Classical Political Theory: Aesthetics and Politics
Political Science 614
Course Syllabus
Fall 2010

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Course Description:

This course will examine the notion of aesthetic politics, both ancient and modern. We will begin by examining one of the twentieth century texts, which claims that the work of politics is best understood through the lens of aesthetics. Here we will be concerned to understand what Jacques Rancière means by aesthetics and how he thinks this category gives us insight into the character of democratic judgment. We will then turn to the thinker who is often considered to be the arch enemy of this kind of aesthetic democratic politics because of his banishment of poetry from his ideal polity and his teaching about philosopher kings. Although considered to be the archenemy of democracy, Plato is still widely considered to have inaugurated many of the categories through which later thinkers attempted to understand the aesthetic character of politics. Here we will be concerned to explore the multifaceted character of Platonic mimesis, thumos, and myth-making to understand Plato’s own notion of the relationship between aesthetics and politics. We will also be examining the literature on Plato’s infamous noble lie (gennaion pseudos) in order to better understand the role of this kind of foundational myth within Plato’s Republic. Finally, we will return to the twentieth century and examine Arendt and Arendtian notions of the aesthetic character of democratic politics. Here we will be concerned to understand the ways in which these texts challenge or resonate with a Platonic theory of aesthetic politics.

Required Texts:
- All texts available at the Paragraphe Bookstore on McGill College south of Sherbrooke. (Students must get the proper translation of these works.)
- Hannah Arendt, Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy (University of Chicago Press)

Assignments:
1. Participation
2. Seminar Paper (15 pages)
Grade Distribution:
- Participation: 30%
- Paper: 70%

Policies:

1. Please ensure that you have done the readings by the beginning of the seminar in which they will be discussed, as I will run the discussion on the assumption that you have done the readings for the week.

2. The papers will be penalized 2/3 of a letter grade per day late. For example, if your paper was worth an A, but was one day late, you would receive a B+ instead. If your paper was worth a B, but was two days late, it would receive D. This policy does not apply if you are seriously ill or distracted by a serious emergency, but in the event of such circumstances it is your responsibility to inform me in person before the assignment is due so that we can make other arrangements. It is also your responsibility to get supporting documentation for such cases. Being ill one for or two days before the paper is due, however, will NOT be a sufficient reason to waive the late penalty. All late assignments (and only LATE assignments) should be submitted to the Political Science Department Office (Leacock 414), where the date of the stamp the office provides (along with verifying signature) will be considered the date of submission.

3. Process of grade appeal on assignments. If you are unsatisfied with a grade-assessment, you can submit the assignment to me, along with a one-page single-spaced note. I will then re-evaluate the paper, but reserve the right to raise or lower the grade, and this second decision is final.

3. Academic Integrity. McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures. For the Faculty’s policies vis-à-vis suspected plagiarism cases, please see www.mcgill.ca/integrity. L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter www.mcgill.ca/integrity).

4. In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

5. In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

6. If you have a disability please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your
situations. It would be helpful if you contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 398-6009 (online at http://www.mcgill.ca/osd) before you do this.

**Course lecture and reading schedule**

**MONDAY Sept 13**

**Sept 20**

**Sept 27**
- Plato, Book 1-2, Republic

**Oct 4**
- Plato, Book 3-5, Republic

**Oct 11**

**Oct 18**
- Tarnopolsky, Christina. “Plato’s Politics of Distributing and Disrupting the Sensible.”

**Oct 25**
- Plato, Book 6-8, Republic

**Nov 1**
- Plato, Book 9-10, Republic

**Nov 8**
- Lear, Jonathan. “Myth and Allegory in Plato’s Republic”
- Malkovits, “Citizen Judgment and Myth in The Republic”

**Nov 15**
- No Class.

**Nov 22**
- Arendt, pp. 3-46.

**Week of Nov. 29-Dec 3: Makeup class for Nov. 15**
- Arendt, pp. 46-85.

**FRIDAY Dec 3**

**PAPER DUE FRIDAY DECEMBER 3RD, 4 PM, LEACOCK 414.**