

**POL485H1S/POL2027H1S**

**The Political Theory of Plutarch's *Moralia* (with a few selection from the *Lives*)**

“I did not so much gain the knowledge of things by the words, as words by the experience I had of things.” (Plutarch in ‘Life of Demosthenes’)

Winter 2014, Tuesday 12 to 2 in UC 67

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**Objectives:** There are three objectives to this course. The first is to introduce students to a selection of Plutarch's essays (collectively called the *Moralia*) and to seek a deeper understanding of their meanings. A second objective is to place these essays in a theoretical and limited historical context. In particular we will reflect on the relation of Plutarch's theory to his Platonist and Hellenistic roots as well as to the political context of a subjected people on the periphery of the Roman Empire. A third objective of the course is to explore the possibility of some coherent patterns of political analysis throughout his essays as a foundation from which we might begin to sketch a broader picture of Plutarch's political theory. How can we reconcile his discussions of political leadership and his allusions to public virtue in the context of Greece's political subjection to Rome?

**Structure:** The course readings will be limited for the most part to selected essays from Plutarch's *Moralia* arranged thematically (as opposed to chronologically), ranging from his conception of the relation between philosophy and history, his moral philosophy, his institutional commitments, his writings on women, and his reflections on the nature of public duties and the qualities of leadership. Discussions on political leadership will be supplemented by readings from his work *Parallel Lives*. There will be a series of short lectures at the beginning of the course to sketch relevant features of the historical and philosophical context for Plutarch's work. Lectures and discussion in the course will also be supplemented by presentations by the students.

**Course Requirements:**

Short paper (3-4 pp., instructions below) due February 11 <sup>th</sup>	15%
Seminar Presentation on the week of your choice (10-20 minutes)	20%
Term Paper (Undergrads 15 pp., Grad students 20-25 pp.) due April 1 <sup>st</sup>	50%
Participation	15%

**Short paper instructions:** The purpose of this paper is to help you begin to build an appreciation and understanding of the significance of Plutarch's *Moralia* for broader traditions in political theory and intellectual history more generally. Students are asked to document one way in which Plutarch's work was used in the later intellectual history to illustrate or justify an argument. The paper should document briefly how one of Plutarch's essays was used (positively or negatively) in the development of an argument within the work of an important thinker in the history of political thought. Possible examples include Montaigne's "Defence of Seneca and Plutarch", Erasmus translations of Plutarch, Machiavelli's *Discourses* (book 2 in particular), Bacon's *Essays*, Harrington's *Oceana* (on civil religion), Rousseau, de Maistre, Emerson's essay "Plutarch", Nietzsche or others you may find. It may be best to focus on a short passage and to document which essay or life of Plutarch the author was drawing on and how they did so. If you wish to venture beyond the *Moralia* and document the use of one of Plutarch's *Lives* you can do so.

For this paper you should provide a general discussion of the piece you have chosen to analyze with some broad presentation of the possible intent of the author in drafting it, then demonstrate in what ways Plutarch's work was integrated into the piece exploring how the work was adapted to the author's purposes.

The paper should be 3-4 pp. double spaced and standard bibliographic and footnote notation is required. Penalties for lateness are 2% a day including weekends.

### **Seminar Presentation:**

Students will do a presentation on the week of their choice (undergraduates 10-15 minutes, graduate students 15-20 minutes). This presentation is meant to serve as an opportunity for you to try out some of the ideas that will inform your final paper.

### **Term Paper:**

Please consult with me about your topic before starting your term paper. Your seminar presentation can also serve as an opportunity for feedback on your choice of topic. I can suggest one of three options for your paper. The first option is to focus on one particular essay of Plutarch of interest to you and use the paper to explore its meaning in further depth. This can be done as a reflective exercise on the text itself or through some cross-referencing with other essays or with relevant classical sources. The second option is to choose a particular theme and explore that theme through a number of Plutarch's writings. You may also wish to explore Plutarch's work or a theme of Plutarch's work in comparison with the thought of another classical thinker (e.g. Cicero). While it is not necessary to consult secondary sources, where there are important commentaries relevant to your topic it would be worthwhile and recommended to consult them.

Again, standard bibliographic and footnote citations are required. To help guard against plagiarism, students are required to hand in their papers via turnitin.com through the Blackboard site for this course. Late penalties are 2% a day, including weekends.

## Required Readings:

Plutarch. *Moralia* –This is basically a posthumous title imposed on the collection of all the extant essays, lectures and dialogues Plutarch wrote apart from his *Parallel Lives*. Apart from the Loeb Classical Library edition, there is no compilation or comprehensive translation of all these essays in print. For this reason, I cannot recommend that you purchase any texts for this course, unless you are willing to invest c. \$350.00 for the fourteen volumes of the Loeb edition that contain these essays. There is a very limited selection of his essays in translation in a 1992 Penguin edition edited by Ian Kidd (translation by Robin Waterfield), so you may wish to purchase that for a printed version of some of his more famous essays. Otherwise, I suggest that you consult the various translations that exist online. This includes those essays included in the 1898 translation provided by the Project Gutenberg available online at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23639/23639-h/23639-h.htm> . There is also an 1878 translation available at: [http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1753](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1753) . See the following address for a list of links to translations of various essays online: <http://www.attalus.org/info/moralia.html> . Where there is no online translation available I will provide digital copies on the Blackboard site for this course. Still, please note that the titles of the essays that I have noted below all come from the Loeb translation. There may be slight changes in the naming of the essays depending on the translations consulted. For each of the course readings below I have provided a reference to the volume of the Loeb edition in which each of the assigned readings are found.

## Course Outline and Weekly Readings:

Week 1 (January 7th)

-Introduction.

Week 2 (January 14<sup>th</sup>)

- **I. Plutarch as political theorist: method and history**

- Read ‘On the Fortune or the virtue of Alexander’ (*Moralia* IV), ‘Life of Alexander’ (*Parallel Lives*- access here: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/alexandr.html>) ‘Were the Athenians more famous in War or in Wisdom?’ (*Moralia* IV), ‘On the fortune of the Romans’ (*Moralia* IV) ‘That a Philosopher ought to converse especially with men in power’ (*Moralia* X) and ‘On the E at Delphi’ (*Moralia* V)

Week 3 (January 21st)

- **II. Plutarch’s Moral Philosophy: debating Epicureans and Stoics**

- Read ‘That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible’ (*Moralia* XIV), ‘Reply to Colotes’ (*Moralia* XIV) and ‘Is ‘Live Unknown’ a wise precept?’ (*Moralia* XIV)
- For an introduction to Epicureanism read Epicurus’ ‘Letter to Menoecus’ accessible at: <http://classics.mit.edu/Epicurus/menoec.html> and ‘Principal

Doctrines' accessible at:  
<http://classics.mit.edu/Epicurus/princdoc.html> .

Week 4 (January 28<sup>th</sup>)

**- II. Plutarch's Moral Philosophy: debating Epicureans and Stoics cont.**

- Read 'How a Man may become aware of his progress in virtue' (*Moralia* I) , 'On Stoic Self-Contradictions' (*Moralia* XIII) and 'Letter of Condolence to Apollonius' (*Moralia* II)

Week 5 (February 4<sup>th</sup>)

**- II. Plutarch's Moral Philosophy: the emotions and virtue**

- Read 'On Moral Virtue' (*Moralia* VI), 'On Affection for Offspring' (*Moralia* VI), 'On the Control of Anger' (*Moralia* VI), 'On Compliancy' (*Moralia* VII), 'On Envy and Hate' (*Moralia* VII), 'On Listening to Lectures' (*Moralia* I)

Week 6 (February 11<sup>th</sup>)

**- Short paper due today (3-4 pp)**

**-II. Plutarch's Moral Philosophy: virtue ethics in civil life**

- Read 'How to tell a flatterer from a friend' (*Moralia* I), 'On the Bravery of Women' (*Moralia* III), 'Consolation to his wife' (*Moralia* VII), 'On the Education of Children' (*Moralia* I) and 'On Having many friends' (*Moralia* II), 'Concerning Talkativeness' (*Moralia* VI)

Week 7 (February 18<sup>th</sup>)

- no class. Have a pleasant reading week!

Week 8 (February 25<sup>th</sup>)

**- II. Plutarch's Moral Philosophy: zoopolis? And the place and nature of religion**

- Read 'Beasts are rational' (*Moralia* XII) and 'On the Eating of Flesh' (*Moralia* XII)
- Read 'On the Delays of Divine Vengeance' (*Moralia* VII), 'On Isis and Osiris' (*Moralia* V), 'Roman questions' (*Moralia* IV) and 'Superstition' (*Moralia* II)

Week 9 (March 4<sup>th</sup>)

- I am away this week for a SSHRC Insight Grant adjudication committee meeting. Use this time to define your paper topics and set up an appointment to meet with me in the coming week so that we can discuss it.

Week 10 (March 11<sup>th</sup>)

**- III. Public duties and qualities of leadership in Plutarch**

- Read 'How to Profit from one's Enemies' (*Moralia* II) and 'To an Uneducated Ruler' (*Moralia* X) 'Whether an old man should engage in public affairs' (*Moralia* X) and 'Precepts of Statecraft' (*Moralia* X) and two *Lives* of your choice. We will use the discussion in part to explore and compare Plutarch's discussion of leadership in the various lives read among students in the class.

Week 11 (March 18<sup>th</sup>)

**- IV. Plutarch and political regimes**

- Read 'On Monarchy, Democracy and Oligarchy' (*Moralia* X), 'Ancient Customs of the Spartans' and 'On Exile' (*Moralia* VII)

Week 12 (March 25<sup>th</sup>)

**- V. Making Sense of Plutarch's 'Table Talk'**

- Read 'Table Talk' (*Moralia* VIII and IX)

Week 13 (April 1<sup>st</sup>)

**- Term Paper Due Today**

**-VI. Concluding reflections: steps toward articulating Plutarch's political theory.**

- Read 'Sayings of Kings and Commanders' (*Moralia* III)