justice by thinking through justice in a different context – Athens in the fourth century B.C.E. – and in a single text from the tradition of political thought – Plato’s *Republic*. Over the course of the semester, you will develop a new vocabulary with which to analyze justice, learn to think with and against Plato and his considerations about justice (in the process sharpening your own thinking), and use Plato as well as current readings on justice today (the “unkind world”) to gain perspective on the role of justice in your own life and situation. All of this will culminate in your taking these theoretical insights to contemporary politics and society by writing an extended reflective essay analyzing the ethics and politics of one aspect of public life – from music to medicine to law – thus applying the theory you develop through the course to the “real world” today.

### OBJECTIVES

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This course has two sets of objectives. First, as a Writing 20 course, this course seeks to teach you **how to write effectively for and thus participate successfully in intellectual conversations**. You will learn the basic ingredients of successful writing such as researching, workshopping, editing, and revising. While perfecting these more collaborative activities, you will also learn how to do the following things that will serve you in your all of your coursework at Duke (and beyond):

- Engage effectively and constructively with the writing of others.
- Articulate and develop a position through writing.
- Situate your writing within specific contexts and to specific audiences.

In addition to developing these universal skills of academic writing, this course also seeks to teach you **how to think like a political theorist**. This includes the ability to do the following things and to do them well:

- Understand the arguments of Plato’s *Republic* including key concepts and ambiguities.

- Compare and contrast the differences within and among positions in the *Republic*.
- Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of arguments in relation to each other and from the perspective of contemporary political and ethical questions.
- Evaluate your own political and ethical sympathies and philosophies, as well as possible critiques of these positions.

## COURSE NARRATIVE

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In the course, you will learn how to think effectively about justice by *writing* about justice; while Plato's *Republic* will serve as our primary text, your responses to it, disagreements with it, thoughts inspired by it, and arguments articulated in conversation with it – in a word, your *writing* – will structure our activities throughout the semester. Blog posts and comments will form the basis of our conversations about Plato's argument and its relevance today; these posts, comments, and discussions will also serve as launching pads for three longer essays in which you will practice the skills of interpretation (coming to terms with the text) and argumentation (positioning yourself vis-à-vis the text in an interesting and significant way). Just like the conversation that takes place in the *Republic*, we will create a community of discourse – giving criticism as well as receiving it in a collective inquiry into the questions of justice – by publicly reading our writing together in the form of seminar discussions, class workshops, and small group activities, all the while trying to discover how to articulate the nuances and complexities of justice as Plato does while also bringing his insights (and ours) to bear on the contemporary world around us.

Our work together will culminate with two major activities: (1) a revision and extension of one short essay into a longer piece; and (2) an extended reflective essay that brings your theoretical vocabulary about justice to bear on some aspect of contemporary public life. For the first assignment, you will develop and elaborate an earlier essay by incorporating comments you have received on that piece and on your writing in general, both from me and from your peers, creating a critical analysis of part of Plato's argument. For the second assignment, you will take this theoretical model and use it to investigate how Plato might speak to contemporary questions of justice in political life today, thinking through the issues raised by using Plato's text and arguments. Our discussions of justice in contemporary political life during the course of the semester will help you find ways of connecting the arguments about justice in the *Republic* and ongoing conversations today: you might analyze the ethics of television shows, films, or novels; the politics of present political institutions ranging from town hall meetings to the United Nations; or the merits of purportedly just ways of life such as public service or religious piety. Thus by the end of this course, you will have both a solid foundation in perhaps the most influential text in political thought, Plato's *Republic*, and a sophisticated argument that uses Plato in some way in order to advance our conversation about justice in the twenty-first century.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

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Although at the introductory level, this is an intensive course. Expect to write at least one to two pages a week and to read at least that much from each of your colleagues. The readings are also demanding and difficult. Take your time! Depending on your own speed and preferences, you may also allot your preparation time to taking notes on the readings, meeting with other students to discuss the material, or preparing in other collaborative ways. I strongly encourage you to meet

regularly with other students from the class. Even informal meetings over dinner will significantly help both your writing and your thinking about justice.

Specific activities and assignments will run as follows:

1. **Participation.** Whether discussing Plato, politics, our writing, or even the weather, I expect you to participate with vim and vigor. Participation includes active listening as well as speaking. Additionally, quality counts over quantity. The more time you spend outside class reading and reflecting, the better our discussions in class. Thus participation will include consistent attendance, preparedness, thoughtful engagement (both listening and speaking) in classroom activities, and timely responses to your peers' writing. To assess your participation, I will ask you to fill out a weekly self-evaluation on Blackboard. I will read this and give you feedback.  
  
**\*IMPORTANT\*** Many of our discussions in class will involve sensitive issues such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. It is of the utmost importance that we maintain an environment of respect and openness conducive to everyone's full and honest participation. In this respect, each individual student's success in the course depends on the success of the class as a whole; we cannot expect to discuss these issues thoughtfully and with sophistication unless all students feel that they can contribute to the conversation.
2. **Blog Postings (BPs).** We will use part of every class meeting to discuss the previous day's blog postings and comments. The blog will create another community of discourse where we can interrogate the text and its arguments, link its concerns to our own, and discuss our ideas and confusions with other students. You must post at least three times on the blog during the semester and add at least one comment on all other days.
3. **Essays (E1, E2, and E3).** When an essay falls due, we will spend the day working together in a workshop format to practice and hone our academic writing skills. These workshops form a major part of our work together and provide the primary place where you can improve your academic writing skills. Moreover, workshops allow the community of our class to help other students collaboratively. I expect sterling attendance and significant participation (listening as well as speaking) during these sessions.
4. **Major Projects (MP1 and MP2).** MP1 and MP2 will form the major projects for the course and will give you the opportunity to demonstrate your prowess as an intellectual writer and a creative thinker on matters of justice. We will discuss these assignments throughout the semester and spend significant time revising our ideas and our writing as we work together on them.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

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The following texts may be purchased at the Duke University Bookstore, or elsewhere as may be your preference. **Please purchase only the editions indicated, as we will require identical translations in class.** I will place additional readings are on Blackboard.

- Plato. *The Republic*. Allan Bloom, trans. Second Edition. Basic Books, 1991.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Tom Griffith, trans. Cambridge, 2000.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Sterling and Sharpe, trans. Norton, 1996.
- Joe Harris. *Rewriting: How to Do Things With Texts*. Utah State, 2006.

**A Note on Translations.** I have asked you to buy THREE different translations of the *Republic* with reason. Because very few of us read Ancient Greek fluently, we must rely on translations of this text. Consulting different translations, however, will help us identify keywords and important phrases in the *Republic* even without knowing the original language. Examining the text in these different forms will, in other words, help you come to terms with the text's nuances and complexities. I will introduce you to different ways of looking at alternative translations in the first week of class. You do not need to read every assigned reading in every translation, but I do want you to make a habit of cross-referencing words and passages that strike your interest. During the semester I expect you to **bring all three translations to every class meeting** so that we can make use of them as discussion dictates.

## EVALUATION

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The following is a list of requirements and means of evaluation.

<i>Task</i>	<i>Due Date</i>	<i>Percentage of grade</i>
1. Participation (attentive listening and thoughtful speaking, attendance)	Ongoing (accumulated during semester)	10%
2. Blog postings and comments	Postings on assigned days and comments on all others	10% (check grades)
3. Essays (E1, E2, E3)	E1: 5 PM Tuesday 9/8 E2: 5 PM Tuesday 9/22 E3: 5 PM Friday 10/2	10% each (30% total)
4. Final Draft of Major Project 1 (MP1)	5 PM Friday 10/31	15%
5. Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography	RP: 8 AM Monday 10/26 AB: 5 PM Thursday 11/5	5% (check grades)
6. Workshop Critiques	Ongoing	5% (check grades)
7. Panel Presentations	Monday 11/30 and Wednesday 12/2	5% (check grades)
8. Final Draft of Major Project 2 (MP2)	5 PM Thursday 12/10	20%

I will give two types of grades in this course: check-grades (✓+, ✓, ✓-) and letter grades (A, B, C, D, F). The check grades denote work that is exemplary (✓+), satisfactory (✓), and unsatisfactory (✓-). In the portions of your grade controlled by check-grades, I will expect you to have a vast majority of ✓+ and ✓ grades. If you do that, you will be fine. If you have more than one or two ✓- grades, I will lower your grade.

Letter grades will follow this rubric:

- To earn a **C**, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of a text in your own terms. A C essay may volunteer an original argument, but without much support or analysis of the sources. C essays are clear, though they might display grammatical weakness.
- To earn a **B**, you must begin to raise questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own agenda. A B essay typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. B essays are usually clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.
- To earn an **A**, you must construct an essay that does more than simply comment on the work of others. You must somehow forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its significance. A essays are clear and often eloquent.
- A **D** means that you have difficulty in writing clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An **F** means that you did not fully or seriously respond to the assignment.

## COURSE POLICIES

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**ATTENDANCE:** As said above, class discussion forms a vital part of this course. I strongly recommend that you avoid missing class unnecessarily. I will give you three grace absences that you may use for any personal or emergency absence. Barring extraordinary circumstances, each absence beyond these three will lower your participation grade by a grade (i.e. from A to A-). Excessive lateness will count as half an absence.

**MISSING AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS:** Assignments are due at the specified times. Barring extraordinary circumstances, for each day an assignment is late I will deduct one letter grade. Missing assignments will receive no credit.

**INTEGRITY:** I will report all cheating, plagiarism, and academic misconduct immediately to the University. For Duke University policies, please see this site:

[http://judicial.studentaffairs.duke.edu/policies/policy\\_list/academic\\_dishonesty.html](http://judicial.studentaffairs.duke.edu/policies/policy_list/academic_dishonesty.html)

For questions about what constitutes proper citation and plagiarism, please see these sites:

<http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/> and <http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/>.

I expect every student to uphold the Duke University Community Standard as detailed here:

<http://www.duke.edu/web/HonorCouncil/communitystandard.html>

**WRITING STUDIO:** All Duke students, regardless of ability, should use the Writing Studio. You can schedule an appointment at any stage of the writing process, whether you find yourself stuck at the brainstorming stage or proudly polishing a final draft. Visit the Writing Studio in the Academic Advising Center during the day, at Lilly Library during the evenings, or at Perkins Library location at various hours. (The Writing Studio even has an e-tutor program where you can work with a tutor remotely from any location.) Visit the Writing Studio’s website (<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/>) to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio’s online resources.

**ACCOMODATIONS FOR IMPAIRMENTS/DISABILITIES:** Students needing accomodation because of any impairment or disability should visit <http://www.aas.duke.edu/trinity/t-reqs/ld.html> to learn about Duke’s policies concerning academic accommodations. If you anticipate a need for accommodations, please contact me as early in the semester as possible. All communication will remain confidential.

**LAPTOPS:** Because of extreme potential for distraction, **no laptops are allowed in class.** If you have medical reasons for needing a laptop, please discuss this with me outside of class.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topics/Activities</u>	<u>To be completed before class:</u>
8/24	Introductions, Translation Exercise	Review syllabus
8/26	<b>“Coming to Terms”</b> – the first “move” of academic writing	<b>*Special: View Writing Studio Video on YouTube*</b> Harris, Chapter 1 <i>Republic</i> , Book I: 327a – 336b <b>BP 1</b>
8/31	Coming to Terms with the <i>Republic</i>	<i>Republic</i> , Book I: 336b – 357a <b>BP2</b>
9/2		<i>Republic</i> , Book II <b>BP3</b>
9/7		<i>Republic</i> , Book III <b>BP4</b>
9/9	Large group workshop	<b>*E1 due, by 5 PM Tuesday 9/8/09*</b> <b>(All students must bring hard copies of papers to be workshopped to class. Non-workshoppers must bring completed workshop sheet to class.)</b>

9/14	<b>“Forward and Countering”</b> – learning to “do things with texts”	Harris, Chapters 2 and 3
9/16	Forwarding and countering Socrates in the <i>Republic</i>	<i>Republic</i> , Book IV <b>BP 1</b>
9/21		<i>Republic</i> , Book V <b>BP 2</b>
9/23	Large group workshop	<b>*E2 due, by 5 PM Tuesday 9/22/09*</b> <b>(All students must bring hard copies of papers to be workshopped to class. Non-workshoppers must bring completed workshop sheet to class.)</b>
9/28	<b>Continuing to Forward and Counter in the <i>Republic</i></b>	<i>Republic</i> , Book VI <b>BP 3</b>
9/30		<i>Republic</i> , Book VII <b>BP 4</b>  <b>*NOTE: E3 due, by 5 PM Friday 10/2*</b>
10/5	<b>*NO CLASS: FALL BREAK*</b>	
10/7	Small groups workshop	<b>E3 Workshop. All students must bring hard copies of papers to be workshopped to class. Non-workshoppers must bring completed workshop sheet to class.</b>
10/12	<b>“Taking an Approach”</b> – Finding your voice as an intellectual and as a writer	Harris, Chapter 4 Nussbaum, “On Plato’s <i>Republic</i> ” (on Blackboard) <b>BP 1</b>
10/14	<b>Approaching the <i>Republic</i></b>	Lear, “Inside and Outside the <i>Republic</i> ” <i>Republic</i> , Book VIII <b>BP 2</b>
10/19		Nehamas, “Plato and the Mass Media” <i>Republic</i> , Books IX and X <b>BP 3 AND BP 4</b>
10/21	Small groups workshop	<b>*MP1.d1 due, bring THREE (3) hardcopies to class*</b>

10/26	<b>No Class: Conferences with Joel about MP2</b>	Work on your research project! <b>*Research Proposal due, by 8 AM Monday 10/26*</b>
10/28	<b>No class: Conferences with Joel about MP2</b>	Work on your research project! <b>*MP1.d2 due, 5 PM Friday 10/31*</b>
11/2	<b>Applying the <i>Republic</i></b>	<b>*Library Day*</b>
11/4	Elevator speeches	Work on your research project!
11/9	Large group workshop: Annotated Bibliographies	<b>*Annotated Bibliography due, by 5 PM Thursday 11/5*</b> (Non-workshoppers must bring completed workshop sheet to class)
11/11	<b>Revising</b>	Harris, Chapter 5
11/16	Small group workshops on MP2.d1	<b>*MP2.d1 due, by 5 PM Tuesday 11/10/09*</b> (All workshoppers must bring completed hardcopies of group's papers as well as completed workshop sheets for each to class)
11/18	Continued small group workshops on MP2.d1	
11/23	<b>No Class</b>	<b>*MP2.d2 due, by 8 AM Monday 11/23*</b>
11/30	<b>Presenting our Approaches</b>  Panels on MP2	Prepare presentation on MP2
12/2	Panels on MP2	Prepare presentation on MP2

**NOTE: MP2.d3 (Final Draft) due by 5 PM, Thursday 12/10/09.**