

Thucydides' War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians (PT142)

Seminar Leader: Dr. David Hayes

Course Times: Tuesday and Thursday 17:30-19:00

Email: d.hayes@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course is devoted to a careful reading of Thucydides' masterpiece, his account of the nearly thirty-year war between cosmopolitan, democratic, imperialist Athens and insular, oligarchic, militarized Sparta. Thucydides has been regarded as the founder of political realism, the first critical historian, and even "the inventor of political science" (Josiah Ober). In addition, political philosophers have been drawn to Thucydides for his investigations of human nature and justice, and his extraordinary literary power has influenced much writing about the experience of war.

Questions that we will ask include: What are the causes, character, and consequences of war? What role can (or must) justice play in a realist view of international relations? What difference can individual leadership make when the course of events seems determined by powerful impersonal forces, or by luck? Since the war was regarded by the Greeks themselves as a clash of values, as well as armies, do we find ourselves preferring one side to another? Whose stories engage our compassion as well as our critical scrutiny?

Thucydides wrote that his book would be "a possession for all time." In consideration of the time we live in, we will give special attention to his descriptions of the plague at Athens and its corrupting social effects, of populist demagoguery, and of the tragedy of civil war.

Requirements

One text is required for purchase:

The Landmark Thucydides, ed. Robert B. Strassler (New York: Free Press) 1996.

We will also read Aristophanes' *Peace*, a comedy staged at Athens in the Spring of 421. This text will be provided to you.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected

standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. For further excused absences, please provide documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2021: All students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Alternatives to in-person attendance will be provided.

Assessment

This is a discussion class. You should come to class not only having done the reading, but also already having taken time to think about what you have read.

I will evaluate class participation according to the following criteria:

- 1) Ready to discuss the reading from the beginning of the class
- 2) Manifestly prepared for each and every class
- 3) Capacity to connect the discussion in the current class with the discussion in previous classes
- 4) Capacity to converse with other students about their concerns, and to contribute to lines of discussion that other students have initiated
- 5) Quality of the student's contributions
An interesting or important thought matters much more than quantity. Dominating the discussion is a negative. If you have a lot to say, for the sake of the general discussion you may need to exercise some restraint by picking your spots.
- 6) Quality of the student's questions
A good question is also an excellent contribution to a discussion—often even better than a good point.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

I freely give extensions—but the request must be made at least 24 hours before the deadline. Late papers will be downgraded a third of a letter grade (e.g., from A- to B+) for every 24 hours that passes.

Use of Electronics

To facilitate a focused and engaging seminar discussion, the use of electronic devices during class time is only allowed for disability accommodation. Using electronics in class will negatively affect your seminar grade. If you have a disability accommodation, please inform me at the beginning of the semester.

Grade Breakdown

Seminar grade: 30%

Midterm essay (2000 words): 30%

Final essay (3000 words): 40%

Schedule

Tuesday

8/31 1.1-1.12 (cf. Herodotus 1.1-1.5)

9/7 1.46-1.118
9/14 2.1-2.47(Pericles' Funeral Oration)
9/21 2.66-end of 2
9/28 3.51-3.68 (Plataea)
10/5 4.1-4.55
10/12 4.102-end of 4

10/18 Midterm essay due (2000 words)

Fall Break

10/26 5.1-5.26
11/2 Finish Aristophanes' *Peace*
11/9 5.84-end of 5 (Melian Dialogue)
11/16 6.33-6.75
11/23 7.1-7.41
11/30 7.70-end of 7
12/7 8.40-8.86

Thursday

9/2 1.13-1.45 (cf. G. Allison,
"The Thucydides Trap")
9/9 1.119-end of 1
9/16 2.48-2.65 (The Plague at Athens)
9/23 3.1-3.50 (Mytilenean debate)
9/30 3.69-end of 3 (Corcyraen stasis)
10/7 4.56-4.101
10/14 Open discussion

10/28 Aristophanes' *Peace*: to line 817
11/4 5.27-5.83
11/11 6.1-6.32
11/18 6.76-end of 6
11/25 7.42-7.69
12/2 8.1-8.39
12/9 8.87-end of 8

Completion Week

12/18 Final Paper due (3000 words)