

Classical Political Thought

GO 303, Fall 2010

Skidmore College

Note: I do not check phone messages and e-mail on weekends.

Office hours: MW 4-5, T 11:15-12:15 and 1:30-2:30, F 10-11

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The core of this course is a fairly close study of Plato's *Republic*, and one that does not have a predetermined focus upon the sorts of topics that preoccupy the discipline of philosophy. Rather, our study will seek to address the questions that the text itself raises. This will allow us to see why it not only stands as a seminal text for philosophy, but also does so for many other disciplines, such as educational theory, gender studies, and literary criticism. Admittedly, our study will often gravitate towards the more obviously political aspects of the work, which is perhaps appropriate for a course in the Government Department. What we can more confidently say is that special attentiveness to political topics must be appropriate with a work titled *Politeia*.¹ But again, we will first and foremost be attempting to see where Plato's text wants to lead its readers, regardless of any boundaries set by today's academic disciplines.

We can only come to the *Republic* as 21st century persons, and in recognition of this fact, this course will conclude with an attempt to show that our liberal democratic society can derive important lessons from book VIII's radical critique of ancient democracy. However, we are nonetheless obliged to make a serious effort to understand the book as Plato's contemporaries would have. To this end, and for another reason, this course features two preliminary studies. First, we will study large portions of Herodotus's *Histories*, supplemented with readings from Plutarch and others, to acquaint ourselves with the *Republic*'s general political and cultural context. Second, primarily by reading Aristophanes' comedy *The Clouds*, we will acquaint ourselves with its intellectual context, that of sophisticated and yet Socrates-persecuting Athens.

Beyond familiarizing us with Plato's historical context, these preliminary studies will underline the fact that classical political *thought* encompassed more than political philosophy in the strict sense. Most academics today would deny that classical writers associated with *history* like Herodotus, Xenophon, or Plutarch were in any way *philosophers*. Plato, as we shall see, denied that poets like Homer, Sophocles, and Aristophanes were. And yet, all these writers, who were profound enough on their own terms, contributed in various ways to classical political thought; and beyond this, we must recognize the contributions of those who were not writers, but actual political leaders like Lycurgus, Pericles, and Dion. By no means did Plato and Aristotle, the archetypal classical political philosophers, rely upon *philosophy alone* when they wrestled with political questions. Neither should we when we attempt to understand what classical political thought was, and what it might have to teach us.

Texts—you must use the translations indicated.

Plato, <i>The Republic</i>	translated by Bloom; titled as <i>The Republic of Plato</i> , 2 nd ed.
Herodotus, <i>The History</i>	(bkstr. has the new <i>Landmark Herodotus</i> with the Purvis trans., but the Grene or Rawlinson translations are also fine to use.)
Aristophanes, <i>The Clouds</i>	translated by West and West, in <i>Four Texts on Socrates</i>

Selections from Plutarch's *Lives*, Aristotle's *Politics* and *Athenian Constitution*, Plato's *Laws* and *Letters*, etc., all found in the course packet.

¹ Do read the first note in Bloom's edition (p. 439), which discusses the meaning of the Greek term.

READING SCHEDULE

Notes: a) each reading is to be completed on the date it is listed, b) the maps in the *Landmark Herodotus* will aid your understanding of other readings, particularly the Plutarch ones, and c) the expectation for the shorter *Republic* assignments is that you will use the additional time for *close* study of the text, which should often involve re-reading, outlining, and plain old *pondering* such as that envisioned by Rodin's famous sculpture *The Thinker*.

UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTION--SOCRATES AND JUSTICE (*Republic*, book one)

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| 1 | 9/8 | Intro: Aims of Course; <i>Polis</i> and <i>Politeia</i>
<i>Republic</i> I 327a-328b—(always read Bloom's end-notes; his "Interpretive Essay" is helpful but optional) |
| 2 | 9/10 | <i>Republic</i> I 328c-336a |
| 3 | 9/13 | <i>Republic</i> I 336b-343a |
| 4 | 9/15 | <i>Republic</i> I 343a-354c |

UNIT TWO: GREEK HISTORY BOOT-CAMP (Herodotus mainly)

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| 5 | 9/17 | Herodotus I 1-45; Athenian Const. (on Solon) 1-12 |
| 6 | 9/20 | Herodotus I 46-94; Plutarch, <i>Lycurgus</i> ; Athenian Const. (on tyrants) 13-19 |
| 7 | 9/22 | Herodotus I 95-216 |
| 8 | 9/24 | Herodotus, selections from III, V, and VI
III 1-2, 27-38, 79-96; V 28-51, 62-66, 69-78, 89-103, 116-126;
VI 11-21, 31-33
Athenian Const. (on Cleisthenes) 20-22 |
| 9 | 9/27 | Herodotus, selections from VI and VII
VI 48-49, 94, 100-117; VII 4, 8, 20-26, 32-37, 43-47, 53-60, 99-105, 131-144, 198, 201-228 |
| 10 | 9/29 | Herodotus VIII 40-42, 48-103, 107-117; Plutarch, <i>Aristides</i> |

UNIT THREE: SOPHIST-TICATION CORRUPTS (mostly Aristophanes, *The Clouds*)

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| 11 | 10/1 | <i>The Clouds</i> : first 10 pages, i.e., 1-245;
Thucydides, Pericles' Funeral Oration; Athenian Constitution 23-28, 41 |
| 12 | 10/4 | <i>The Clouds</i> : entire |
| 13 | 10/6 | <i>The Clouds</i> : review entire |
| 14 | 10/8 | Plutarch, <i>Alcibiades</i> (contains small selection from Xenophon) |

UNIT FOUR: PLATO'S REPUBLIC (*Republic*, books two through ten)

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| 15 | 10/11 | <i>Republic</i> , II 357a-368c |
| 16 | 10/13 | <i>Republic</i> , II 368c-374a; Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , 1:1-2, 3:6-9 |
| 17 | 10/15 | <i>Republic</i> , II 374a-383c, III 386a-392c
Paper #1 due |
| 18 | 10/18 | <i>Republic</i> , III 392c-403c |
| 19 | 10/20 | <i>Republic</i> , III 403c-412b |
| 20 | 10/22 | <i>Republic</i> , III 412b-417b, IV 419a-427d |
| 21 | 10/25 | <i>Republic</i> , IV 427d-445e |
| 22 | 10/27 | <i>Republic</i> , V 449a-457c |

23	10/29	<i>Republic</i> , V 457c-473c
24	11/1	<i>Republic</i> , V 473c-480a, VI 484a-487a
25	11/3	<i>Republic</i> , VI 487a-503b
26	11/5	<i>Republic</i> , VI 503b-511e
27	11/8	<i>Republic</i> , VII 514a-521d
28	11/10	<i>Republic</i> , VII 521d-541b
29	11/12	<i>Republic</i> , VIII 543a-562a
30	11/15	<i>Republic</i> , VIII 562a-569c, IX 571a-576b
31	11/17	<i>Republic</i> , IX 576b-592b
32	11/19	<i>Republic</i> , X 595a-612b
33	11/22	<i>Republic</i> , X 612b-621c
34	11/29	Interpretations of the <i>Republic</i> : lecture --re-read 614a-621d, 497c-503b, and 540d-541b; also, compare 591e-592b w/ 496a-497a.
35	12/1	Interpretations of Plato's politics: significance of his voyages to Syracuse Plutarch, <i>Dion</i> ; Plato, 7 th <i>Ltr.</i> 324-340, 350-352—reading entire <i>Ltr.</i> is optional
36	12/3	Interpretations of Plato's politics: Plato, select. from <i>Laws</i> book III; 8 th <i>Ltr.</i> ; Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , 4:1-2, 7-9 Paper #2 due

UNIT FIVE: PLATO'S RADICAL CRITIQUE OF DEMOCRACY (book VIII revisited)

37	12/6	<i>Republic</i> , VIII re-read 543a-557a	the slope; democratic revolt
38	12/8	<i>Republic</i> , VIII re-read 555b-558c, 562a-566d	two accounts of democracy
39	12/10	<i>Republic</i> , VIII re-read 558c-562a, IX, 571a-576b	the democratic soul
	12/15	Paper #3 due—in my office box by 1:25 pm.	
	12/21	Final 9am to noon. Same room—TLC 204	

3 papers—one on units two and three, one *Republic* explication paper, one final paper. 60%

Participation: 15%

Final exam: 20% Factual and conceptual—lecture focused

5 pass/fail quizzes, mostly from unit two: 5%

Final Exam: This will be a comprehensive and mostly essay exam. Please do not ask me to reschedule it unless it conflicts with another final or you have some other Skidmore-approved emergency reason.

Essays: These are formal essays where you are expected to have an identifiable thesis with arguments to support it. They should demonstrate a command of the text at hand, and a thoughtfulness about the claims made therein. I will hand out topics approximately two weeks before the essays are due, although for the third paper you will have a good deal of leeway to choose your own topic. These are not research papers and you are not required to read any secondary literature. I want you to engage these authors directly. Consult p. 5 of the *The Writing Requirement in the Government Dept.* pamphlet for grading guidelines.

An essay may be handed in the next session (or 48 hours if in Dec.) later for the loss of about 9% of the grade. Being more than 3 minutes late on due-dates will not only be counted as a tardy, but will get you this same 9% deduction. E-MAILED WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

Explication paper—more will be explained later, but a rough draft is due the session *before* your text-session is assigned: the final version graded A,B,C,D, F, plus or minus may be added based on grade for draft, which is plus, satisfactory, or minus. Students absent the day their draft due, even if draft handed in, cannot get better than a satisfactory on the draft.

Participation: Good participation means you contribute fairly regularly to the quality of class time. This can occur in a number of ways: giving good responses to my discussion questions, asking myself or one of your peers for clarification when needed, (politely) arguing against myself or one of your peers, asking useful questions, or even refraining from jumping in when others have established a useful line of conversation that you can add nothing significant to. The participation grade can also reflect your demeanor. For example, the always-silent-but-noticeably-attentive student will receive a C-. The always-silent-but-seemingly-disengaged student will receive an F. There may be outside lecture events that likewise allow the participation grade to be improved. The grade is *not* aided by repeatedly participating without evidence of careful thought or without consideration of the good of the class.

Quizzes: There will be a few quizzes, generally multiple choice and by surprise, and occurring at the very beginning of class. No make-ups, so absences and tardies hurt doubly here.

General Expectations: *You are expected to read the assignments carefully and reflectively, remaining open to the possibility that what you are reading is right.* Your first duty as an attentive reader is to understand what is being said. This means grasping the argument of the author—identifying central claims and seeing how these claims are supported. When you encounter something you strongly disagree with, make sure you first understand the argument. You are expected to give reasons for your opinions.

Commonsense Rules: (My apologies for having to list them!)

You will be attentive in class and display the demeanor of one who is interested in the material and respectful of others.

Cell-phones or similar items, food, gum, tobacco products, make-up, and other personal items will not be on your desk, nor in use—remember to turn cell phones off. *It is extremely rude to “text” or otherwise consult electronic devices during class—you will be asked to leave class if you insult all of us by doing so.*

You will refrain from going to the restroom or the water-fountain during class, with only emergencies providing exceptions.

Four Non-Commonsense Rules:

- 1) Laptop computers and recording devices are not to be used in class. Exceptions are made according to Skidmore policy.
- 2) Hats and hoods are not to be worn in class.
- 3) Regular (non-alcoholic, obviously!) beverages may be brought to class.

4) I will be utilizing formal address, i.e., “Mr. Smith,” etc., for class purposes. If you refer to another student in class discussion, you will do likewise—e.g., “Contrary to what Mr. Smith said, I noticed that on page five of the reading...etc.” You will refer to me as “Professor Scott” or “Dr. Scott.”

Attendance: *Attendance is mandatory.* All excused absences must be cleared ahead of time. If you must miss class, you remain responsible for all the material covered that day. After three unexcused absences, each subsequent absence will bring your final grade down by one half of a letter grade.

Academic Honor: I take violations of the honor code very seriously. At minimum, plagiarism will merit a “0” for that assignment, with failure for the course likely. In cases that I deem particularly egregious, I will seek to have you suspended or expelled from Skidmore College.

