

POL 381H: Topics in Political Theory Tragedy: Ancient and Modern Perspectives

Session: Spring, 2012
Course Instructor: Larissa Atkison
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Time and Place: WI 523, Monday and Wednesday 4-6 pm
Office Hours: Thursday 2-4, SS 3105

Course Description

The aim of the course will be to expose students to Greek tragedy as a resource for thinking about tragedy as a phenomenon. In particular, we will focus on the ethical questions brought out in three Sophoclean dramas, *Antigone*, *Ajax*, and *Philoctetes*, including the problem of competing or clashing ethical systems, the inversion or destruction of individual and communal frameworks, and individual moral responsibility in the face of collective injustice. Each play will be paired with corresponding texts from political theory; together these readings pose such questions as, is the good life possible or does the possibility of irresolvable ethical conflict undermine this ideal? How are individuals or communities supposed to act or continue to live when their horizons of meaning collapse or cease to exist? What does it mean for individual moral responsibility when one is immersed in a corrupt ethical framework? Finally, this course will encourage students to consider, more broadly, the implications of turning to literature as an alternative and complement to traditional political theory.

Required Texts

Arendt, Hannah. *Responsibility and Judgment*. Schocken Books: 2003.

Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Lear, Jonathan. *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. HUP: 2008.

Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Cambridge: 1999.

Sophocles. *Sophocles I: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone*.

Trans. Grene and Lattimore. Chicago.

Sophocles. *Sophocles II: Ajax, The Women of Trachis, Electra & Philoctetes*.

Trans. Grene and Lattimore. Chicago.

NB: Required texts for the class have been ordered through the University bookstore unless

otherwise indicated. Recommended texts will be posted on Blackboard unless otherwise indicated.

Assignments and Evaluation:

Participation: 10%

Midterm: 30%

Final Essay (2500 words): 30%

Final Exam: 30%

Participation: Participation will be evaluated through regular attendance in lecture. You will be expected to come to class having done the reading and ready to participate in class discussion.

Midterm: (**Wed. May 30**) The midterm will be based on lecture and class readings. It will be held in class Wednesday May 30th.

Final Essay (Due June 17): The final essay topics will be distributed two weeks before the due date and will ask students to compare selected required readings. Essays will be evaluated for comprehension, critical analysis, originality, style, precision, and clarity, as well as your ability to stay within the word limit (please see below for word limit rules). You must have a clear thesis, which you set out to prove using course material; recommended readings should be thoroughly consulted for written assignments. You are encouraged to use the writing centers (each college has one, as does Robarts).

Essay Format: All papers should be submitted to Turnitin.com and emailed as a separate Word attachment to the instructor. Papers should be double spaced, 12 pt. font, with proper margins and page numbers. Penalties (2 points for each 100 words or fraction thereof) will be attached to papers that run over the prescribed word limit. You may use any standard citation method (MLA, Chicago, etc.) as long as you do so consistently. Place a word count at the top of each paper just under your name.

“Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.”

Final Exam: The final exam will take place during the scheduled exam period.

Course Rules and Policies

Extensions, Make-ups and Late Penalties: No extensions will be granted without a certificate

from a physician. Late papers will automatically be penalized 4 points plus 2 points per calendar day of lateness, weekends included. One make-up midterm will be scheduled for students who miss the exam for an extraordinary reason (seasonal colds, work, and scheduling conflicts, are not extraordinary reasons). In order to be considered for the make-up test you must email the instructor within one week of the original exam and provide appropriate documentation supporting your absence, e.g. an official doctor's note.

Office Hours: Office hours will be held for two hours each week. Time and location TBA.

Plagiarism: As you are well aware, plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will not be tolerated in any form. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, failing to cite the work or ideas of someone else, sharing papers, etc. For further clarification and information, please see the University of Toronto's policy on Plagiarism at <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/plagsep.html>.

Course Prerequisites: It is required that students have taken POL 200; POL 320 is helpful but not required.

Blackboard and E-mail: All students should ensure that they have access to the course Blackboard website, as reading materials and course announcements will be posted electronically. The instructor will send important course announcements through the Blackboard email system. Students must use a valid UTOR email address.

Accessibility Needs: The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: disability.services@utoronto.ca or <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility>.

*****The use of digital recorders during lectures is **not permitted*******

Reading Assignments

Unit I. Tragedy as Ethical Conflict

Mon. May 14: Introductory Lecture

Recommended:

- Mark Chou and Roland Bleiker, "The Symbiosis of Democracy and Tragedy: Lost Lessons from Ancient Greece" in *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, pp. 659-682.
- Bernard Williams, "The Liberation of Antiquity" in *Shame and Necessity*, pp. 1-21.
- Paul Woodruff, "Ancient Greece" in *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*, pp. 81-103.

Wed. May 16: Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1-22; Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, § 1-18

Wed. May 23: Sophocles, *Antigone*

Recommended:

- Peter Euben “Antigone and the Languages of Politics” in *Corrupting Youth*, in 139-178.
- Bonnie Honig, “Antigone’s Laments, Creon’s Grief: Mourning, Membership and the Politics of Exception” in *Political Theory*, pp. 5-43.
- Martha Nussbaum, “Sophocles’ Antigone: Conflict, Vision and Simplification” in *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 1-23.

Mon. May 28: Sophocles, *Antigone*; Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 444-446

Wed. May 30: MIDTERM (in class)

Unit II. Tragedy as Cultural Destruction and the Loss of Ways of Living

Mon. June 4: Sophocles, *Ajax*

Recommended:

- Jon Hesk. Sophocles’ *Ajax* (on reserve in Robarts)
- Bernard Knox, “The Ajax of Sophocles”, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, pp. 1-37.
- Bernard Williams. “Shame and Autonomy” in *Shame and Necessity*, pp. 75-103.

Wed. June 6: Sophocles, *Ajax*; Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope*, Chapter 1

Mon. June 11: Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope*, Chapters 2-3

Recommended:

- Charles Taylor. “A Different Kind of Courage” in *The New York Review of Books*.
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2007/apr/26/a-different-kind-of-courage/>

Unit III. Moral Responsibility and the Limits of the Political

Wed. June 13: Sophocles, *Philoctetes*

Recommended:

- Mary Whitlock Blundell, “Philoctetes” in *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies*, pp. 184-225.
- Martha Nussbaum, “Consequences and Character in Sophocles’ Philoctetes” in *Philosophy and Literature*, pp. 25-53.
- Aristide Tessitore. “Justice, Politics, and Piety in Sophocles’ ‘Philoctetes’” in *The Review of Politics*, pp. 61-88.

Mon. June 18: Sophocles, *Philoctetes*; Hannah Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, pp. 17-48

Wed. June 20: Course Conclusions

Recommended:

- Hannah Arendt. “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, pp. 49-146.