

Classical Political Thought (Government 303)

Skidmore College

Spring 2007

T TH 3:40-5:30

Ladd 206

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Office Hours: T TH 11-12 and 1-2
or by appointment

This course is an introduction to classical political thought. It will consist of a close reading of four works by four of the most influential and penetrating political thinkers of the classical world. The authors we will study—Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, and Thucydides—all had a major role in the founding of political philosophy or political science.

The works we will examine have been studied by various people in many different cultures and times; they have an enduring power and message. But our study is made especially urgent by the challenge raised by leading thinkers of our time against the very possibility of science or philosophy, including and perhaps above all against political science. The thinkers that we will study can help us to understand and assess that challenge. For they did not take for granted the possibility or desirability of science. In fact, a recognition of the need to justify the philosophic or scientific life may even have moved Socrates and his students to become the first philosophers to turn from physics—the study of the natural world—to “the human things” or politics.

We aim to uncover the reasons for and the results of this turn in the works of Aristophanes, Plato, and Aristotle. At the end of the course students should be able to speak and write thoughtfully and clearly about the following themes: the human good, justice, virtue, and human nobility; the roots of political idealism; what makes human beings political; the aims of political life and the tensions among these aims; the various political regimes and their respective strengths and weaknesses; the tension between philosophy and political life; the limits of political life.

Plato and Aristophanes (West & West, eds.), *Four Texts On Socrates* (Cornell)

Plato (Bloom, ed.), *The Republic* (Basic Books)

Thucydides (T.E. Wick, ed.), *The Peloponnesian War*, Crawley transl. (Modern Library)

H.W. Fowler, *Modern English Usage*, third edition (Oxford)

II. Course Requirements

Two short essays (3 typed pages), due February 8, March 6.

One longer essays (5 typed pages), due April 12.

Final comprehensive (essay) exam, as scheduled by registrar.

(Exam study questions will be given out on the last day of class.)

Attendance requirements: no unexcused absences. Excused absences will be granted upon presentation of a doctor’s note or a relative’s obituary.

The term grade will be computed as follows: first essay 15%; second essay 20%; longer essay 25%; class attendance and participation 10%; final exam 30%.

III. Class Schedule:

Tuesday, January 23	Introduction to Course: Why Study Classical Political Philosophy?
Thursday, January 25	Plato, <i>The Apology of Socrates</i> <i>Four Texts on Socrates</i> , 63-97
Tuesday, January 30	<i>The Apology of Socrates</i> (continued) <i>Four Texts on Socrates</i> , 63-97
Thursday, February 1	Aristophanes, <i>The Clouds</i> <i>Four Texts on Socrates</i> , 115-136
Tuesday, February 6	Aristophanes, <i>The Clouds</i> <i>Four Texts on Socrates</i> , 136-151
Thursday, February 8	Aristophanes, <i>The Clouds</i> <i>Four Texts on Socrates</i> , 152-176 First paper Due
Tuesday, February 13	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Book I (Cephalus), 327a-331e1
Thursday, February 15	<i>Republic</i> , Book I (Polemarchus and Thrasymachus), 331e1-354c
Tuesday, February 20	<i>Republic</i> , Book II (Glaucou's and Adeimantus' demands of justice), 357a-368c
Thursday, February 22	<i>Republic</i> , Books II&III (City of sows and the feverish city; reform of theology and education of the Guardians) 368c-386a
Tuesday, February 27	<i>Republic</i> , Book III (Education of the Guardians, the noble lie), 386a-417b
Thursday, March 1	<i>Republic</i> , Book IV (Three parts of the city, Leontius, the three parts of the soul, justice 419a- 445e)
Tuesday, March 6	<i>Republic</i> , Book V (Communism of women and children, equality of the sexes, the possibility of the just city; philosopher kings. 449a-487a. Second Paper due

Thursday, March 8	<i>Republic</i> , Book VI (Adeimantus' objections to philosophers and the character of the philosophic life.) 487b-511d
Tuesday, March 13	Spring Break
Thursday, March 15	Spring Break
Tuesday, March 20	<i>Republic</i> , Book VII (Cave allegory, second education of the guardians) 514a-541b
Thursday, March 22	Aristotle, <i>The Politics</i> , Book I, chs. 1 & 2
Tuesday, March 27	<i>The Politics</i> , Book I, chs. 3-13
Thursday, March 29	<i>The Politics</i> , Book II, chs. 1-8
Tuesday, April 3	<i>The Politics</i> , Book II, chs. 9-12, Book III, chs. 1-5
Thursday, April 5	<i>The Politics</i> , Book III, chs 6-18
Tuesday, April 10	<i>The Politics</i> , Book IV, chs. 1-11
Thursday, April 12	<i>Politics</i> , Book IV, chs. 12-16, Book VII, chs. 1-3 Third Paper due
Tuesday, April 17	Thucydides: the archeology and opening of the war (Bk I, chs. 1-65)
Thursday, April 19	Debate at Sparta, I.66-88 (Justice vs. Necessity)
Tuesday, April 24	The 50 years truce and Athenian imperialism. The Corinthians' final speech; Thucydides examines the sacred; Pausanias and Themistocles; Pericles' 1 st speech (I.89-146)
Thursday, April 26	The war begins: Plataea, Archidamos, and the Athenian withdrawal from the countryside; Pericles' funeral oration (II.1-46)
Tuesday, May 1	Athenians under stress: the plague and Pericles' last speech; what is the deepest cause of this war? (II.47-65) Distribution of Final Exam Study Questions
As scheduled	Final exam

