POLI 333: WESTERN POLITICAL THEORY 1
ANCIENT POLITICAL THOUGHT

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 13h05–14h25, in Birks 203

Instructor: William Clare Roberts
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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 14h30-15h30; Wednesdays, 11h-12h
Also available by appointment

διότι δὲ πολιτικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ζῶον πάσης μελίτης καὶ παντὸς ἀγελαίου ζῶου μᾶλλον, δήλον.
Aristotle, Politics 1253a8-9

1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This is a course in the political thought of the ancient Mediterranean world. We will focus our study on the two monumental works of the genre, Plato’s Republic and Aristotle’s Politics, but we will also examine both the historical background of ancient Athenian political theory and its afterlife in the political thought of the Roman republic. The primary themes of the course will be the Greek understandings of politics, constitution, virtue, and law, and how these influenced the Roman conception of res publica.

This course is the first in a sequence of courses on the history of political thought offered by the Department of Political Science. As a pre-requisite, you must have taken at least one university-level course in political theory (preferably POLI 231), or a comparable course in philosophy. The readings for this course are quite difficult, and will therefore require patience and careful attention. There will be an exam on the alphabet and transliteration rules of Ancient Greek, three short papers, and a series of writing exercises.

The aims of the course include:
1. To begin students’ training in the history of western political thought, and to prepare students for Political Science 334, the medieval political thought course that follows it in sequence;
2. To provide a substantive investigation of the themes mentioned above, of a selection of the most important thinkers in the history of western political philosophy and social thought, and of the intellectual, political, economic, and social history of the ancient world;
3. To offer students the opportunity to learn to interpret and understand theoretical and philosophical texts about politics, and to adjudicate among rival understandings or interpretations of those texts;
4. To exercise students’ ability to critically evaluate those texts, both with respect to the quality of their arguments and with respect to their normative or explanatory claims;
5. To offer students the opportunity to practice making normative and explanatory arguments about politics and society;
6. To improve students’ skills at communicating such arguments in discussion and in written work.

This is a myCourses class. Assignments will be distributed and course communication conducted via myCourses.
2. Course Texts:

The primary course texts are available at The Word Bookstore, at 469 Milton St. (cash/cheque only). They are also available on course reserve in the Humanities & Social Sciences Library.


I discourage you from reading secondary texts, including the introductions and interpretive essays by our translators. The best way to get an understanding of the texts is to read them carefully and repeatedly. Every bit of time that you might spend reading a commentary or secondary work is time you could better spend studying the original text in greater depth. On the other hand, in a class such as this, where unfamiliar history and names will show up quite often, Wikipedia is a valuable resource, if used selectively. It is a very unreliable guide to ideas; don't look up “Plato” and think you’re going to learn anything about his philosophy. But it’s usually very reliable about dates, institutions, political and social changes, and so on, especially if what you need are basic facts and orientations.

3. Coursework and Evaluation:

You can tailor this course to your needs and expectations to a greater degree than many other courses. The evaluation of coursework is always of two sorts: qualitative and quantitative. My aim in this class is to maximize productive qualitative evaluation and to make the assignment of quantitative marks a minor and mutual affair. The final evaluation of your work in this course will be based upon essays (60%), attendance and participation (10%), a Greek alphabet and transliteration exam (10%), and a peer- and self-evaluation portfolio (20%).

a) Essays: There are three essay assignments spread over the course of the term. You can choose to write one, two, or three of those essays. If you write all three, each should be 1250-1500 words long. If you write two, one should be 1200-1500 words long and the other 2500-3000 words. If you write only one, it should be 5000-6000 words. A more detailed description of these assignments and the criteria used for assessing them will be available on myCourses.

- NB: Written assignments should be handed in at the beginning of class on the due date, and will not be accepted by email.
- I strongly encourage you to stop by my office hours to talk about your written assignments before turning them in.

b) Attendance and Participation: Class meetings will involve frequent writing exercises and questions about the reading, and Thursday class meetings will usually conclude with 30–45 minutes of questions and discussion. Prepare for class by taking notes and thinking about questions, ideas, or problems that arise from your readings. Be sure to bring your books and/or hard copy printouts of readings to class. You are responsible for all of the assigned material, including the parts we do not discuss in class.

- NB: As per McGill’s courtesy policy, cell phone use, texting, emailing, and surfing the web are prohibited during class. Additionally, I ask that you turn off and put away your laptop and tablet computers. There is increasing evidence that laptop use in classrooms – even for note-taking alone – is detrimental to attention and learning. (If you think that there are special circumstances that make this policy unwise in your own case, please speak to me.)
c) **Greek exam:** I will ask you to memorize the Greek alphabet and to learn how to transliterate from the Greek to the Latin alphabet (and vice versa). You will be tested on these matters on 25 September.

d) **Peer- and self-evaluation dossier:** You will take part in a series of objective-setting and self-evaluation exercises over the course of the term, where I ask you to reflect on what you want to get out of the course and its assignments and to evaluate your own performance in the light of your objectives. I will also ask you to evaluate one another’s written work. At the end of the term, I will schedule a short meeting with each student, at which we will go over your work and the various evaluations it has received, and to arrive at a final mark in the course on that basis. A more detailed description of the various components of this project will be available on myCourses.

4. **Schedule:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading assignments</th>
<th>Important dates</th>
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<tr>
<td>3 September: None: Introductory lecture</td>
<td>Greek exam preview</td>
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<td>5 September: The Twelve Tables (skim)</td>
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<td>12 September: Plato, <em>Gorgias</em></td>
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<td>17 September: Plato, <em>Republic</em>, Book I</td>
<td>writing workshop</td>
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<td>19 September: No class: read Plato, <em>Republic</em>, Book II</td>
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<td>25 September: Plato, <em>Republic</em>, Book III</td>
<td>Greek exam</td>
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<td>27 September: Plato, <em>Republic</em>, Book IV</td>
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<td>1 October: Plato, <em>Republic</em>, Book V</td>
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<td>3 October: Plato, <em>Republic</em>, Book VI</td>
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<td>8 October: Plato, <em>Republic</em>, Book VII</td>
<td>1st essay due</td>
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<td>10 October: No class: read Plato, <em>Republic</em>, Book VIII</td>
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<td>15 October: Plato, <em>Republic</em>, Book IX</td>
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<td>17 October: Plato, <em>Republic</em>, Book X</td>
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22 October  Plato, *Apology* and *Crito*

24 October  Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I

29 October  Aristotle, *Politics*, Book II

31 October  Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III  2nd essay due

5 November  Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III

7 November  Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VII & VIII

12 November  Aristotle, *Politics*, Book IV

14 November  Aristotle, *Politics*, Book V & VI

19 November  Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Books III & V

21 November  Cicero, *On Duties*, I.1-41, 59-73, 93-121


28 November  None: Wrap-up  3rd essay due

5. **Rules, Policies, and Pedantries:**

Because it is in everyone’s interest that the coursework end when the course ends, I will not give anyone a K in the absence of a well-documented medical situation.

Students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Lectures and discussion will be in English. *Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être note.* I know that in some courses there are fairness concerns about who grades French written work; I evaluate all the work in this class myself, in French or English. I can also suggest French translations of the texts, if you would prefer. Please ask.

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 more information see: http://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).*