

## **POLS 290: Ancient Political Thought**

University of Illinois at Chicago  
Fall 2005

Prof. Stephen Engelmann  
Office Hours: BSB 1108B  
Wednesdays 1:30-4 and by appointment  
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### **Course Description**

In this course, we will study ancient political thought to gain a critical perspective on the politics and ethical practices of our own time. But to do so is not to bow to the present. This approach guided the Medieval Era's study of classical philosophy and the Modern Age's study of classical history. And thus, to ask what the ancients teach us about ourselves is to ask a question that is both contemporary and traditional. It is also to ask a question that requires respect for antiquity's distinctiveness.

All political philosophy is an inquiry into how we should live and how we should live together, and this is especially true for the ancients. Throughout the semester, we will be attentive to how the thinkers, historians, poets and dramatists whom we study posed questions of order, justice and virtuous action; and we will be attentive to how their understandings of these dimensions of human existence are sometimes quite different from our own.

This course will introduce you to some of the dominant texts and concepts of "Western" political thought drawn from the Mediterranean region and originally written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Some of our readings will challenge the centrality of these texts--they will force us out of the frame--and we will take the fact of this centrality in the liberal arts and sciences as a problem for thought and discussion.

### **Course Objectives and Requirements**

This course is a reading, discussion, and writing course and participation in class discussions is essential.

**Memos.** To enrich our conversations about the texts, discussion memos on each week's assigned readings (300-500 words, typed and double spaced) will be due at the beginning of class every Monday. In these memos, you will reflect on the main and most compelling points from each week's reading. Good memos report on and briefly engage some of the reading's main assumptions, arguments, and conclusions. Since this will be the start of your thinking, well articulated--and textually grounded--statements of confusion could sometimes qualify as good first steps. Memos will be evaluated with a pass, pass-minus, or failing grade. Students who fail 3 or fewer of the memos will receive an "A" for their memo grade (95 with a majority of good passes, below 95 if pass-minus grades must be counted). *With more than 3 failed (or missed) memos, the memo grade declines steeply ("B" for 4 failed memos, "C" for 5, etc.).* Students are advised not to miss any memos in the first few weeks, because I will give extra guidance on the first ones. **Please note, also, that the grading scheme holds throughout the semester and includes work missed due to illness or other necessity.**

**Essays.** The additional written work for this course will be two 6-8 page papers in which you will be asked to analyze and/or synthesize themes from the assigned readings. Please feel free to give me drafts

of your essay to read before the due date for each paper. I look forward to discussing each of these papers with you through the various stages of their composition. Topics will be given out in class.

Miscellaneous. Please note that you are also responsible for problem solving with me. Talk to me in office hours and talk to each other! *If you are confused by the readings or class discussions, that may be a good, rather than bad, sign.* We will study difficult materials that require continued consideration outside of class. And if you confront other problems affecting your performance during the semester, please contact me as soon as possible so we can find a resolution to those as well.

Lapses in academic integrity will not be tolerated. We will chat about the ideas we study in this course, and I encourage you to discuss your ideas outside of class whenever possible. But you are to do your own work. If the distinction between thinking together as a group and doing your own work is unclear, please talk with me for clarification. **Any sources you consult must be cited (to do otherwise is to plagiarize: see <http://www.uic.edu/depts/pols/Plagiarism1.pdf>). If you must look beyond the primary sources, the library is full of rich secondary materials. I recommend that you avoid sources on the internet, which is not a useful tool for critical essay writing.**

### Course Readings

Please use only the assigned readings that are handed out in class or available for purchase at the campus bookstore. Everything you read is in translation. **It is crucial, if you acquire a copy of a text somewhere else, that you get the same version as the rest of the class.** In-class handouts will be listed below in the "Schedule of Assignments and Course Outline" section of the syllabus.

The following required texts can be purchased at the campus bookstore:

Aeschylus, The Oresteia Trilogy, Fagles trans.  
 Aristophanes, Lysistrata, Croft ed.  
 Aristotle, The Politics, Barker trans.  
Book of Job, Mitchell trans.  
 Plato, Protagoras and Meno, Guthrie trans.  
 Plato, The Republic, Reeve trans.  
 Plato, The Trial and Death of Socrates, Grube, trans.  
 Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle, Fitts & Fitzgerald, trans.  
Tao-te-ching, Hinton trans.  
 Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, Warner trans.

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#### SUMMARY OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING PERCENTAGES:

35% - Discussion memos  
 50% - Two paper assignments (25% each)  
 15% - Participation and regular attendance

See "Schedule of Assignments and Course Outline" below for reading assignments and paper due dates

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### Schedule of Assignments and Course Outline

#### **I. Introduction: Life, Death and Political Order**

M-8/22: Course Overview

M-8/29: Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle (all three plays)

M-9/5: Labor Day (no class)

M-9/12: Aeschylus, The Oresteia Trilogy (all 3 plays)

M-9/19: The Book of Job; Tao Te Ching

*\*Paper Topic One Assigned: Due by 4:00 p.m. under my door or in my mailbox on Wednesday 10/12*

## II. Athenian Democracy and Its (Dis)contents

M-9/26: Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, pp. 124-164, 194-245;  
Aristophanes, Lysistrata

M-10/3: Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, pp. 400-429, 447-449, 465-470,  
483-488, 516-599

M 10/10: Plato, Protagoras (from Protagoras and Meno);  
Plato, Apology and Crito (from Trial and Death of Socrates)

## III. The Heretical Position in the Greek Context

M-10/17: Plato, Republic, Books I-IV

M-10/24: Plato, Republic, Book V-VII

M-10/31: Plato, Republic, Book VIII-X

## IV. Aristotle: A Synthesis of Politics and Philosophy

M-11/7: Aristotle, Politics, Book I, Book II chs. i-v, Book III, chs. i-xii, Book IV, chs. i-xi

*\*Paper Topic Two Assigned: Due by 4:00 p.m. under my door or in my mailbox on Monday 12/5*

## V. The Roman Experiment and the Heretical Position in Rome

M-11/14: Polybius, The Rise of the Roman Empire (handout excerpt);  
Cicero, On Duties (handout excerpt)

M-11/21: Epictetus (handout excerpt); Book of Matthew (handout)

## VI. Conclusion: Life, Death, and Political Order Reconfigured

M-11/28: Tacitus (excerpt handout); Augustine, The City of God (excerpt handout)

**\*\*THERE IS NO FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THIS COURSE**

\*\*Students with disabilities who require accommodations for access and participation in this course must be registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS). Please contact ODS at 312/413-2183 (voice) or 312/413-0123 (TTY).

