

**POLI 270: Classical Political Thought**  
**Spring 2013**  
**Dey Hall 305**  
**Tuesdays, 3:00-5:50PM**

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Office hours: Monday and Wednesday, 3:30 – 5PM; by appointment

For ancient and medieval writers, thinking about politics was inextricably bound up with thinking about ethics, psychology, knowledge, and religion. Thus the readings in this class will involve you in thinking about a variety of issues that arise when humans live together: justice, power, good and evil, the structure of the human mind, the structure of family, the best modes of governing—and ways of knowing all these things. In readings these authors, you will engage in the practice of political theory yourself, a practice that involves close textual analysis as well as a wider focus on the theoretical and political issues at stake.

The ethical and political questions raised by these ancient texts are often deeply pertinent to our contemporary context. Yet it is sometimes equally enlightening to articulate the way in which our contemporary culture has shifted away from certain ethical and political questions that were central for the ancients. It will be helpful to maintain a balance between these two modes of analysis, either by drawing insightful contemporary parallels or by deepening knowledge of ancient and medieval history.

There are specific learning objectives for this course, and I've designed the readings, problem-solving discussions, and writing assignments to support these goals. If you decide to take this course, here is what you will be working on:

- Gaining a general understanding of major works in ancient and medieval political thought
- Developing your general abilities to interpret texts and to use textual evidence to support claims or arguments about an author
- Practicing analytic thinking about politics and ethics. I find useful the following definition of analytic or critical thinking: “a practical reflective activity that has reasonable belief or action as its goal” (Teaching Thinking Skills: Theory and Practice, ed. Joan Baron and Robert Sternberg, p. 10). This course will require you to engage in deliberation about a) what is “a reasonable belief or action” with respect to particular political and ethical issues or dilemmas, and b) what is a reasonable belief with respect to the interpretation of a particular text. Of course, there is often more than one reasonable belief to hold about a particular dilemma or text. What is important is that you develop the ability to make an argument for your judgments, in terms of identifying stated and unstated assumptions, considering counterarguments, and explaining and supporting your reasons, including reasons for adopting particular textual interpretations and for making particular value judgments.
- Developing your writing abilities. In this class, you will be asked to write in a way that is analytic, imaginative, and precise. Your aim will be to compose thoughtful written analyses of challenging problems and thinkers, while maintaining clarity of meaning, organization, sentence structure, etc.

You can probably tell that this work involves a lot of creativity and effort on your part. It is my hope that you will also experience—at least occasionally!—the exhilaration that can come with doing this kind of practical intellectual work. Another goal of your liberal arts education is to cultivate an affection for a sustained and serious examination of the world and of oneself. The aspiration here is that the search for knowledge through ongoing critical thought and learning will become an habitual and pleasurable activity for you, one that continues to shape your life and give it meaning long after college. I always try to hold this intention when I take the seat of the teacher, and I ask that you do the same as you undertake the work of this course.

Required Texts:

Homer, *Iliad* (Fagles translation, Penguin)  
Aeschylus, *Oresteia* (Hackett)  
Sophocles, *Antigone* (Hackett)  
Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (Hackett, Grube translation)  
Plato, *The Republic* (Hackett)  
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Irwin translation, 2<sup>nd</sup> translation)  
Aristotle, *Politics* (Hackett, Reeve translation)  
Augustine, *The City of God* (Gateway)  
Shakespeare, *King Lear* (Penguin)

**Always bring the assigned readings to class, as we will frequently refer to passages.**

A few words about the kind of space I seek to create each time we come together:

Mine is a classroom in which you will learn about classical political thought, but it is also a classroom in which you will learn to be a good interlocutor and participant in the construction of knowledge. By this, I mean several things. First, I have a non-traditional pedagogical style, one that is more compatible with a range of learning styles and my own teaching style. I emphasize discussion more than lecture and attempt to create a safe and open environment in which we can learn from one another. Though I will occasionally lecture, I do not believe that we learn best when told how to interpret a text or how we should feel about it, but instead believe that we must learn to think critically for ourselves. My teaching style reflects this belief, and I will try to help you develop the necessary skills to think critically about material as we move through this course. There will certainly be moments when I attempt to directly transmit knowledge to you, but there will be many more moments when I facilitate your own intellectual discoveries in the classroom. And these two things are, of course, not necessarily mutually exclusive. Secondly, I follow feminist educator bell hooks in her attempt to help her students, “come to voice.”<sup>1</sup> This has several meanings, the first of which is quite literal. I want you to work on becoming more comfortable speaking out loud in the classroom and getting used to hearing the sound of your own voice in a room filled with others who are actively listening. I understand that some of you are nervous about this prospect, but I still expect you to challenge yourself to speak. For inspiration, I want to offer you the words of the late feminist writer and poet Audre Lorde:

“We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for the final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.”<sup>2</sup>

Beyond this, I hope to enable all of you, not just an assertive few, to feel empowered in the kinds of rigorous, critical discussions we will engage in every time class meets. Though I expect you to always be respectful and thoughtful in your exchanges with one another, coming to voice in this way necessarily involves taking risks, allowing yourself to be open to challenges and contestation by others, and daring to push your thinking farther than you might otherwise have done. The classroom, as I understand it, provides us with a unique opportunity to learn the value of theorizing collectively, as we actively participate in the process of thinking and talking through theory in community with others.

### **Course expectations and information:**

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<sup>1</sup> bell hooks, *Talking Back*. (South End Press, 1989), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence in to Language and Action,” in *Sister Outsider* (The Crossing Press, 1984), p.44.

## Reading assignments:

### Required Reading

You are expected to prepare the readings by the day for which they are assigned. By “prepare” I do not mean simply giving them a cursory reading. Rather, I mean read them carefully, think about them, identify sections or parts of the readings that you think work well or that you have problems with, use whatever note-taking system works best for you, and be sure to come to class with any questions you may have. I will sometimes pass out reading questions or thoughts to help guide your reading; these are designed to help you think about the text, and you are to work through these questions before class as part of your preparation. Remember that these readings are not like textbooks, but are much more dense and complex; they will probably take you longer to read, and you may need to read tough sections a few times, so be sure to plan accordingly.

**Class participation:** This course requires a considerable amount of active and sustained participation. You will need to come to class ready to work actively on your understanding of feminist political theory, to analyze texts using critical thinking, and to consider complex social and political issues. Your work for this class will involve both autonomous and collaborative learning. The idea of *autonomy* stresses your personal responsibility for your own learning, while the idea of *collaboration* stresses your responsibility for teaching and learning from one another. It is my responsibility as the teacher to secure the necessary conditions in which both types of learning can occur, and to engage in analytic thinking with you. So this class is not like a theater, where you come and watch me perform for you. Instead, it is best thought of as a lab, where you come in to work with, examine, and enhance the knowledge gained from the readings and from your own experiences.

You will work in participatory learning groups for much of the semester. We will keep the same group for several class periods in a row before switching to new groups. (Please look at the instructions for learning group interaction in Appendix A.) In addition to small group work, the class as a whole will work together to discuss and analyze issues and questions in the readings. I expect everyone to participate in the larger discussions as well, in order to practice and develop your communicative abilities, or, in other words, in order to help you come to voice (Note: participation in the learning groups will not suffice to do well overall on participation.) If you find yourself struggling with this, refer to the above Audre Lorde quote, and please feel free to come to my office hours so that we can discuss strategies to help you become more comfortable speaking aloud in class. The good news is that I have a very broad notion of participation, including active listening, asking questions of one another (including, “What do you mean? Can you say more about that?”), reading relevant passages aloud, helping another person find the right page, explaining why you agree or disagree with what someone else has said, taking detailed notes, and engaging in and facilitating discussion. Everyone must experiment with a variety of forms of participation, rather than always playing the same role.

### **Important note:**

Turn off all cell phones before class begins. I ask that you not take out phones or blackberries at any point during class to check messages. Also, the use of laptops or e-readers will not be allowed. I find them distracting and unnecessary for the kind of work we will be doing together, which, as I hope I’ve made clear enough by now, relies heavily on your engagement with other classmates with whom you are working to create and sustain a stimulating and engaged learning environment. If you are someone who usually takes notes on your laptop, you will need to work on developing different listening and writing skills that work for this course. I am happy to work on developing alternative strategies with you.

Your participation grade will rely on both subjective and objective measures. Subjective measures include my evaluation of your labor in the classroom, including group work, class discussion, and in-class writing assignments. Objective measures include attendance, possession of readings, and the quality of group reports (see Attachment A).

**Attendance:** You are responsible for contributing to our learning in this class, and you cannot do this if you are not here. You will receive one attendance credit for each class you attend (we have 14 scheduled meetings including the first day). Regardless of the quality of your other participatory work, attendance credits will operate as a baseline for your overall participation grade. To be clear: Attendance credits are a “floor” for your overall participation grade, which includes a variety of components; it does not guarantee you a particular grade.

To be eligible for an A for your participation grade, you must have 14 attendance credits.

To be eligible for a B, at least 13.

To be eligible for a C, at least 12.

In order for an absence to be excused, you must: a) provide written documentation of a medical or family emergency AND, b) meet with another student in the class to replicate the participation that you missed, and affirm to me that you have done so. Excused absences will not count against your attendance credit total.

Tardiness, should it be a problem, will also be factored into your participation grade. Showing up late to class or leaving early is disruptive and disrespectful to your classmates (and to me). This class will meet for two hours and fifty minutes, as scheduled. We will have a short break in the middle. You will treat this like any other course, and plan to be there the entire time. The length of the class will not be an excuse for arriving late or leaving early. I will send an attendance sheet around at the beginning of each class. Should you need to sign it at the end of class because you came in late, you will need to note that you were late.

**Essay Assignments:** Another important skill I want you to work on in this course is analytic and imaginative writing—in other words, to perform clear, thoughtful written analyses of complex feminist political theory. During the course of the semester, there will be two 5-page essay assignments; I will hand out essay prompts several days before the essays are due. **No late papers will be accepted.** Also, I do not accept electronic copies of papers; you must turn them in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. You are responsible for saving a copy of your essay electronically or having a back-up hard copy in your possession. **Do not give me your only copy of an essay.** I will not accept this as an excuse for an extension or a “pass” should I fail to find your paper in my mailbox. (See Attachment B for my grading policy on papers.)

Since the essays constitute a large part of your grade, I urge you to carefully read and consider the instructions I hand out and the expectations I outline, to allow yourself time to revise drafts, and to make use of the services of the Writing Center, which is located in Phillips Annex (962-7710), [www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb)).

### **Short Assignments:**

#### Microthemes

A microtheme is a written response to the reading. There are two different types: summary and thesis-supported (see Appendix C on microthemes for further explanation). You will need to complete a total of four microthemes for this course, two summary and two thesis-supported.

#### Quizzes

In order to factor in formal course credit for preparing the readings carefully, there will be periodic quizzes. Quizzes may or may not be announced in advance, and quiz questions will always be textual or factual, not interpretive. In other words, quizzes are not designed to surprise you or trip you up, but rather to let you demonstrate your understanding of the readings. Missed quizzes cannot be made up.

#### Miscellaneous

This includes in-class writing assignments and other group work assignments.

**Syllabus Statement:** On **Tuesday, January 22**, please bring to class a written or typed statement (signed and dated) that confirms that you have re-read the entire syllabus carefully. I do this because I want to ensure that you studied the information and requirements for this course, including the attachments, so you understand my expectations of you. It’s important that you understand all of the requirements, have a general

sense of the topics we'll cover, and just know what you're getting into! Further, reading the syllabus carefully will help you figure out what your expectations should be of me.

**Honor and Honesty:** All work done in this class must be carried out within the letter and spirit of the Honor Code (<http://honor.unc.edu/honor/index.html>). You are also responsible for consulting with me if you are unclear about the meaning of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, or adverse conduct, or about whether any particular act on your part constitutes such a violation of the University's honor code.

Your course grade will be based on the following assignments:

Class Participation (including group work and attendance)	15%
Short Assignments	20%
First essay assignment	20%
Second essay assignment	25%
Final Exam	20%

- Jan 16 Introduction. Course requirements, procedures, and expectations will be reviewed. *All students are responsible for having the information given during the first day of class.*  
Homer, *Iliad*, Books 1, 3, 6 & 9
- Jan 22 Aeschylus, *Oresteia* (note: read all three plays in the trilogy: *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Furies/Eumenides*)  
**Microtheme 1 Due (summary)**
- Jan 29 Sophocles, *Antigone*
- Feb 5 Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (read all three dialogues—*Euthyphro*, *Apology*, & *Crito*)
- Feb 12 Plato, *The Republic*, Books 1 & 2  
**First essay due—in class peer review**  
\*\*Final essay due by Friday, Feb. 15 at noon, in my office, Hamilton 354
- Feb 19 Plato, *The Republic*, Books 3 & 4 (bottom 86-96, 102-110, middle 115-121), Book 5 (122-156), Book 6 (top 161-middle 177), Book 7 (186-193, 204-5, bottom 211-212), Book 10 (middle 282-292)  
**Microtheme 2 Due (thesis-supported)**
- Feb 26 Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book 1 (can skip ch. 11 & 12), Book 2, Book 3 (ch. 1 – 7)
- Mar 5 Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book 6 (ch. 1-2, 5, 7-9, 12-13), Books 8-10
- Mar 19 Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1 (ch. 1-7 and 12-13), Book 3 (ch. 1-13)  
**Microtheme 3 Due (summary)**
- Mar 26 Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 4 (ch. 1, 6-9, 11-13), Book 5 (ch. 1-2,5-6,8)
- Apr 2 catch-up day  
**Second essay due—in class peer review**

\*\*Final essay due by Friday, April 5, in my office, Hamilton 354

Apr 9 Augustine, *City of God* (1-15, 28-57, 118-153)  
**Microtheme 4 Due (thesis-supported)**

Apr 16 Shakespeare, *King Lear*

Apr 23 ...continued

The final exam for this course is **Friday, May 3, at 4PM** in our regular classroom. You must be present for the final exam in order to pass this class. The only exception is an exam conflict, which must be noted and approved by Advising.