

The Athenian Culture War

TTh. 1:15–2:30pm

Duke University

Allen 226

Fall, 2005

Teacher

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Texts

TAZ = *Thinking from A to Z*

EGPT = *Early Greek Political Thought from*

Homer to the Sophists

TS = *The Trials of Socrates*

GT = *Greek Tragedies (v.1)*

PS = *Philosophy Before Socrates*

RA = *A Rulebook for Arguments*

RES = Reserve Readings

P = *Protagoras*

G = *Gorgias*

Important Dates

Greek Alphabet Quiz.....9/6

Logic Assignment.....9/13

First Paper.....9/22

Midterm Exam.....10/13

Second Paper Schema.....11/1

Second Paper.....11/10

Final Exam.....12/13

Evaluation

Greek Alphabet Quiz.....3%

Schema.....5%

Logic Assignment.....7%

First Paper.....10%

Second Paper.....15%

Quizzes and Participation.....15%

Midterm Exam.....15%

Comprehensive Final Exam.....30%

In 399 BC the Athenians put Socrates to death for promoting impiety and corrupting the youth. According to his student, Plato, he did neither. Whether or not Plato was right, by the end of the fifth century Socrates had become the symbol of a fierce contest over old and new in the most important aspects of public life: religion, values, education and authority.

Since we are presently in the midst of our own such contest, we shall occasionally notice parallels between our own times and those of fifth-century Athens. But it will be our principal goal to understand the Athenians' clash of ideas.

We shall build a foundation by reading some samples of poetry in order both to appreciate the traditional assumptions of the Athenians about public life (drawn, for instance, from Homer, Hesiod, Pindar and Theognis), and also to see the Athenian culture war dramatized in tragic form (by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides).

Most of the course, however, is devoted to probing the origins of the intellectual revolution that began with three foreign influences: (i) Asian thought about the cosmos and the human body, (ii) the religious and philosophical innovations of South Italian and Sicilian Greeks, and (iii) the growing prestige of itinerant teachers known as ‘Sophists.’

As examples of the first group, we shall read fragments of Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Diogenes of Apollonia and the Hippocratics, as well as Leucippus and Democritus. As examples of the second: Pythagoreans, Parmenides, Empedocles, Zeno, and Melissus. Of the third: Protagoras, Gorgias, Antiphon, Critias, and Anonymous Iamblichi.

The clearest portrait of the culture war these influences helped foment in Athens is found in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, which makes Socrates out to be its chief instigator. We shall read it at the end of the course alongside two of Plato’s efforts to salvage his teacher’s reputation from this libel.

*ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ μολών,
ὁ μηδὲν εἰδώς Οἰδίπους, ἔπαυσα νιν,
γνώμη κρηήσας οὐ’ ἀπ’ οἰωνῶν μαθών·*

Oedipus

ἐγὼ δέ, ὥσπερ οὔν οὐκ οἶδα, οὐδὲ οὔμαι

Socrates