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Phil 2780
Ancient Political Philosophy
M W 1:00-1:50, Maury 104
Spring 2017

SYLLABUS: ANCIENT POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

I. Required texts

Plato *Republic*, tr. Reeve, Hackett
Plato *Five Dialogues*, tr. Grube, Hackett
Aristotle *Politics*, ed. Everson Cambridge
Landmark Thucydides: Guide to the Peloponnesian War, Simon & Schuster

II. Scope and Goals of the Course

Politics is essentially as old as the human species itself – even hunter-gatherers faced problems of collective organization and external relations – and doubtlessly people thought about political issues long before they gained the capacity to formulate these reflections in writing. Nonetheless, many of the most ancient documents that have come down to us (from Egypt, Babylonia, China, and, a bit later, Israel) feature political themes. That’s not surprising because literacy was a rare acquisition in the ancient world, a possession of rulers and those in their service. So if politics extends back to our earliest prehistory, political thought is as old as human history.

With all due respect to these predecessors, *political philosophy* not only begins with Greece but also attains depths of profundity and insight rarely again equaled. Even if you have never read a word of political philosophy, you are already acquainted with its Greek foundations. Our word *politics* comes from the Greek word *polis*, the standard form of the state in Greek civilization. Greeks invent the concept and practice of *democracy* – rule by the people – and debate whether it is better than *monarchy*, *aristocracy*, *oligarchy*, or *tyranny*, all Greek concepts. If perchance you found some of the heated 2016 campaign rhetoric outrageous and offensive, you may be interested to hear that Greeks too wrestled with the phenomenon of *demagoguery*. Governments are supposed to pursue *justice*, a subject never examined with more brilliance than in Plato’s *Republic*. *Inequality* is a front-burner issue today and, if Aristotle is to be believed, similarly central to the stability of Greek city-states. *Foreign policy*, including conditions of war and peace, matter enormously us, and no one has offered a more gripping theory of international relations than Thucydides. (He also is pretty damned good on domestic political wrangling!)

OK, that's my pitch to persuade you of the importance of the topics to be confronted. Our twin goals in this course are (1) to understand Greek political philosophy in its historical context and (2) to explore what relevance this thought has to our contemporary situation. If the answer is "None" that will be kind of sad, but philosophy unlike social media is not a post-truth exercise and therefore we have to accept the answer revealed by the evidence, not what we might wish. (Spoiler alert: I have reason to be optimistic and so I think you do too.)

III. Format of the Course

1. *Readings; Classroom work.* We will read three Platonic works, including his masterpiece *Republic*; a big chunk of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and Aristotle's *Politics*. In my opinion these are the most important works on politics written in Greece and they also are among the greatest human beings have produced. Every time I look back into them I discover more treasures. I hope that you will come to share my pleasure and excitement.

Although each of the readings is masterful, you may nonetheless from time to time encounter difficulties with them, especially if philosophy is new to you. Ancient Greece can also take some time getting used to. Although I don't expect you to sail through these readings effortlessly, I do expect you to give them your best shot. That includes your having carefully read assigned material *in advance of the class in which it will be discussed*, and also your willingness to reread sections that initially prove elusive. Our job in class will be to work together to understand the problems addressed by these philosophers. I think of this as being very much a joint enterprise. My role is one of exploring with you points of special interest, helping to clarify complexities, and raising questions implied by the material. Correlatively, your responsibilities are to read and think conscientiously about all texts and to be prepared to tell me what you find perplexing or challenging or worthy of deeper pursuit. Within that context, we shall strive for a maximum of discussion. Personally, I can think of nothing duller than a class in which one person (me) does all the talking. I hope you agree.

Attendance won't be taken for lectures. You are adults, so if you miss a class, that's your business. You are, however, responsible for whatever transpires during all sessions, including any assignments or quizzes (see below) that are given out. Your TA will announce discussion section attendance policy at the first meeting. Although participation is not formally graded, the quality of your participation will be a tie-breaker for tipping borderline grades.

2. *Tests & Quizzes*

The only exam that will be given is a final exam. It will count for approximately 40% of your course grade. It will involve some form of short answer and essay questions. Further

information concerning the nature of the exam will be supplied in class.

Occasional unannounced quizzes will be given. These will involve very specific questions requiring short answers. **Quizzes cannot be made up**; once missed it's eternally gone. I shall, however, drop your lowest quiz result. (If more than eight quizzes are given, your two lowest scores will be dropped.) This means that if you must miss a class or two during the semester there should not be any significant impact on your course performance even if you happen to be unlucky with regard to quiz timing; more than occasional absences are another story. These quizzes will count cumulatively for approximately 25% of your course grade.

3. *Papers.* I shall ask you at irregular intervals to write short (4-7 pages) papers in response to particular questions I'll toss your way. You are required to write any 2 of them, and you may submit 3, with the 2 best counting toward your course grade. Thus, if one (or perhaps two) of the assignment topics or times doesn't suit you, then you should feel free to skip it. There will be at least four paper assignments in total. Unless you have received explicit permission to the contrary, all submissions must be hard copy. Please retain the digital file just in case something goes awry. Cumulatively, they will determine some 30% of your Phil 3140 grade.

All paper assignments will involve working through some problem in the assigned readings. Although you are entirely at liberty to consult any sources written or human that you think might help you write a better paper, it is imperative that any borrowings of ideas or language be credited via a citation. You may use whatever style of footnote or endnote you please just so long as full attribution information is provided. Failures to do so, even if not malicious, risk putting you on the wrong side of the plagiarism divide. That is definitely *not* a place you want to be!

Paper grades will be based on "content" rather than style or grammatical correctness (although it should be noted that your ability to express yourself accurately in written English prose very definitely affects the content as it appears to your reader). However, any paper that comes to me with more than a very few errors in spelling, grammar, etc. will either be rejected as failing to meet minimal standards of acceptability or, if I'm feeling especially generous, handed back to you for revision and resubmission. This means that you ought to proofread carefully anything you will be submitting to me. I very much care about the quality of your writing - and so should you! One final caution: *Late papers will not be accepted.* Thus, if for some reason you must miss a class, it's a good idea to check and see if there has been an assignment.

4. *Study hint.* Philosophy, as you'll soon find out, is very much a *dialogic* business. That is, philosophical inquiry involves putting questions, trying out answers, criticizing those answers, and moving on to yet better answers – and better questions. It's possible to replicate this dialogic process in your own head: possible but not easy. Far better to

conduct actual dialogue with another person who has his or her own ideas to contribute. In the classroom I'll be one such person. But outside the classroom I'll be just a memory. (A pleasant one I hope!) I strongly encourage you to get together on a regular basis with one or more other Ancient Political Philosophy students to study together. Students who do so tend to perform conspicuously better than those who don't. I encourage you to find compatible study partners and make this a genuinely cooperative enterprise.

5. *Computers, Phones, etc.* 21st Century electronics are wonderful! I love them as much as you do – well, almost as much. I must tell you, however, that they don't have a place in Phil 2780. If you're carrying a phone, please make sure you turn it off and put it out of sight (and possibly out of mind) before the start of class. If your ringer goes off, or if you are observed staring intently into a display, you owe a 500-word essay on the topic of the day, due at the next class meeting. If it happens a second time you will be asked to withdraw from the course. With some reluctance I also ask you not to open a computer during class. These machines have wonderful utility, but they also offer powerful temptations for distraction, both for you and for the person next to you glancing over to see what treats may be on your screen. Try taking notes the old-fashioned way: pen in hand. Or you may record class sessions for later review and transcription.
6. *Other* I retain the right to base up to 10% of your course grade on intangible but nonetheless real ways in which you have contributed to the class. For example: Do you routinely come to class well-prepared? Do you take an active role in discussions? Do you raise questions either in real or virtual space? Do you show respect for other students (and tolerance for the befuddled instructor when he *still* hasn't quite remembered your name correctly)? Or do you snooze in the back row, ask only questions like "Will this be on the final exam?"

You deserve fair warning concerning some of my pet peeves: (1) Students arriving late to class constitute distractions both to me and to the other students. I realize that lateness sometimes can't be helped, but I won't put up with it becoming the rule rather than the exception. (2) Holding side conversations is distracting. Please direct your remarks to the whole class. (3) Rudeness toward other students or even the instructor isn't tolerated.

IV. Readings

What follows is written on paper (actually, electronic bits), not stone. We may speed up from the itinerary provided below (unlikely), slow down (more likely), or alter the reading list. If there are any substantial changes in the reading schedule I will announce them in class/online. For slight blips in our pace, all you need to do is remember where we left off in the last session and make sure that you stay at least one day ahead.

WEEK 1

Jan. 18 Introduction

WEEK 2

Jan 23 Plato, *Apology*, approximately first half
Jan. 25 Plato, *Apology*, remainder

WEEK 3

Jan. 30 Plato, *Apology*, wrap-up
Feb. 1 *Republic*, Bk I

WEEK 4

Feb. 6 “
Feb. 8 *Republic*, Bk II

WEEK 5

Feb. 13 *Republic*, Bk III
Feb. 15 *Republic*, Bk IV

WEEK 6

Feb. 20 *Republic*, Bk V
Feb. 22 *Republic*, Bks VI, VII

WEEK 7

Feb. 27 *Republic*, Bk VIII
March 1 *Republic*, Bk IX (Book X optional)

March 4 - 12: Spring Break!

WEEK 8

March 13 Thucydides, 1.1 -1.65
March 15 1.66 - 1.146

WEEK 9

March 20 2.1-2.103
March 22 3.2 -3.49

WEEK 10

March 27 3.70 - 3.85; 4.46 - 4.48; 5.84 - 116
March 29 Books 6, 7 (all)

WEEK 11

April 3 Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk I
April 5 Bk II

WEEK 12

April 10 Bks III, IV
April 12 Bk V

WEEK 13

April 17 Bk VI
April 19 Bks VII, VIII

WEEK 14

April 24 Plato, *Crito*
April 26 “

WEEK 16

May 1 Loose ends, review, final thoughts

FINAL EXAM: Tuesday May 9, 9 a.m.