

Tragedy and Theoria

Graduate Seminar
(Sample Syllabus)

This course reads Greek tragedy with an eye towards modern reception, or ‘the uses and abuses’ of Greek tragedy for modern political life. We will therefore read a survey of ancient texts and consider a range of secondary interpretations as well as modern *uses* of these texts as occasions for political theorizing about contemporary problems. Topics include the politics of membership and exclusion; democratic political identity and its limits; tragic theorizing of race and gender; and the politics of tragedy, mourning and loss. This class thus focuses heavily on the ancient world and its texts, but it does so for the sake of a contemporary world.

While we will begin the course with a short survey covering historical context and culture, Greek tragedy and political life have literatures with endless corners to explore. General edited volumes on Greek tragedy, its context, theory, and reception, include Bushnell, R. (2009). *A Companion to Tragedy*. London: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing; and Winkler & Zeitlen, eds., (1990) *Nothing to Do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*. Princeton. For a general introduction to major players in Ancient Greek political thought, consider Janet Coleman, (2000). *A History of Political Thought: From Ancient Greece to Early Christianity*, Blackwell. For those interested in xenophobia, ethnicity, and otherness, see Isaac B., (2004) *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton. For an overview of terminology and methods in reception studies, see Hardwick, L. (2003) *Reception Studies*, Cambridge.

Attendance at all class sessions is mandatory. Students will be required to pick one week to give a 15-20 minute in-class presentation/response to the assigned readings. The task of this presentation is to 1) Draw forward a line of questioning, interpretation, or central problematic connecting the readings and 2) Articulate at least 3 questions for class discussion. If you are presenting the same week as someone else, you are encouraged to coordinate as you prepare to cover different (or complementary) ground. **A written copy of your presentation should be circulated at least 24 hours in advance of class to give everyone a chance to think about your comments.** Additionally, students will be required to turn in one 20 page paper, on a topic of their choosing drawn from our course, at the end of the semester.

For our last class, you will also give a 15-minute presentation, to be modeled in the style of a professional conference presentation, sketching the argument of your final paper. Other students will have the chance to ask questions and give you feedback. You are *not* expected to have fully completed your paper by this presentation; however, to give you time to develop your argument before class there is no reading assigned for our final meeting. The purpose of this presentation is to give you practice presenting work in progress in a professional way (useful for conferences, proposal defenses, and pitching work to editors!) while also giving you a chance to strengthen your final paper’s argument.

The following is a list of the assigned readings for each class. The first two weeks cover general discussions about context and reception. The following weeks list a primary play or work of literature in the class title, and several secondary sources beneath. You should read *both* the play *and* the secondary literature assigned. Readings marked with a ** are suggested, not required.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE:

Week 1: Introduction Part I: Historical Context

- From, Winkler & Zeitlen (ed) (1990) *Nothing to Do with Dionysus*:
Goldhill "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology"
Ober & Strauss, "Drama, Political Rhetoric, and the Discourse of Athenian Democracy"
Jean Paul Vernant & Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1990) *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*.
New York: Zone Books. Ch. 1 & 2.
**Euben, P.J., (1986) "The Battle of Salamis and the Origins of Political Theory"
Political Theory, Vol. 14, No. 3., pp. 359-390.

Week 2: Introduction Part II: The Death of Tragedy?

- Rita Felski, ed. (2008). *Rethinking Tragedy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press:
George Steiner, "'Tragedy' Reconsidered."
Simon Goldhill, "Generalizing about Tragedy"
Paige DuBois, "Toppling the Hero: Polyphony in the Tragic City"
Euben, P. (1990) "Conventions and Misgivings" in *The Tragedy of Political Theory*.
Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 3: Aristotle, *Poetics*

- Halliwell, S. (1998) *The Poetics of Aristotle*. Bristol: Bristol Classic Texts. Ch. 1-5
**Davis, M., & Burnardete, S. (2002). "Introduction" in *Aristotle's Poetics*. St.
Augustine's Press.
**Markell, P., (2003) Ch. 3: "Tragic Recognition in Antigone and Aristotle" in *Bound By Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
**Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Books 1-6.
**Plato, *Republic*, Book 2-4, 10.

Week 4: The Birth of Tragedy

- Nietzsche, (1967) *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Kaufman, W. New York: Vintage Books.
Strong, T. (2012) "Nietzsche: The Tragic Ethos and the Spirit of Music" in *Politics Without Vision*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
**Allison, J. (2000) "Birth of Tragedy" in *Reading the New Nietzsche*. New York:
Rowman & Littlefield.

Week 4: Homer, *Iliad* (Selections, TBA)

- White, S. K. (2009) *The Ethos of Late Modern Citizen*, esp. Ch. 4
**Jasper Griffin (1980). *Homer on Life and Death*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Week 5: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*

- Williams, B., (1993) *Shame and Necessity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week 6: Aeschylus, *Oresteia*

- Euben, P. "Justice and the Oresteia" in *The Tragedy of Political Theory*.
Unforgiven (1992--Film)

**Goldhill, S. (2004) *Aeschylus: The Oresteia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 7: Thucydides: Democratic Imagination

[Thucydides' Introduction, Dispute at Epidamnus, Debate at Sparta, Perikles' Funeral Oration, The Plague, & the Death of Perikles]

Stow, S. (2017) *American Mourning: Tragedy, Democracy, Resilience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Ch. 1, 2.

Loraux, N. 2006. *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*. Trans. A. Sheridan. New York: Zone Books. Ch. 1.

**Ober, J. "Thucydides and the Invention of Political Science" in Regnagkos A., and Tsakmakis, A., *Brill's Companion to Thucydides*. Boston: Brill Publishing. pp. 131-160.

Week 8: Thucydides: International Relations

[Cocyræan Revolution, Melian Dialogue, Syracuse Adventure, Alcibiades in Sparta, Death of Nicias.]

In Lebow & Erskine, (2012). *Tragedy and International Relations*.

Mayall, J. "Tragedy, Progress, and the International Order."

Rengger, N., "Tragedy or Skepticism? Defending the Anti-Pelagian Mind in World Politics"

Euben, J. P., "The Tragedy of Tragedy"

Strong, T., "Nietzsche, and Questions of Tragedy, Tyranny, and International Relations."

**Lebow, N. (2003) *The Tragic Vision of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Ch. 1-3.

Week 9: Sophocles, Oedipus

Knox, B. 1964 *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Ch. 1 & 2.

Euben, P., "Identity and the *Oedipus Tyrannos*" in *the Tragedy of Political Theory*

Week 10: Antigone

Butler, J. (DATE) *Antigone's Claim*.

B. Honig, (2010) "Antigone's Two Laws: Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Humanism" in *New Literary History*, Vol 41, No. 1, pp.1-33.

**Butler, J. (2006) *Precarious Life*. New York: Verso Books.

Week 11: Antigone, (Again)

B. Honig, (2009) "Antigone's Laments, Creon's Grief: Mourning, Membership, and the Politics of Exception." In *Political Theory* Vol 37, No. 5, pp 5-43.

McIvor, D. (2016) *Mourning in America: Race and the Politics of Loss*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Week 12: Euripides, Medea

Sissa, G. (2008) "Relationships" in *Sex and Sensuality in the Ancient World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

McClure, L. "The Worst Husband: Discourses of Praise and Blame in Euripides Medea" in *Classical Philology*, 94, No. 4, 373-394

**Loraux, N. (1987) *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Week 13: Euripides, *Ion*

Kasimis, D. (2013) "The Tragedy of Blood-Based Membership: Secrecy and the Politics of Immigration in Euripides Ion." In *Political Theory*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 231-256.

Dougherty, C. 1996. 'Democratic Contradictions and the Synoptics Illusion of Euripides' *Ion*.' in *Demokratia*. Ed. Josiah Ober & Charles Hedrick. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 249-270.

Loraux, N. "Kreusa the Autochthon: A Study of Euripides *Ion*." In *Nothing to Do With Dionysos?*

Week 14: Euripides, *Bacchae*

Euben, P. "Dismembership in the Bacchae" in *The Tragedy of Political Theory*

Bernard Williams, (1973) "Ethical Consistency" in *Problems of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Honig, B. (2001). "Survival" in *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 15: Student Presentations.