

Professor Adam Sitze
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LJST 36: Law Between Plato and the Poets

Ancient tragedy, ancient comedy, and Platonic political philosophy pose very different questions about the essence and basis of law, and about law's relation to such matters as conflict, politics, guilt, love, suffering, action, justice, and wisdom. This course is a preliminary study of the relationships between these differing modes of inquiry. We will spend the first half of the course outlining the theories of law that govern select dramatic works by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes. In the second half of the course, we will trace the intricate way these theories are at once incorporated into and rejected by Platonic political philosophy, as exemplified by Plato's *Republic*. Along the way, we shall weigh and consider competing versions of the "return to Plato" in contemporary philosophy.

Required Texts (available at Amherst Books)

Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*
Aristophanes, *The Clouds*
Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*
Plato, *Apology*
Plato, *Republic*
Plato, *Symposium*
Sophocles, *King Oedipus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*
Course Reader (available from Megan Estes in Clark 208)

Course Requirements

- (a) 5 Response Papers (maximum 3 pages, excluding footnotes) (50% of grade)
- (b) Final Essay (maximum 10 pages, excluding footnotes) (40% of grade)
- (c) Close Reading and Active Participation in Class (10% of grade)
- (d) Compliance with Amherst College Honor Code

Week One

1. Monday, January 24: Introduction
2. Wednesday, January 26: Danielle Allen, "Greek Tragedy and Law"; Donald Kelley, "Greek Roots"; George Steiner, "Tragedy Reconsidered"; and Cornel West, "Democracy Matters Are Frightening in Our Time"

Week Two

3. Monday, January 31: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides*
4. Wednesday, February 2: Nussbaum, *Fragility*, Chapter Two; Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The Historical Moment of Tragedy in Greece," "Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy," and "Intimations of the Will in Greek Tragedy"

Friday, February 4: **Response Paper #1 Due**

Week Three

5. Monday, February 7: Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Oedipus at Colonus*
6. Wednesday, February 9: Bernard Knox, "Why is Oedipus Called *Tyrannos*?"; Vernant, "Oedipus Without the Complex" and "Ambiguity and Reversal"

Week Four

7. Monday, February 14: Sophocles, *Antigone*
8. Wednesday, February 16: Athol Fugard, "The Island"

Week Five

9. Monday, February 21: Martin Heidegger, "The Greek Interpretation of Human Beings in Sophocles' *Antigone*"; Bonnie Honig, "Antigone's Laments, Creon's Grief"; and Nussbaum, *Chapter Three*
10. Wednesday, February 23: René Girard, "Oedipus and the Surrogate Victim" and "The Gods, the Dead, the Sacred, and Sacrificial Substitution."

Optional: Simone Weil, "The *Iliad*, Or, The Poem of Force."

Friday, February 25: **Response Paper #2 Due**

Week Six

11. Monday, February 28: Aristophanes, *Clouds*
12. Wednesday, March 2: Leo Strauss, "Introduction," "The Clouds," and "Conclusion," from *Socrates and Aristophanes*

Optional: Giorgio Agamben, "Comedy"

Friday, March 4: **Response Paper #3 Due**

Week Seven

13. Monday, March 7: Plato, *Apology*
14. Wednesday, March 9: Hannah Arendt, "Socrates"

Friday, March 11: **Response Paper #4 Due**

Week Eight

15. Monday, March 21: Plato, *Symposium*
16. Wednesday, March 23: Nussbaum, *Fragility*, Chapter Six; Leo Strauss, "Introductory Remarks" and "The Setting" from *On Plato's Symposium*

Friday, March 25: **Response Paper #5 Due**

Week Nine

17. Monday, March 28: Plato, *Republic*, Books I and II
18. Wednesday, March 30: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets," 39-58; Jean-Joseph Goux, "Philosophy I"; Nussbaum, "Interlude I: Plato's Anti-Tragic Theater"

Optional: Martin Puchner, "The Poetics of the Platonic Dialogue"

Week Ten

19. Monday, April 4: Plato, *Republic*, Books III and IV
20. Wednesday, April 6: Strauss, "On Plato's *Republic*"

Week Eleven

21. Monday, April 11: Plato, *Republic*, Books V and VI
22. Wednesday, April 13: Jacques Rancière, "Order of the City," "Order of Discourse," and "Preface" to *Disagreement*.

Week Twelve

23. Monday, April 18: Plato, *Republic*, Books VII and VIII
24. Wednesday, April 20: Alain Badiou, "Plato, Our Dear Plato!", "Philosophy and Mathematics," "Platonism and Mathematical Ontology," and "The Democratic Emblem."

Week Thirteen

25. Monday, April 25: Plato, *Republic*, Books IX and X
26. Wednesday, April 27: Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets," 58-72; Nussbaum, *Fragility*, Chapter Five; Ramona Naddaff, "The Myths to End all Myths"

Week Fourteen

27. Monday, May 2: Nicole Loraux, "The Divided City: Mappings."
28. Wednesday, May 4: Badiou, "The (Re)turn of Philosophy Itself"; Nussbaum, *Fragility*, Chapter One; Rancière, "Ten Thesis on Politics"; Strauss, "On Classical Political Philosophy"

Monday, May 16: **Final Essay Due**