

LDST390/PLSC379: GREEK TRAGEDY AND POLITICAL THEORY

Jepson School of Leadership Studies
University of Richmond
Spring 2020

Course Information

Time/Place: Wednesday & Friday, 12:00-1:15, Jepson 102
Professor: Daniel Schillinger
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Office: Jepson 245
Office Hours: Monday, 10-11:30 and by appointment

Course Description

This seminar explores Greek tragedy from the perspective of political theory. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were piercing observers of political life; they were also the principal educators of the Athenian democracy. Their plays raise fundamental questions about the origins of political life, the nature of democracy and its specific difference from tyranny, the responsibilities and errors of political leaders, the vulnerability of all human beings to disaster, the costs of war and empire, the causes of factional strife, and the complex relations joining men, women, and gods. We will read three plays written by each tragedian: Aeschylus' trilogy the *Oresteia*; Sophocles' *Ajax*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus Tyrannus*; and Euripides' *Alcesteis*, *Trojan Women*, and *Bacchae*. Political philosophers beginning with Plato and Aristotle have also been eager students of these plays, even as they have reflected on the function of tragedy as a literary genre, political institution, and ethical orientation. We will read Plato, Aristotle, Nietzsche, and contemporary interpreters such as Bernard Williams and Bonnie Honig, whose various approaches to Greek tragedy show that this literature remains a generative source of political reflection and critique.

Required Texts

Please purchase personal copies of the following texts—for sale at the University of Richmond Bookstore. Additional readings will be posted to the course site on Blackboard or sent directly to the class via email.

- 1) Aeschylus. *The Complete Aeschylus, Volume 1: The Oresteia*. Edited by Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- 2) Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated by Joseph Sachs. Indianapolis: Focus Philosophical Library, 2006.
- 3) Euripides. *The Complete Euripides, Volume 1: Trojan Women and Other Plays*. Edited by Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- 4) Euripides. *The Complete Euripides, Volume 4: Bacchae and Other Plays*. Edited by Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- 5) Euripides. *The Complete Euripides, Volume 5: Medea and Other Plays*. Edited by Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- 6) Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- 7) Sophocles. *Sophocles I*. Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- 8) Sophocles. *Sophocles II*. Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- 9) Soyinka, Wole. *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*. New York: Norton, 1974.

Course Expectations and Practices

By far the most important expectation and requirement for this course is that you read the assigned texts carefully and prior to class. Often I will distribute reading questions in advance; please engage with these questions and arrive prepared to discuss them, making specific connections to central passages and themes. You should also strive to attend every class session and to bring the day's texts to class. There are no excused absences except in the event of a documented illness or emergency. Students who meet these expectations will have every chance of success. Although the syllabus features classic texts, we will raise and explore unique questions and themes; external sources or prior reading cannot substitute for your participation in the course. During class, please try to discuss the texts in a spirit of questioning, openness, and respect. Energetic participation would be great! For my part, I promise to engage with all your questions, thoughts, and concerns about course material and logistics. Please talk to me during office hours about anything pertaining to this course.

Marking Scheme

1) Essay 1 (1,800 words, due Mon., Feb. 17 via email)	25 %
2) Essay 2 (1,800 words, due Mon., Mar. 23 via email)	25 %
3) Essay 3 (3,600 words, due Mon., Apr. 20 via email)	35 %
4) Attendance and Participation	15 %

Assessment Criteria

Each essay that you write for this course should satisfy the following criteria:

- 1) The essay clearly and directly responds to the prompt.
- 2) The essay contains a thesis-driven argument and a coherent structure (rather than a mere summary of one or more texts, a list of facts, or an absence of structure altogether).

- 3) The essay displays careful engagement with the course materials through its analysis of textual evidence and key concepts.
- 4) The essay eschews basic errors and achieves a polished writing style.

The third of these criteria is the most important: your essay should put on display your careful and sustained engagement with the course materials. Even so, “A” essays will satisfy each criterion listed above by exhibiting mastery of both the course content and of the elements of the academic essay. “B” essays will fall short of mastery while attaining competence. “C” essays will satisfy these criteria to a minimal extent. “D” essays will not meet these criteria, though they will show some effort toward the composition of a solid paper. “F” essays will suggest an unacceptable lack of engagement with and effort on this assignment and in the course. In addition, the essay should be written in Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, and it should adhere to an accepted style of citation (e.g., Chicago).

With each essay assignment, I will include an optional pre-draft assignment that will allow you to involve me in your writing process. Pre-draft assignments are designed to guide you through part of the writing process and to sharpen your argument. The first pre-draft assignment will provide an occasion for you to formulate a compelling and contestable thesis. The second pre-draft assignment will help you to locate evidence for your thesis and to build a coherent structure supported by clear transitions—key skills for the composition of a longer essay that incorporates secondary sources. The third and final pre-draft assignment will entail the composition of an annotated bibliography. While the pre-draft assignments are entirely optional, they will almost certainly help you to write lucid, coherent, and thoughtful essays.

Participation in class discussion also comprises a fundamental part of the course. While participation should be consistent, it will be graded, ultimately, on the basis of its judiciousness and quality. As the Registrar makes clear, successful students devote at minimum 10-14 hours of work per week to each class at the University of Richmond. This class is an upper-level seminar; expect to devote more than the minimum amount of time to it. On this point, see: registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html

Extensions and Lateness

No extensions or make-up examinations will be permitted in the absence of official documentation (of a serious illness or an emergency) submitted to me prior to the deadline. Late papers will be penalized three percent as soon as the deadline passes and an additional two percent for every day late. To be clear, a late paper will incur a penalty of five percent when the deadline passes and an additional two percent at the end of every subsequent day.

Honor System and Academic Integrity

The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.” I am serious about promoting academic integrity in this course; any kind of unauthorized assistance will not be tolerated. For more information, see: studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html

Accessibility and Religious Observance

I am committed to accessible learning. Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams. On accessibility, see: disability.richmond.edu/

If you will need accommodations for religious observance, please notify me within the first two weeks of classes. More information: registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html

Schedule of Readings and Events

W. Jan. 15: Four Tragic Moments: selections from Homer (Hector and Andromache); Herodotus (Solon and Croesus); Thucydides (The Athenian Disaster in Sicily); and *This American Life*, “Life after Death” (Act 1)

F. Jan. 17: Euripides, *Trojan Women*

W. Jan. 22: Euripides, *Trojan Women*; selections from J. Peter Euben, “Introduction,” in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*; Paul Cartledge, “Deep Plays”; Adrian Poole, “Total Disaster”

F. Jan. 24: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*

W. Jan. 29: Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*

F. Jan. 31: Aeschylus, *Eumenides*

W. Feb. 5: Aeschylus, *Oresteia*; selections from Simon Goldhill, “The Drama of Logos”; Danielle Allen, *The World of Prometheus*; J. Peter Euben, “Justice and the *Oresteia*”

F. Feb. 7: NO CLASS (Marshall Center Event)

W. Feb. 12: Theory Interlude: Aristotle, *Poetics*

TH. Feb 13 (Evening Event): Modern Drama Interlude: See August Wilson’s “Fences” at Virginia Repertory Theatre
F. Feb 14: August Wilson, “Fences”
M. Feb 17: PAPER 1 DUE BY 11:59 PM
W. Feb. 19: Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>
F. Feb 21: Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i> ; selections from Bonnie Honig, <i>Antigone, Interrupted</i> ; Martha Nussbaum, <i>The Fragility of Goodness</i> ; Peter Ahrensdorf, <i>Greek Tragedy and Political Philosophy</i> ; Daniel Mendelsohn, “Unburied”
W. Feb. 26: Sophocles, <i>Ajax</i>
TH. Feb 27 (Evening Event): Modern Drama Interlude: Watch “The Tecmessa Project” with Professor Cherry’s “Politics and Literature” Class
F. Feb. 28: Sophocles, <i>Ajax</i> ; selections from Bernard Williams, <i>Shame and Necessity</i> ; Simon Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology”; Paul Woodruff, <i>The Ajax Dilemma</i>
W. Mar. 4: Sophocles, <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>
F. Mar. 6: Sophocles, <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i> ; selections from Sigmund Freud, <i>Interpretation of Dreams</i> ; Bernard Williams, “Moral Luck”; Arlene Saxonhouse, “The Tyranny of Reason in the World of the Polis”
W. Mar. 18: Theory Interlude: Plato, <i>Ion</i>
F. Mar. 20: NO CLASS (Marshall Center Event)
M. Mar. 23: PAPER 2 DUE BY 11:59 PM
W. Mar. 25: Theory Interlude: Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> , Sections 1-15
F. Mar. 27: Theory Interlude: Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> , Sections 15-25
W. Apr. 1: Euripides, <i>Bacchae</i>
F. Apr. 3 (In-Class Event: Guest Lecture by Professor Patrice Rankine): Euripides, <i>Bacchae</i> ; Wole Soyinka, <i>The Bacchae of Euripides</i>
W. Apr. 8: Euripides, <i>Alcestis</i>

F. Apr. 8: Euripides, *Alcestis*; selections from Victoria Wohl, *Euripides and the Politics of Form*; Charles Segal, *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow*

W. Apr. 15: Theory Epilogue: Hannah Arendt, “Action,” in *The Human Condition* (first half)

F. Apr. 17: Theory Epilogue: Hannah Arendt, “Action,” in *The Human Condition*

M. Apr. 20: PAPER 3 DUE BY 11:59 PM

W. Apr. 22 (In-Class Film): Modern Film Epilogue: Nicholas Ray, *In a Lonely Place*

F. Apr. 24 (In-Class Film and Final Discussion): Nicholas Ray, *In a Lonely Place*; Robert Pippin, “Active and Passive Skepticism in Nicholas Ray’s *In a Lonely Place*”