

Ancient and Medieval Political Thought

ANCIENT GREEKS, ROMANS, JEWS, AND EARLY CHRISTIANS faced problems that may seem familiar to us. We are likely to ask, as were they, whether and how we may reconcile democracy and empire, knowledge and power, or citizenship and tradition. Their questions appear to be our questions: can reason, dialogue, and revelation coexist as bases for political authority? How does monotheism contribute to the formation of collective identities like the “nation,” while attenuating more local identifications? Some artifacts from the ancient period will seem wholly strange to us, like the Greek conceptions of citizenship and justice without a notion of rights; differences of this kind may help us to think beyond the discourse of our time. We will ask: how did the emergence of written culture shape Greek understandings of law and justice? What does this process suggest about the attenuation of written culture today? How do different conceptions of time support different visions of political action? How did early Christians conceive of community as distinct from the household, the city, and the nation? How about their forebears, the Romans, with their republic and then their empire? To explore these and other questions, we will grapple with some major works in ancient political thought. We’ll reflect on why they are frequently invoked in present-day philosophy and critical theory. We’ll work with Greek and Latin political-theoretical vocabularies, and engage for ourselves in political theorizing as a systematic intellectual project. While the course is historical, we’ll also closely read texts in order to explore resources for critically examining present-day politics.

Lecture: MWF 10:00 – 10:50 am in Demergasso-Bava Hall 100

Office Hours: Wednesdays and Fridays 11:00 am – 12:00 pm, Bizzini 132-A

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Learning Objectives: My objectives for student learning in this course include both knowledge and skills. By the end of the semester, you will:

- Be familiar with the arguments and ideas present in ancient political thinking presented in the readings, in lectures, and in classroom discussions.
- Understand some main theoretical debates about ancient political thinking, and be familiar with examples from the political world to which the debates speak.
- Thoughtfully read complex texts and analyze arguments.
- Communicate your own ideas and arguments, verbally and in writing.

Course Requirements: According to the Stanislaus State Academic Catalogue, a 3-credit course is designed to require a minimum of 9 hours of work per week. This class requires 150 minutes per week of classroom attendance (in person lectures and discussion), and therefore *more than 6 hours per week* on your own, reading and writing in preparation for class and assignments. More specifically, this class requires:

1. Attendance and participation. Lecture attendance and participation makes up **25%** of your grade.
2. A **midterm essay** (8 pages) due *Monday, October 22nd at 10:00 am*. The midterm essay amounts to **35%** of your grade.
3. A **final essay** (8 pages) due on *Tuesday, December 18th* at 10:00 am. The final essay is **40%** of your grade.
4. A 1-hour **final “exam”** (multiple choice) to be given at 10:00 am on *Monday, December 10th* in class. The final exam is required, and it is worth **0+%** of your final grade. (I will explain the meaning of this on the first day of class.)

Readings: The readings are the foundation of the course. If you like to read, and to discuss what you read with your fellows, you are likely to succeed in the class. That said, the material is dense and difficult, written in idioms that bear little resemblance to those idioms that even people who *do* read encounter today. It therefore requires that you practice “slow reading,” which takes time, concentration, patience, and reflection, *before* attending lecture. If you have taken these steps and are still having difficulty engaging in the course materials, arrange to see me in office hours.

Textbooks: There are no required books for this course, and all reading materials are available on Blackboard.

Lectures: My in-class lectures are an integral resource for your discussion meetings and your papers. Attendance is required. Be on time. Bring your copy of the text up for discussion to lecture and to discussion meetings. Stay focused. Electronic technology is not to be used during lecture, even for note-taking.¹ Lastly, chatting with your neighbors or digging into crinkly food packaging during class distracts your fellow students, and me. Be courteous.

Essays: The goal of the essays is to promote careful reading, synthesis of the readings with other course activities, and above all, scholarly articulation of your views of the readings. The essays you write in this course are works of theorizing; they are not research papers. I will provide you with a few prompts for each essay. Your essays will be evaluated by your use of textual evidence and argumentation, your originality, and the style and grace of your exposition. Improvement of these skills from the midterm to the final essay is an important course objective. An “8-page essay” ends toward the bottom of the essay’s 8th page.

I have found three books particularly valuable as we all work to improve our writing. Regarding argumentation, I suggest *A Rulebook for Arguments* by Anthony Weston (Hackett). In matters of

¹ Multiple studies have shown that using a laptop in a lecture class for any purpose is detrimental to students’ learning. See, Evan F. Risko, Dawn Buchanan, Srdan Medimorec, Alan Kingstone. “Everyday attention: Mind wandering and computer use during lectures,” *Computers & Education*, Volume 68, October 2013, pp. 275-283; see also Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer “The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking” *Psychological Science* 0956797614524581, first published on April 23, 2014. Further studies have demonstrated that screens distract nearby non-users too, in ways that harm their learning. See, for example, Faria Sana, Tina Weston, and Nicholas J. Cepeda, “Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers,” in *Computers & Education*, Volume 62, March 2013, pp. 24-31. Finally, mobile devices and apps (messaging, Facebook) are designed specifically to divert attention, both in terms of their visual aspects, as well as their appeal to the systems of the brain that provide emotional gratification. These systems easily override humans’ ability to generate sustained focus and, therefore, humans’ ability to form complex thoughts and to learn.

composition, I recommend *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* by Joseph M. Williams (Chicago). When it comes to the nuts-and-bolts of standard written English, as well as for advice on how to handle the challenges of advanced writing, I consult *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage* by Bryan A. Garner (Oxford). You are accountable for submitting essays that work toward the standards outlined in these references. Selections from *Rulebook* and more information regarding paper requirements for this course are available on Blackboard — set aside time to review these materials before you begin working on your essays.

Office Hours: I will be in my office, 132A Bizzini, on a weekly basis to talk about activities related to our course or your other academic concerns.

Email: I strongly prefer face-to-face contact; but if you face an emergency that cannot wait until class time, contact me through email.

Grading Guidelines and Course Policies: A comprehensive account of my standards for grading and course policies is available on the Blackboard site for this course. Review this material carefully — taking the course implies that you have read and understand it.

Schedule of Lectures and Reading Assignments

Aug 22: Course Introduction

Aug 24 & 27: Political Tragedy and the Impetus to Theorizing

Sophocles, *Antigone*

Aug 29 & 31: No class. I'm away at a conference

Sept 5, 7, 10: Ancient Greek History, Democracy, and Culture

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*

Book I: pars. 1-7, 15-97, 139-46 Book III: pars. 36-49, 70-84

Book II: pars. 10-17, 34-54, 59-65 Book IV: pars. 58-65, 117

Sept 12, 14, 17: Diagnosing the Decline of Athens

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*

Book V: pars. 16, 25-30, 84-116 Book VII: pars. 50-56, 60-87

Book VI: pars. 8-31, 43-93 Book VIII: pars. 1-2, 44-54, 88-89

Sept 19, 21, 24: The Legacy of Socrates

Plato, *Euthyphro*, *Apology* and *Crito*

Sept 26, 28, Oct 1: Justice and the Inadequacy of the Socratic Method

Plato, *Republic*, Books I – III

Oct 3, 5, 8: Plato's Response to the Athenian Crisis

Plato, *Republic*, Books IV – IX

Oct 10, 15, 17: Workshop Midterm Essay (Draft due in class on Oct. 10th)

October 19: No class. I'm away at a conference

Midterm Essay Due Monday, Oct 22nd at 10:00 am

Oct 24, 26, & 29: ‘The Highest Association’: Aristotle Recovers the *Polis*

Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I; Book III, Chs. 1-13, 15

Oct 31, Nov 2, 5: Aristotle on Constitutions and Polity

Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VII, Chs. 1-10, 13-16; Book VII, Chs. 2, 3

Nov 7, 9: From *Polis* to *Res Publica*: The Rise of Rome

Epicurus, “Principle Doctrines”

Seneca, “Letters from a Stoic”

Nov 14, 16: Echoes of Aristotle in the Roman Republic

Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, Book I; Book II (§1-31, 42-52, 64-70); Book VI (§9-29)

Nov 19, 21: Obedience and Monotheism: God, Man, and Woman

Five Books of Moses: Genesis 1-4:16; 6; 9:1-17; 11:1-9; 12:1-3; 15-18; 21:1-7; 22

Nov 26, 28, 30: Covenanting a Nation and God’s Justice

Exodus 1-3; 5-6:13; 7; 9:1-12; 11-12; 14-16; 19-20, 32-34; Deut. 26-28

Dec 3, 5, 7: Christian Love and Political Order

Augustine, *City of God*: Books: I (entire); II (entire); V (Chs. 15-26); VIII (3-13); XI (1-12); XIV (entire); XV (1-5); XIX (1-19, 24-28); XX (1, 2); XXII (22-24, 29, 30)

Dec 10: Wrap Up & Final “Exam”

*****Final Paper Due at 10:00 am on Tuesday, December 18th*****

Ancient & Medieval Political Thought – Timeline

Gregorian calendar

Bring this timeline with you to class and refer to it often – it’s crucial to grasp the overlapping and entangled histories that inform our reading

“Before the Common (or Christian) Era”

c1250 – Moses leads Israelites from Egypt
 c950 – J and E compose parts of *Five Books of Moses*
 594 – Solon the Lawgiver’s legal reforms in Athens
 c550 – D and P compose parts of *Five Books of Moses*
 509– Beginning of Roman Republic
 508 – Cleisthenes’ legal reforms; emergence of the *demes*
 499 – Beginning of Greek Classical Age
 496 – Sophocles born
 471 – Thucydides born
 469 – Socrates born
 441 – Sophocles’ *Antigone* first performed in Athens
 431 – Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War
 430 – Plague in Athens; beginning of Athenian decline
 429 – Pericles dies
 427 – Plato born
 424 – Aristophanes’ *The Clouds* first performed in Athens
 420 – “Peace of Nicias”
 421 – Dramatic setting of Plato’s *Republic*
 414 – Hostilities between Athens & Sparta resume
 406 – Sophocles dies
 404 – Athens surrenders to Sparta; reign of the 30 Tyrants
 402 – Moderate democracy restored in Athens
 401 – Thucydides dies (*History* ends in mid-sentence)
 399 – Trial and execution of Socrates; end of Greek Classical Age
 398 – Beginning of Greek Hellenistic Age
 387 – Plato takes up residence at the Academy
 384 – Aristotle born
 360 – Plato writes *Republic*
 367 – Aristotle arrives at the Academy
 347 – Plato dies
 342 – Epicurus born
 335 – Aristotle founds the Lyceum in Athens
 322 – Aristotle dies
 270 – Epicurus dies
 167 – Rome takes military control of Hellas
 c165 – Newest parts of Hebrew Masoretic Text composed
 146 – Greece becomes a Roman Protectorate

106 – Marcus Tullius Cicero born
 100 – Aristotle’s *Politics* compiled by Andronicus
 86 – Lucius Cornelius Sulla sacks the Lyceum
 80 – Cicero tries Sulla for abuses of power
 63 – Cicero becomes Consul of Rome
 60 – Caesar comes to power
 54 – Cicero begins writing *On the Commonwealth*
 51 – Cicero finishes *On the Commonwealth*
 43 – Cicero dies
 37 – Reign of Herod begins in Judea
 27 – Roman Republic collapses; Roman Empire begins
 4 – Jesus of Nazareth born

“The Common (or Christian) Era”

29 – Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth
 35 – Epictetus born
 66 – Jews revolt against Rome in Jerusalem
 70 – Romans Burn Jerusalem
 90 – Nazoreans (Greek Jewish sect) begin to write New Testament
 c95 – Hebrew scriptural canon (the Masoretic Text) established at Jamnia
 c120 – Most of New Testament written (in Greek)
 155 – Epictetus dies
 320 – Conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine
 325 – Council of Nicaea; Christianity becomes official religion of Roman Empire; New Testament scriptural canon (*Ta Biblia*) established
 354 – Augustine Born
 386 – Augustine’s conversion to Christianity
 387 – Rome sacked by the Gauls
 410 – Rome sacked by the Visigoths
 413 – Augustine begins writing *City of God*
 426 – Augustine finishes writing *City of God*
 430 – Augustine Dies
 476 – End of Roman Empire in West
 529 – Plato’s academy closed by Roman Emperor
 1453 – End of Roman Empire in East

Key Greek and Latin Terms

Bring this list to class with you every day; add to it as new terms are introduced.
Your facility with these terms will be gauged in the final exam.

Greek

Aletheia – truth (cf. *Lethia*)
Anēr - “manly” man
Anthropos – (human) body
Aporia – lack of a passage or way out
Archē – empire, organizing principle
Aretē – excellence and fitness in all things
Athenaioi – Athenian (man)
Daimonion – (Socrates’) “divine sign” or portion
Demos – people, organized by legal jurisdiction
Demos – “the people” (generally)
Dēmokratia – democracy
Despotēs - master
Dikaios – to conduct your affairs in accordance with
dikē
Dikē – “justice,” or adherence to single fundamental
order of the *Kosmos* → virtue of the *polis*
Doxa – opinion, reputation
Eidos – ideal form
Elenchus – Socratic method
Elutherios – spirit of freedom, liberty, license
Epistēmē – knowledge
Epitaphios – speech in praise of the dead
Eudaimonia – happiness, “a good portion”
Eu zēn – living well
Erastēs - lover
Energieia – action, function
Ethea – habitual or personal patterns → ethics
Graphē - writing
Ho demos kratei – the people dominate
Hoi polloi – the many
Isegoria – citizens’ equality in speaking to the
assembly
Isonomia – citizens’ equality before the law
Kallipolis – the attractive, beautiful city
Kinesis – movement (e.g. of events)
Koinonia – association, partnership
Kosmos – everything, the universe
Krisis – tipping point; rendering into constituent
parts; decision; judgment; divorce
Kritik – one who renders, judges, decides
Lethia – loss of memory (cf. *Alethia*)
Logos – word, speech, reason
Mathema – a known object, object of study
Metic – resident alien
Mimesis – performative identification
Noesis – intellect, intellection
Nomos – customs, cultures, names, traditions, laws
Oikos – household
Paideia – culture, education

Phatria – ancestral altar (tribal religion)
Philia – love, friendship
Phrōnesis – practical wisdom, prudence
Phusis – nature
Pleonexia – unbounded need, luxury
Polis – city, political association
Polites – citizens
Politeia – regime, constitution (cf. Plato’s *Republic*)
Politikē – study of politics
Politikos – activity of politics
Praxis – rhythmic dancing → practice
Prophases – preconditions
Psyche – ghost → soul
Sophia – wisdom
Schole – leisure
Stasis – corruption, degeneration, revolution
Technē – art, craft, technique
Telos – end or final development of a thing
Theoria – going to look at, see, view, contemplate
(e.g. a drama)
Theoros – one who goes to view and contemplate
(e.g. a drama)
Tychē – chance / fortune
Thumos – spirit, courage
Zēn - living
Zoon politikon – political animal

Latin

Æternitas - eternity
Auctoritas – authority
Caritas – genuine love, love of eternal things
Civitas – the city
Cupiditas – self-love, love of temporal things
Humanitas - humanity
Imperium – power (sacred overtones)
Iudicium – judgment (cf. Gr. *Kritik*)
Ius Gentium– civil law (as made)
Ius Natural – natural law
Legalis – legal proceedings
Lex – legal code (as written)
Pūblica - public
Regnus – rights
Res – attribute, property, concern
Patria – fatherland
Persona – mask
Poplicus – the people
Principium – principle or axiom
Sacramentum – loyalty oath
Speculatore – watcher, spy → bishop

Thucydides' Peloponnesian War
Guide to Assigned Paragraphs

Book One

- 1-7: 'Archaeology' – Differences between Athens and Sparta
- 15-19: Organization of Hellas into two alliances: Athens and Sparta
- 20-22: Thucydides' discussion of his method
- 23-31: Political Revolt (*stasis*) in Corcyra and resulting conflict with Corinth
- 32-36: Speech #1: Corcyraeans at Athens
- 37-43: Speech #2: Corinthians at Athens
- 44-55: Battle between Corcyraeans, Athenians and Corinthians, off Sybota.
- 56-65: Revolt (*stasis*) of the Potidaeans
- 66-71: Speech #3: Corinthians at Sparta
- 72-79: Speech #4 Athenians at Sparta
- 79-85: Speech #5: Archidamus
- 86: Speech #6: Sthenelaidas
- 87: Spartans vote for war
- 88-97: History of Athens' growth in power
- 139-46: Speech 7: Pericles' first to the Athenians

Book Two

- 10-12: Speech #8: Archidamus to the Peloponnesians
- 13-17: Strategy of Pericles
- 34-46: Pericles' Funeral Oration (#9)
- 47-54: The Plague
- 59-65: Speech #10: Pericles to the Demoralized Athenians

Book Three

- 36-40: Speech #11: Cleon to the Athenians about the Mytileneans
- 41-49: Speech #12: Diotodus' Reply
- 70-84: Political Decline (*stasis*) of Corcyra

Book Four

- 58-65: Speech #15: Hermocrates to the Sicilians
- 117: One-Year Armistice

Book Five

- 16, 25 - 30: Peace treaty between Sparta and Athens
- 84-116: Melian Dialogue (#16)

Book Six

- 8-14: Speech #17: Nicias to the Athenians
- 15-18: Speech #18: Alcibiades
- 19-23: Speech #19: Nicias' reply
- 24-31: Athenians' decision to sail upon Sicily
- 43-51: Athenian setbacks on the way to Syracuse
- 52-61: Effects of misconceptions in Athenian civic culture
- 62-88: Events in Sicily and Syracuse
- 89-93: Speech #21: Alcibiades to Spartans

Book Seven

- 50-6: Worsening circumstances in Sicily
- 60-8: Speech #22: Nicias to Athenian soldiers
- 69-87: Rout of Athens under Nicias and Demosthenes

Book Eight

- 1-2: Athenians learn of defeat in Sicily
- 44-54: Further treachery of Alcibiades
- 88-9: The Athenian Oligarchy