



LIBS 597.01W— Special Topic

The Disciplining Myth — Plato's *Republic* and the Theory of Myth

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Keith “Maggie” Brown

Office Location: Online

Office Hours: Wednesday 4pm – 5pm, or BY APPOINTMENT

Office Phone: 940.565.4985

University Email Address: Keith.Brown@etamu.edu

Preferred Form of Communication: **Email/Canvas**

Communication Response Time: Weekdays, within 5 hours; Weekends, within 1 day.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course reads Plato's *Republic* not as a treatise to be evaluated for its argument about justice, but as an act of construction: a myth built to replace the myths it inherited. Homer and Hesiod's gods lie, war, weep, and seduce without consequence — theirs is, on Plato's diagnosis, a slack, undisciplined pedagogy, and a city raised on it will produce citizens, and tyrants, to match. The *Republic* does not merely argue that such stories should be censored. It arrives as their replacement, fully built: a new myth of the soul and the city, disciplined by design, delivered across the structure Robin Waterfield's translation makes visible when it divides the traditional ten books into fourteen "more natural" chapters — chapters that trace, with striking regularity, a movement from inherited myth (Ch. 4) through founding myth (Ch. 5, the Myth of Metals) through philosophical myth (Ch. 9, the Sun, Line, and Cave) to the systematic banishment of the mimetic poets (Ch. 13) and finally to Plato's own capstone eschatology (Ch. 14, the Myth of Er). Waterfield's *Republic* is read here also for its most consequential interpretive decision: rendering *dikaiosyne* as morality rather than justice, on Aristotelian grounds that the Greek term names something closer to virtue entire than to fair distribution alone — a choice that raises the stakes of every myth in the dialogue from political legitimacy to the whole shape of a life.

Required alongside Plato are four texts in the theory of myth and structure, read against the *Republic*'s own myth-moments rather than as free-standing secondary literature: Claude Lévi-Strauss's "The Structural Study of Myth," paired with the Myth of Metals, for a structuralist account of how myth

mediates a contradiction a culture cannot otherwise resolve; Roland Barthes's "Myth Today," paired with the Sun, Line, and Cave, for an account of how a form is emptied of its history and naturalized into an eternal truth; Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," paired with the return of the poetry critique in Chapter 13, for the moment a structure's organizing center is shown to be produced by the very term it excludes; and Umberto Eco's *The Open Work*, paired with the Myth of Er, for a reading of Plato's closing myth as a structure that hands its own completion to the listener.

The course proceeds by close reading, not survey: each theoretical text is read narrowly, against a specific textual site in the *Republic*, with journal prompts built to test the theory's terms against Plato's sentences rather than to summarize either. A wider list of readings — Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Barthes's "Rhetoric of the Image" and "The Death of the Author," Foucault's "What Is an Author?," and Deleuze and Guattari's "Rhizome" — stands adjacent to the required texts as further doors: not assigned, not excluded, available to be walked through this semester or returned to later, whenever a piece of the student's own work asks why it was made the way it was made.

Keyed to Waterfield's 14 chapters, not the traditional 10 books. Stephanus ranges below are approximate — use them for orientation, not citation.

TEXTS

Required Reading

1. Plato – *The Republic* (Trans. R. Waterfield) New York: Oxford Univ Press, 1998. Purchase.
2. Claude Lévi-Strauss – "The Structural Study of Myth" Provided online.
3. Roland Barthes – *Mythologies* ("Myth Today"). Provided online.
4. Jacques Derrida – "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" Provided online.
5. Umberto Eco – *The Open Work*. Provided online.

Other texts will be suggested throughout the guided study based on one-to-one dialogs between student and instructor.

The Sequence

Ch.	Title	Approx. Stephanus	What's happening	Paired reading	Arc position
1–2	Convention under Attack / The Challenge to Socrates	327–367	Cephalus, Polemarchus, Thrasymachus; Glaucon & Adeimantus restate the problem	—	(primer)
3	Fundamentals of Inner Politics	369–376	The city founded; the "healthy" city vs. the "luxurious," feverish one	—	(primer)
4	Primary Education for the Guardians	376–412	Censorship of Homer/Hesiod's stories about the gods; gymnastic and musical education	—	(see reframing below — the replacement myth, not just the edit)
5	The Guardians' Life and Duties	412–427	Selection of true guardians; the Myth of Metals / Noble Lie; communal property	Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth"	STRUCTURE — founding myth
6	Inner and Outer Morality	427–445	The four virtues; tripartite soul; morality defined in city and soul	—	—
7	Women, Children, and Warfare	449–471	The "three waves"; equality of women guardians; rules of war	—	—
8	Philosopher Kings	471–502	The philosophic nature and its corruption	—	—
9	The Supremacy of Good	502–535	Sun, Line, and Cave — Plato's three interlocking images	Barthes, "Myth Today"	STRUCTURE — ideological myth

Ch.	Title	Approx. Stephanus	What's happening	Paired reading	Arc position
10	Educating Philosopher Kings	521–541	The mathematical curriculum; dialectic; the fifteen-year program	—	—
11	Warped Minds, Warped Societies	543–576	Timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, tyranny	—	—
12	Happiness and Unhappiness	571–592	The tyrant's psychology; ranking the lives	—	—
13	Poetry and Unreality	595–608	The poetry critique returns — mimesis thrice removed from truth; poets banished	Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play"	UNDOING — the crack
14	Rewards Now and Hereafter	608–621	Immortality of the soul; the Myth of Er	Eco, <i>The Open Work</i>	THE GAP — reader completes

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Minimal Technical Skills Needed:
- Access D2L and other online resources
- Meet regularly with instructor.
- Submit work via assignment portals.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

Zoom dialogs based on close analysis of texts.

Student Responsibilities or Tips for Success in the Course

- Be prepared to question the foundations of your own perspective on life, the universe, and everything.
- Respectfully interact with and take seriously perspectives different from your own.
- Be comfortable with complexity and ambiguity! Philosophical questions do not have single "right" answers, just as most of our global problems rarely have a single, easy fix.
- Cite sources, giving credit to where you obtain information.
- Make the commitment to spend at least 10 hours a week reading the assignments, reflecting on the material covered, questioning your friends/family, and participating in other activities throughout the course.

GRADING

Final grades in this course will be based on the following scale:

A = 90%-100%

B = 80%-89%

C = 70%-79%

D = 60%-69%

F = 59% or Below

Weights of the assessments in the calculation of the final letter grade.

Journal Entries	30%
MidTerm Check-In	30%
Final Project	40%
TOTAL:	100%

Assessments

1. **Journals:** Weekly Journal of thoughts and sketches based on reading and conversations with instructor
2. **Midterm:** Essay on topic that reflects student's understanding of Plato in light of being a working artist.
3. **Final:** Essay over student's comprehension of their own artistic production in light of structuralism and post-structuralism.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

LMS

All course sections offered by Texas A&M University-Commerce have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are technical requirements

LMS Requirements:

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/article/Brightspace-Platform-Requirements>

LMS Browser Support:

https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser_support.htm

Zoom Virtual Classroom Requirements:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362023-Zoom-system-requirements-Windows-macOS-Linux>

ACCESS AND NAVIGATION

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@tamuc.edu.

Note: Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, a TAMUC campus open computer lab, etc.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact your Instructor.

Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found here:

<https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>

Interaction with Instructor Statement

Please interact with me as needed via email or schedule a Zoom chat.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Syllabus Change Policy

The syllabus is a guide. Circumstances and events, such as student progress, may make it necessary for the instructor to modify the syllabus during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced in advance.

University Specific Procedures

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. The Code of Student Conduct is described in detail in the Student Guidebook:

<https://www.etamu.edu/student-code-of-conduct/>

Students should also consult the Rules of Netiquette for more information regarding how to interact with students in an online forum: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/netiquette>

ETAM Attendance

For more information about the attendance policy, please visit the webpages:

<https://inside.tamuc.edu/admissions/registrar/generalinformation/attendance.aspx>

Academic Integrity

Students at Texas A&M University-Commerce are expected to maintain high standards of integrity and honesty in all of their scholastic work. For more details and the definition of academic dishonesty, see the following procedures:

Academic Integrity Policy and Form

[Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty 13.99.99.R0.03](#)

[Undergraduate Student Academic Dishonesty Form](#)

<https://inside.tamuc.edu/aboutus/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/documents/13.99.99.R0.03UndergraduateStudentAcademicDishonestyForm.pdf>

Students with Disabilities-- ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Services

Velma K. Waters Library- Room 162

Phone (903) 886-5930

Fax (903) 468-8148

Email: StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu

Website: <https://www.tamuc.edu/student-disability-services/>

Nondiscrimination Notice

Texas A&M University-Commerce will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

Campus Concealed Carry Statement

Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031, et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in Texas A&M University-Commerce buildings only by persons who have been issued and are in possession of a Texas License to Carry a Handgun. Qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are also permitted to do so. Pursuant to Penal Code (PC) 46.035 and A&M-Commerce Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations.

For a list of locations, please refer to the [Carrying Concealed Handguns On Campus](#) document and/or consult your event organizer.

Web url:

<http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/34SafetyOfEmployeesAndStudents/34.06.02.R1.pdf>

Pursuant to PC 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all A&M-Commerce campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

A&M-Commerce Supports Students' Mental Health

Counseling Center Services

The Counseling Center at A&M-Commerce, located in the Halladay Building, Room 203, offers counseling services, educational programming, and connection to community resources for students. Students have 24/7 access to the Counseling Center's crisis assessment services by calling 903-886-5145. For more information regarding Counseling Center events and confidential services, please visit www.tamuc.edu/counsel

NOTES TO KEEP IN MIND

Ch. 4, reframed — the Republic as the Disciplining Myth

Working thesis: Plato isn't only cutting Homer and Hesiod's content — gods who lie, war, weep, seduce. He's diagnosing a pedagogical failure. A *paideia* built on undisciplined gods produces undisciplined citizens (and undisciplined tyrants). Ch. 4 doesn't just clear ground for a replacement; it names what the city's stories are *for* — forming soul and city at once — and therefore what any replacement has to do. Everything from the Myth of Metals forward is that replacement already in motion. The *Republic* is not the argument for a new myth. It *is* the new myth, delivered ready to install.

Two pieces of scholarship worth having in reserve when you teach this — one supports the thesis cleanly, one needs a small correction before it does.

Book 1 as an independent early dialogue.

There's a real, still-contested tradition here, associated most prominently with Gregory Vlastos, who dated Republic Book 1 (Waterfield's Ch. 1) to Plato's early period and Books 2–10 to the middle period — treating Book 1 as originally a free-standing "Socratic" dialogue (sometimes called the conjectural *Thrasymachus*) later folded into the larger project. The case rests on stylometry and on Book 1's aporetic shape: it ends, like the early dialogues, with no definition secured, where Books 2–10 are confidently constructive throughout. This isn't settled — Charles Kahn has called it "an old scholarly myth," and Sansone's recent commentary argues the stylistic differences aren't probative and that Book 1 already anticipates what's coming. But even the skeptics of the compositional history concede the shape: Chs. 1–2 behave like classic elenchus — attack, refutation, *aporia* — and Ch. 3 onward behaves like something else entirely, willing to construct, to lie for a purpose. If you want a textual hinge for "the old mode ends here, the myth-building begins here," Glaucon's line at 358b — announcing he's reviving Thrasymachus's argument to force Socrates past mere refutation — is exactly that seam, whether or not Plato drafted Ch. 1 as a separate piece years earlier.

The Syracuse connection.

The familiar story (Plato burned by a failed philosopher-king experiment, retreating into theory) is most solidly documented for the *Laws*, written after all three Sicilian trips, including the catastrophic third (361 BCE) and Dion's assassination (354 BCE) — several scholars read the *Laws*'s turn to a heavily mythic "second-best" constitution as a direct response to that failure. Republic is standardly dated to the middle period, at or after the founding of the Academy, which places it *before* the two Dionysius II trips (366, 361 BCE) usually meant by "the failed experiment." The trip that actually precedes Republic is the first one: Plato's visit to Dionysius I's court around 387 BCE, the disillusioning encounter with a luxurious, undisciplined tyranny (and, per later semi-legendary tradition, his enslavement there), after which he returns to Athens and founds the Academy. That's the biographical throughline that survives a date-check: Plato sees up close what a city trained on undisciplined gods produces, and the Academy — soon followed by the Republic — is the answer he

builds. The more famous "philosopher-king" failures under Dionysius II come *after* Republic and belong more properly to the Laws's disillusionment.

Node A — Ch. 5 + Lévi-Strauss

The Myth of Metals is Plato inventing a myth to mediate a contradiction he needs mediated: the city has just told its citizens they're all earth-born siblings, and now has to explain why some of those siblings rule and others obey. Lévi-Strauss's method doesn't ask whether a myth is *true* or *justified* — it asks what logical tension the myth is doing the work of resolving, and treats every retelling as structurally equivalent. That indifference to justification is useful friction against a room that wants to argue about whether Plato's "noble lie" is defensible.

Journal prompts

1. Break the Myth of Metals into its mythemes (earth-birth, metal-admixture, caste-assignment, the prophecy of ruin). Diagram the opposition it mediates. What does the resolution cost, and who pays it?
2. Swap "justice" for Waterfield's "morality" in your reading of the myth. Does the opposition being mediated change once the stakes are the *whole moral order* rather than a fair distribution of goods?
3. Structuralist method assumes a myth's logic recurs elsewhere in the same culture's stories. Where else in the *Republic* does "siblings of one earth, unequal by nature" show up — the guardians' communal life, the tripartite soul? Trace one repetition.

Node B — Ch. 9 + Barthes

Barthes's myth is a second-order system: a sign is emptied of its particular history and made to carry a concept, then presented as eternal rather than constructed. The Sun does exactly this — a physical body among other bodies, stripped of its own history, made to carry "the Good." The Cave does it too, and says so almost too plainly: "They're no different from us" (515a) universalizes a historically specific, contestable, exclusionary program of philosophical education as simply *the human condition*.

Journal prompts

1. Where exactly does the Cave allegory perform the naturalizing move Barthes describes? What historically particular claim gets smuggled in as universal?
2. What is sacrificed when the sun is emptied of its own history to become a form for "Goodness"? What is gained, politically, by that particular naturalization?
3. Waterfield's own notes admit the relation between Cave and Line has "almost as many interpretations as there are writers on it." Is that indeterminacy evidence *against* reading the Cave as myth in Barthes's sense — or is unresolvable interpretability part of how the myth secures its authority?

Node C — Ch. 13 + Derrida

Derrida: a structure requires a center that both organizes it and stands outside it — a point of presence that limits the freeplay of the system's elements without itself being subject to that play. Plato's whole architecture is centered on excluding mimetic poetry: philosopher/poet, truth/copy, being/appearance all cohere around that exclusion. But Ch. 13's own argument is conducted through image and analogy, and the book is one chapter from its most mythopoetic writing yet. The center that organizes the anti-mimetic structure turns out to be produced by the very thing it expels.

Journal prompts

1. Name the "center" organizing Ch. 13's argument. Find one place in the chapter's own prose where Plato needs image, analogy, or narrative to make that argument. Does the center hold?
2. Read Chs. 4, 5, 9, and 13 together as four returns to a single compulsion — needing myth to argue against myth. Contradiction, structural necessity, or just what structure *is*, per Derrida?
3. In your own idiom: what gets abjected so the philosopher-king's stable identity can cohere, and where does that excluded material resurface, displaced, elsewhere in the text?

Node D — Ch. 14 + Eco

Eco distinguishes openness from mere ambiguity: an open work builds a structural invitation for the audience to complete it. The Myth of Er is Plato's most elaborate narrative myth, delivered immediately after the poets have been banished, and its epistemic status is deliberately unsettled — is Er's account literal, useful fiction, both? Er himself is instructed not to *believe* the account but to *guard* it for the living (614b) — a messenger's role, which is to say, a poet's role, handed out at the exact moment poets have been sent away.

Journal prompts

1. Where in the Myth of Er is completion of meaning explicitly handed to the listener rather than settled by the narrator?
2. If the Myth of Metals and the Myth of Er really do bracket the dialogue, as Waterfield's introduction claims — does the *Republic* as a whole behave like an open work, asking something of its reader rather than closing an argument for them?
3. Is "guarding" an account you don't fully believe a form of interpretive completion? What does it mean that the book's last gesture, after expelling the poets, is to install a keeper of an unverifiable story?