

Pervert Politics from the *Polis* to *The Prince*:  
Queer Vicissitudes of pre-Modern City-State Citizenship

Classics of Social and Political Thought—I

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SOSC 15100-10

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Course Description & Aims

In this course ‘gossip as good as gospel’ (Thucydides), published Academic dialogues (Plato), a visiting adjunct’s lecture series (Aristotle), a riotously vulgar satirical drama (Aristophanes), and a former political prisoner’s leadership manual (Machiavelli) provide the textual resources for research into the ways desire (*eros/amor*) is cast in an antagonistic relationship to *arête* or *virtú* in pre-Modern city-state political cultures. Tracking the shifts in the manifold valuations of desire articulated by these authors – for instance, from founding the democracy in Athens to ravaging the democratic soul; from fueling ambitions for imperial power to soliciting the unconventional gaiety of peace; from seeking freedom from oppression to actively instituting an ethos that checks elite abuse – students are encouraged to map the terrain of political desire/virtue as it takes shape across these sources. In particular, students will be invited to ask after the ‘perverse’ qualities or elements that surface in the politics presented in each text, namely: the ways in which ancient political values like the ‘good, beautiful, and just’ also pose the risk of an affirmation of their inverse – or, more pointedly, may themselves be the effect of a perverse inversion.

***Overview of Course Requirements***

Required Texts\*

The following assigned texts are available for purchase from the Seminary Cooperative Bookstore:

Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 1991)

Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett, 1998)

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1998)

The following additional readings are available via Chalk:

Plato, *Alcibiades I*

Plato, *Crito*

Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae*

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*

*\*Please note that all of the assigned Platonic dialogues, as well as Thucydides’ History, include frank discussions of intergenerational homoerotic sexuality (pederastic pedagogy). Additionally, the Ecclesiazusae and The Prince contain strong sexual language and touch on themes of sexualized aggression against women. All students should feel welcome to address any possible challenges this material may pose at their discretion prior to the assignment.*

Writing Requirements

Students will submit three papers. The first will be a short response paper (500 words). The second will be for a careful reconstruction of an argument and a brief critical evaluation (1000 words). The final paper will be a more sustained and developed

exercise in crafting a careful reconstruction and critical evaluation (2000-2500 words). Writing prompts will be circulated in advance of each assignment. For the final writing assignment an optional peer-review draft-exchange will be available. Students are **strongly** encouraged to participate.

#### Participation in Class Discussion

Students must attend every class, text and notes in hand, and be an active participant in discussion. Participating actively in class means contributing comments and questions to the discussion.

#### Reading Questions//Chalk Discussion Board

Students are required to post at least one question about the assigned reading(s) to the Chalk discussion board by midnight before each class. Reading questions should explicitly engage the text by citing a particular passage or concept and asking something specific about it. “What does the author mean here?” is not acceptable; an acceptable question will include a reasonably defended – even if hypothetical – answer. Students may skip any two days of posting before it affects class participation grade.

#### Grades

Reflecting the importance of the seminar format, 40% of the total grade for the class will be participation, which includes the quality and consistency of discussion questions posted to Chalk. The first paper counts for 10% of your grade, the second for 20%, and the final paper for the remaining 30%.

Papers will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for each day they are late (i.e., a B+ becomes a B). Extensions will be granted only in cases of documented illness and/or personal emergency. Papers more than 3 day late will not be accepted.

Absences will be excused only in documented cases of illness, personal emergency, or religious observance. After the first unexcused absence, each additional unexcused absence will result in a deduction of one full letter grade from your participation grade.

#### Obligatory Notice about Plagiarism

Quite simply: **do not plagiarize**. If you have any questions whatsoever about the proper way to cite a source, please consult me, or refer to Charles Lipson’s *How to Do Honest Work in College* (2004). Plagiarism will lead to automatic failure of this course and will be referred to the University administration for additional sanctions.

#### ***Fall Quarter Reading Schedule:***

##### **Week One**

Tuesday: 9/29 Introduction Session: Qu(e)ring the history of political theory to ask after *politics*; Strategies and Tactics - What is “inversion”?; Revolutions of political values – What is “perversion”?; A brief note on media-relations, historicity, and the contemporary milieu.

Thursday: 10/1 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Bk II. 34 – 46; Bk VI. 53 – 61. – *Available via Chalk.*

### Week Two

Tuesday: 10/6 Plato, *Alcibiades I* – Available via Chalk.

Thursday: 10/8 *Crito* – Available via Chalk.

### Week Three

Tuesday: 10/13 Plato, *Republic*, Bk. I – II. \*\*\* **First Response Paper Due** \*\*\*

Thursday: 10/15 Plato, *Republic*, Bk. III – IV.

### Week Four \*\*\*Writing Prompts Out\*\*\*

Tuesday: 10/20 *Republic*, Bk. V – VI.

Thursday: 10/22 Plato, *Republic*, Bk. VII – VIII.

### Week Five \*\*\* **Second Writing Assignment Due: FRIDAY, OCT. 30<sup>TH</sup>** \*\*\*

Tuesday: 10/27 Plato, *Republic*, Bk. IX - X.

Thursday: 10/29 Aristotle, *Politics*. Bk. I: 1-7, 12-13; Bk. II: 1-5, 7-8; Bk. III.

### Week Six

Tuesday: 11/3 Aristotle, *Politics*. Bk. IV: 1-2, 4-9, 11, 12; Bk. V: 1, 5-9; Bk. VI: 5.

Thursday: 11/5 Aristotle, *Politics*. Bk. VII: 1-5, 7, 9-10, 13-15; Bk. VIII: 1.

### Week Seven

Tuesday: 11/10 Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* (full text). – Available via Chalk.

Thursday: 11/12 Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* (continued).

### Week Eight \*\*\*Writing Prompts Out\*\*\*

Tuesday 11/17 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Dedicatory Letter, I-VI; *Discourses on Livy*, Dedicatory Letter; I: P, 9-10, 19-20, 58; II: 2; III: 30.1 (Chalk); Letter to Vettori of December 10, 1513 (in *The Prince*, 107-111).

Thursday 11/19 *Prince*, VII-XIV; *Discourses*, I: 11-12, 18.4, 27.

### Week Nine

Tuesday 11/24 *Prince*, XV-XIX; *Discourses*, III: 40-42.

Thursday 11/26 **THANKSGIVING BREAK: NO CLASS//PAPER PROPOSALS DUE**

### Week Ten

Tuesday 12/1 *Prince*, Chapters XX-XXVI; *Discourses*, III: 9, 49.

\*\*\* **Final Paper Due: Tuesday 12/8** \*\*\*