

Ancient Political Thought

Political Science 384
Classics 374
Fall 2012
Perkins LINK 059 (Seminar 1)
Wednesdays and Fridays 11:45am – 1.00 pm

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Office Hours: Wednesday and Friday 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm

Course Synopsis

What duties ought we have to our fellow citizens as members of a shared community? What freedoms and privileges ought we have for ourselves? How do we square personal ambition with the good of the community? In what ways are the rich obligated to care for the poor? What role does moral and intellectual education play in the development of good citizens? The ‘Tea Party’ movement and the ‘Occupy’ movement offer competing answers to these questions, but they are not the first do to so. These questions have been central to the western intellectual tradition since its founding by Greek and Roman thinkers. The classic arguments and theories of these intellectual giants are more relevant than ever.

The goals of this course will be giving each student a broad and nuanced understanding of ancient political thought as well as improving each student’s critical thinking and writing skills. For example, we take notions of justice, virtue, and duty for granted. Yet, when we come to the ‘nuts and bolts’ of such ideas, we find that differing interpretations of these values come into conflict. Thinkers on the left tend to see radical personal freedom as central to personal development, while those on the right see it as the surest road to social discord. Thinkers on the right tend to see state regulation of economic affairs as limiting prosperity, while those on the left see the state as the only body capable of protecting citizens from the worst abuses of the markets. As a result, thinkers on the right and on the left have very different notions of moral and political duty – different notions, in other words, of what makes a good person and what makes a good citizen.

We will explore these debates through thorough examination of major texts of ancient political philosophy, encountering both Greek and Roman representatives. We will find that many of these thinkers ask similar questions, though confronted with very different political situations. What is tyranny? When should a citizen overthrow a tyrant? How should conflict between the rich and the poor be managed by the state? What does human excellence look like? Is political participation integral to that excellence? Is government an aid or a hindrance to it? In exploring their answers to those questions we will sketch the outlines of the ancient philosophic landscape.

Course Expectations and Goals

Goals

This course aims to enhance your analytical and intellectual skills while simultaneously allowing you to situate yourself and others in the political-intellectual landscape. The course's goals for each thinker that we encounter are threefold:

- 1) **Analyze:** Each thinker was making a set of political claims. They meant for their positions to win out in a field of competing arguments and theories. I invite and encourage you to sharpen your analytic skills by separating each argument into its constituent parts, identifying the assumptions that animate each argument, and tracing the logic of each argument from those assumptions to its conclusions.
- 2) **Themmatize:** Each thinker will share continuities and discontinuities with each other as well as with today's leading thinkers. This course aims to aid you in identifying those continuities and discontinuities, both as a tool to navigate contemporary political discourses and to identify your own agreements and disagreements with your intellectual forerunners.
- 3) **Synthesize:** These works are classics, but they are all flawed in some way. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these philosophies? Politics always entails an ongoing struggle between progressive and conservative elements, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. The course aims to help you identify the elements most worth keeping in the ideas you encounter, as well as those most worthy of being tossed in the dustbin of history.

Expectations

To achieve the course goals, you will need to approach this course in a certain way. If you do, you will find the texts we read and the thinkers we engage will come to life much more so than if you approach the course passively. Duke is an expensive institution. Get your money's worth!

- 1) **Reading:** The texts we will read are dense and complex. Their difficulty and richness are part of what has made them classics. Effective interpretation only comes with attentive engagement. My job will be to help you in that task by clarifying passages and pointing you to key issues. Your job is to read slowly and carefully. Do not plan on grasping the main points of the argument by skimming key passages. Many of the devils are in the details. Leave at least 1 hour for every 20 pages you plan on reading. If you take your time with these texts, you will learn far more from them than you will from me. You will also more sharply discern the flaws in their arguments and the unasked questions in their explorations. Take notes. Write down questions. Your goal in reading is to identify the *strengths* and *weaknesses* in their arguments, not just the wikipedia-level summary.
- 2) **Criticism:** The goal here is criticism from all sides. When approaching an issue or an argument, be both critical and charitable. Think about how the writer would

respond to your criticisms if he or she were in front of you. What defense would be mounted? How strong is it? Your goal should be to criticize the *strongest possible variant* of an author's argument. Moreover, allow the author to challenge you and your assumptions. Criticism is a two-way street. Our answers to the problems they posed are not necessarily any better than those that have come before. If you disagree with a thinker on a certain issue, ask why that is the case. Explore *your own* assumptions and chain of reasoning in addition to the thinker's. This task is a challenging one. Our political positions are often bound up with the most deeply-rooted parts of our self-conception. But, if you engage in this process honestly and charitably, you will find your political positions challenged for the better. If your political positions (or the justifications behind) them are the same at the outset of this course and at the end, then you did not really participate in this course. (Don't worry, it won't affect your grade 😊.) The same goes for me.

- 3) **Class-Participation:** The goal of each class session is two-fold. We will aim to both *understand* the thinker's arguments and *critically assess* those claims. I plan to lecture for 1/3-1/2 of each session. However, no lecture I can give will be as fruitful as a lively discussion. Come to class with questions and concerns ready. Bring your reading notes. If you've been taking them dutifully, then you'll have no shortage of contributions and we will quickly arrive at a better understanding of what claims were made in the reading. Moreover, just as you ought to interrogate the arguments in front of you as you read, come prepared to do so in class. Each of us will come with a different set of concerns with respect to the reading. Together, we can better assess the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments before us. In addition, we can better test our own positions by challenging and being challenged by the positions of others. Be prepared to *respectfully* question the claims being made by me and by your peers while simultaneously being receptive to the questions we pose to you.
- 4) **Electronics Policy:** The devices developed as part of the information revolution have dramatically empowered us in unforeseen ways and vastly improved the educational experience. However, a small percentage of students abuse these devices in class and have prompted a strict policy regarding electronics in the classroom.
 - a. **Laptops/Ipads:** There has been a sea-change in the way students take notes. I, like many of you, prefer to take notes on a laptop, rather than with pen and paper. However, the notational and organizational strengths of laptops come with the hazard of e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, instant-messaging services, and any number of other possible distractions. As a result, they significantly hinder some students' participation in class discussion. To that end, I require that all laptops/tablets be put away during the discussion portion of class. So be prepared to take notes during the discussion section of class with pen and paper.
 - b. **Cell-Phones:** All cell-phone use during class is strictly prohibited. As an instructor, I find students' texting and e-mailing in class extremely distracting. Any students using their cell-phone to text or e-mail in class

will be asked to leave for the day and will have an unexcused absence recorded. *Exception:* Naturally, we all forget to turn off our ringers from time to time. If you forgot to turn it off before class, please don't be embarrassed. And please don't ignore the phone as if it belongs to one of your classmates. If your cell-phone does happen to go off in class, discreetly silence the phone at that time.

- c. **Recording Devices:** Many students like to record lectures and discussions for later reference. I am happy to accommodate recordings provided I am notified beforehand and the student making the recording is present.
- 5) **Writing:** Writing is an essential part of deepening your engagement with the thinkers we read. In analyzing, thematizing, and synthesizing the ideas you read as you develop your own written work, you will discover new dimensions to both their and your ideas about politics. Take your time when writing a draft, and be prepared to write multiple drafts. Writing a paper is more like taking a road-trip than flying from point A to point B. You won't know how much time you need to dedicate to it, and there should be surprises along the way.
- 6) **Honor Code:** By participating in this course, you have agreed to abide by the Duke University Community Standard, both in letter and spirit:
<http://www.integrity.duke.edu/standard.html>
- 7) **Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. You will each be given three unexcused absences. Each unexcused absence beyond that will result in the loss of 2/3 letter to your participation grade. Excused absences require submission of a STINF (<http://www.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/trinity/t-reqs/illness/form.pl>), Notification of Absence Due to Observance of a Religious Holiday form (<http://www.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/trinity/t-reqs/rholiday/form.pl>), Notification of Varsity Athletic Participation (<http://www.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/trinity/t-reqs/novap/form.pl>), or a notification from your Dean. I will also make excused absences for family emergencies.

Assignments

- 1) **3 Section Papers (30% of your final grade each)**

This course is divided into four subsections, each corresponding to a different form of conflict addressed by the ancient world. Whether it's war, class-conflict, conflict between the state and the individual, or the struggle to become a better person, each of the four groupings of readings we'll cover will offer a different perspective on the same issue. This panoply of opinion should provide you with excellent material for formulating your own perspective in a paper of **1600-2200 words** engaging that subsection's material with respect to the issue of your choosing. **You will be asked to perform this exercise for 3 of the 4 subsections.** I will provide prompts. Each essay will be due by e-mail, in MS Word or a compatible format. The paper grade will be lowered one grade level for each day that it is late (from an A to an A- minus, for example). Extensions are available with instructor consultation.

2) Attendance/Participation (10%).

Required Texts

All Available on Amazon for less than \$11 each

Aristotle: *The Politics* (Penguin Classics)

Aristotle: *The Nichomachean Ethics* (Penguin Classics)

Cicero: *The Complete Works* (Penguin Classics)

Homer: *The Iliad* (University of Chicago Press - Lattimore Translation)

Plato: *The Republic* (Oxford University Press – Cornford Translation)

Plato: *The Apology of Socrates* (Library of Liberal Arts)

Plato: *The Symposium* (University of Chicago Press)

Plutarch: *Parallel Lives*, Volume 2 (Modern Library Classics)

Sophocles: *Antigone* (Fitts/Fitzgerald Translation)

Course Schedule

7/29 – No Class

7/31 – No Class

Section 1: Violence and Virtue

9/5 – The Iliad: Anger, Ambition, and Arete

Reading: *The Iliad*: Books I, VI (lines 119-530 only), IX, XVI (lines 1-129 and 394-867 only), XVIII, XIX, and XXII.

9/7 – The Iliad: Force and Reconciliation

Reading: *The Iliad*: Books XXII and XXIV; Simone Weil ‘The Iliad, or the Poem of Force’ (On Sakai)

9/12 – Thucydides: Competing Ideals of Athens and Sparta

Reading: *History of the Peloponnesian War*: I.1 I.20-24, I.67-88, I.139-II.67 (On Sakai)

9/14 – Thucydides: Revolt and Repression

Reading: *History of the Peloponnesian War*: III.36-51, III.70-86, IV.47-48 (On Sakai)

9/19 – Thucydides: Ethics and Empire

Reading: *History of the Peloponnesian War*: V.84-116, VI.2-32 (On Sakai)

9/21 – Thucydides: Hubris

Reading: *History of the Peloponnesian War*: VII.42-87 (On Sakai)

9/26 – Seneca: Anger and the Stoic Solution

Reading: *On Anger*: Book III (On Sakai)

Section 2: Class Conflict and Constitutional Design

9/28 – Plato: Utopia

Reading: *The Republic*: IV.427c-V.470 [pp. 119-127]

10/3 – Plato: Philosopher Kings and the Rule of Expert Knowledge

Reading: *The Republic*: V.471c-VII.521b [pp.175-235]

10/5 – Plato: Justice and Injustice in the City and the Soul

Reading: *The Republic*: VIII.543a-IX.592 [pp.264-320]

*****Paper for section 1 due in class*****

10/10 – Aristotle: Response to Plato and Typology of Regimes

Reading: *Politics*: Books II.1-6, 12; III.1, 4, 6-9, 11-12

10/12 – Aristotle: Constitutional Merit and Preservation

Reading: *Politics*: Books IV.1-3, 11, 12; V.1, 5, 7-8, VI.1-5

10/17 – Aristotle: Membership in the Ideal Regime

Reading: *Politics*: VII.1-4, 8-9, 13-17; VIII.1-3

10/19 – Livy: The Common Good in the Roman Res Publica

Reading: *The History of Rome*: Preface, Book I.1, I.4-7(first paragraph only), I.8-9, I.13, I.15 (final paragraph only), I.16-17, I.19, I.21 (final paragraph only) I.49, I.56-60, II.1, II.3-5, II.32-35, II.39-40, III.33-34, III.36-37, III.42, III.54-55, V.21-23. (On Sakai)

Section 3: Sovereignty and Sedition – Conflict between subject and state.

10/24 and 10/26 – Which Laws? Whose Justice? Sophocles’s *Antigone*

Reading: *Antigone*

10/31 and 11/2 – The Justice of Philosophy

Reading: Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*

*****Paper for section 2 due in class*****

11/7 – Plutarch: Ambition and Empire

Reading: Plutarch’s *Lives*: ‘Life of Caesar’

11/9 – Plutarch: Duty and Betrayal

Reading: Plutarch’s *Lives*: ‘Life of Brutus’

Section 4: Becoming Better – Conflict between today’s and tomorrow’s self

11/14 and 11/16 – Philosophy and the Ladder of Love

Reading: Plato’s *Symposium*

11/28 – Aristotle: Morality and the Meaning of Life

Reading: *The Nichomachean Ethics*: Books I and II

11/30 – Aristotle: Happiness and the Intellect

Reading: *The Nichomachean Ethics*: Books VI, VIII.1-4, 10, and 11, and X.6-9

*****Paper for section 3 due in Class*****

12/5 – Cicero: Ethics of Duty

Reading: Cicero's *On Duty*: Book III

12/7 – Review Session:

12/14: *Paper for section 4 due at 5pm*****