

Classics 0084: Greek Political Thought

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C T/W/F 9:30-10:20

The modern term 'politics' comes from the Greek *politikos* (of, or pertaining to, citizens and the city) and the reflection about political life and constitutional forms is one of the most important contributions of ancient Greece. The aim of this course is to explore origin and development of Greek political thought because it is essential for our understanding of contemporary world, especially when we discuss themes such as democracy, equality, justice, and the confrontation between East and West. The course will be a survey of Greek thought in English translation from Archaic times to the Hellenistic age. Students will also have the opportunity to learn Greek words of the political language by searching new digital tools available through the Perseus digital library, in



order to understand the etymology of much of our political terminology. Homeric epics, Hesiod, and the lyric poets reveal the first political reflection that testifies the change from the world of the kings to the new role of the aristocracy and the emerging needs of oppressed people. The search for justice and new solutions to civic coexistence permeate the poetry of Solon and the action of archaic lawgivers. In the Fifth and Fourth century we have the great explosion of the democratic political thinking and the debate about Athenian imperialism, which are expressed by many different media, as the Greek drama, the works of the great historians Herodotus,

Thucydides, and Xenophon, orators' speeches, and Sophists' arguing about ethics, politics, and the relationship between law and nature. The discussion about the meaning of 'law', the relationship between the citizen and the city, and the teaching of virtue strongly emerge in the trial of Socrates and in the reconstruction of his personality by Plato, who speculates on philosopher rulers, justice, the good city, and practical politics in the Republic and the Laws. Aristotle is the first political scientist and his natural philosophy greatly influences his ideas about household, slavery, justice, and the distribution of power in the city, together with his classification of constitutions and theories about their evolution and change. With Alexander the Great and the end of Greek cities' freedom we enter a new age where individual needs and a different way of conceiving politics are expressed by Cynics, Stoics, and the Epicureans, while Hellenistic theories concerning kingship develop a new conception of rulership before Greece is conquered by Rome. *Satisfies the Humanities Distribution Requirement and the Classical Culture Area.*