



Possibility and Utopia in Plato's *Republic*

A talk by W. Derek Bowman

“That sounds great in theory, but it will never work in practice.” This charge is often made in response to specific political proposals, such as the universal provision of health insurance, or a plan to avoid financial crisis by relying on self-regulation in the banking industry. It's obvious why, if true, this would be a problem for such policies, since working in practice is their central purpose. However, the same charge is also frequently used as an objection to theories of justice that come across as too utopian. But why should we think that philosophical theories have to meet any practical standard at all?

W. Derek Bowman will address this question through an examination of Western philosophy's most famous utopia: the ideal city of Plato's *Republic*. Plato's city includes such wildly utopian arrangements as the (then unprecedented) equality of women, the abolition of the traditional family, and the absolute rule of philosopher-kings. And yet, he insists that this utopia must be shown to be not only desirable, but also possible. Examining Plato's arguments will reveal a conception of political possibility that allows us to better understand the relation between theory and practice even in the philosophy and politics of today.

W. Derek Bowman, Philosophy PhD, Brown University, May 2013

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This talk is sponsored by the UNE Philosophy Club and is open to the entire campus community.