

Professor Andrew Poe
TTH 10-11:20AM in CLAR 100
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POLITICAL SCIENCE 43

Ancient Political Thought

-Introduction-

This course surveys ancient Greek and Roman political thought. The course aims to illustrate that, although the ancient world was remarkably different from our own, many of the concepts and ideas that dominate our thinking about politics today have been influenced by our inheritance of these classic traditions. Such ideals as democratic citizenship, the rule of law, public and private spaces, and civil liberties find their first articulation in these ancient polities. Indeed, many of the questions and problems that plagued politics in those ancient worlds – What is justice? What are the obligations of democratic citizens? What is the best form of government? – are still vibrant today. Moreover, both the Greeks and the Romans provide models for political ambitions (both personal and communal) gone horribly wrong. Their histories provide ample reflection for, amongst other contemporary concerns, how much corruption polities can endure, the costs of empire, and how to recognize and avoid tyranny.

Moving historically through philosophical engagements with political problems, the course begins with Herodotus' critical reflections on the new political world he saw emerging during the Persian Wars (5th century BCE), and ends with Augustine's contemplations on human and divine orderings of politics (the early 5th century). Through close textual readings and contextual analysis we will engage in a systematic comparison of our assumptions about politics with those expressed in these ancient worlds. And, in so doing, we will attempt to further our understanding of contemporary politics and the political problems requisite to modern political practices.

-Course Requirements-

There are **three** requirements for this course:

1. 8-10 page Mid-Term Paper: Topics will be distributed on October 26th and will cover the first half of the course; papers will be due in Class on November 2nd - 35%
2. 10-12 page Final Paper: Topics will be distributed on December 14th and will cover the second half of the course; papers will be due to my departmental mailbox by noon on December 22nd - 45%
3. Attendance and participation in the course - 20%

Late Papers: Except in documented cases of serious emergency, late papers will receive a 1/3 grade penalty for each calendar day the paper is late.

-Texts-

The following books are available for purchase at Amherst Books:

Plato – *The Dialogues of Plato* (Volume 1)
Plato – *Republic* (Grube translation)
Sophocles – *Oedipus Cycle* (*Oedipus the King*; *Oedipus at Colonus*; *Antigone*)
Aristotle – *The Politics*
Livy – *The Early History of Rome* (Books 1-5)
Cicero – *The Republic and The Laws*
Seneca – *Moral and Political Essays*
Sallust – *Catiline's War, The Jugurthine War, Histories*
Tacitus – *The Histories*

The remainder of the readings will be available on course e-reserve.

-Schedule and Readings-

Introduction

September 7th – Ways of Approaching the Ancient World:
Texts, Contexts, and Theory

Part 1: Athenian Democracy and its Critics

September 9th – Foundations for Democracy (part 1)
Reading: Herodotus' *Histories* (Book 1)

September 14th – Foundations for Democracy (part 2)
Reading: Herodotus' *Histories* (remaining selections on the Persian Wars and the institution of democracy in Athens)

September 16th – Patriotism
Reading: Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War* (selections on Pericles and the origins of the war between Athens and Sparta)

September 21st – A Critique of Patriotism
Reading: Plato's *Menexenus*

September 23rd -- The Trials of Citizenship (part 1)
Reading: Plato's *Apology*

September 28th – The Trials of Citizenship (part 2)
Reading: Plato's *Crito*

October 30th – The Idea of Justice (part 1)
Reading: Plato's *Republic*, Books 1-2

October 5th – The Idea of Justice (part 2)
Reading: Plato's *Republic*, Books 3-5

October 7th – Educating Citizens
Reading: Plato's *Republic*, Books 6-8

October 12th – Problems for a Just Polity
Reading: Plato's *Republic*, Books 9-10

October 14th – Political Theatre (part 1)
Reading: Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*

October 19th – Political Theatre (part 2)
Reading: Sophocles' *Antigone*

October 21st – Political Animals
Reading: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (brief selections)
Aristotle's *Politics*, Book 1

October 26th – On Different Kinds of Government (and their consequences)
Reading: Aristotle's *Politics*, Book III: chapters 1-13, and Book IV:
chapters 2-3, 8-9, 11-12, and 15

October 28th – Public Speech
Readings: Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (selections)

Part 2: The Roman Republic and its Aftermath

November 2nd – The Beginning of Rome

Reading: Selections from Livy on the founding of Rome
Plutarch's "Life of Romulus"

November 4th – Defending the Republic (part 1)
Reading: Cicero's *Republic*

November 9th – Defending the Republic (part 2)
Reading: Cicero's *On the Laws*

November 11th – On Exile
Reading: Seneca "On Anger"

November 16th – Decline (part 1)
Reading: Sallust's "The Jugurthine War"

November 18th – Decline (part 2)
Reading: Tacitus's *Histories*, selections on Nero

November 30th – Foundations for a New Ethic
Reading: *Genesis/Exodus* (selections)

December 2nd – Revolution (part 1)
Reading: *The Gospel of John (complete)*

December 7th – Revolution (part 2)
Reading: Paul's "Letter to the Romans"

December 9th – The City of Man
Reading: Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans, Book I*

December 14th – The City of God
Reading: Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans, Book XIX*

Some Additional Suggested Readings on Ancient Political Thought:

- The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, edited by C. Rowe and M. Schofield
- J. Ober, “Democracy: Athenian and Modern,” excerpted from *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*
- S. Monoson, *Plato’s Democratic Entanglements*
- E. Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought*
- C. Tarnopolsky, “Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato and the Contemporary Politics of Shame,” in *Political Theory*, 2004.
- G. Vlastos, “The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy,” *Political Theory*, 1983
- J. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*
- B. Yack, *Problems of a Political Animal*
- J. Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*