AMBITION, POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, AND THE NATURE OF POLITICS

This class will consider a handful of different readings that explore ambition, the distinctive character of political philosophy, and the nature of politics itself as these themes first came to light in the classical world of ancient Greece. However, the aim in this course is not primarily historical. That is, we are not primarily attempting to understand how Aristophanes, Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle reflect and/or criticize their own—now extinct—political cultures. Although we will necessarily give attention to some of the peculiarities of the political culture of ancient Greece, as a class in political thought our goal is to engage the considered views of unusually thoughtful and reputedly wise human beings, with a view to determining what they can teach us as we seek to understand the enduring realities of ambition, philosophic thinking, and—for both better and worse—the inescapable reality of politics in the contemporary world. The class will be successful in the measure that it challenges some of our own opinions, enlarges and enriches our current views, or engenders greater thoughtfulness about ambition, philosophy and politics as they pertain to the contemporary world, and especially to ourselves.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available in the University Bookstore):
So as to prevent unnecessary problems (especially misleading translations), students are required to use the editions specified below (all are paperbacks and among the least expensive editions available).


REQUIREMENTS:

- Regular attendance and participation in class.
  - Since this is a text-based course, all students are required to bring the text under discussion to class on a daily basis
  - No computers are to be used during class-time unless there is an extenuating circumstance, which must be cleared with me ahead of time
• Attendance at four public lectures in the discipline of political thought. All scheduled lectures are at 4:30 in the Watkins Room, Trone Student Center
  o Jan 29: Patrick Deneen, “The Only Natural State” (tentative title)
  o Feb 20: James W. Ceaser, “Tocqueville’s World and Ours”
  o March 13: Robert Faulkner, “Democratic Greatness?”
  o April 3: Dianna Schaub, “Tocquevillian Perspectives on Slavery”

• Midterm and Final examinations
  o No cell phones or technological devices may be used or taken out during exams. Failure to comply will result in an F for the exam.

• Two Short Papers (2-3 pages). Late papers are marked down one third of a letter grade for each day beyond the assigned deadline.

• Periodic Quizzes on assigned reading for class (usually announced)

GRADING
The two papers, two exams, and participation grade will be equally weighted (20% each) to determine the core grade for the course. The core grade can be raised on the basis of steady improvement.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:
• Participation grades begin with a C (for being there), and are raised in accordance with the quality of a student’s active engagement with course materials. All students are graded weekly (check, plus, minus) on quality (and quantity) of their active engagement with course materials for that week.
• More than two unexcused cuts adversely affects the participation grade. Beginning with the third unexcused absence, each missed class is penalized one-third of a letter grade.
• If you arrive after attendance is taken, you are likely to have been marked absent. It is your responsibility to let me know at the end of class that you were in fact present.

DISABILITIES:
Students with disabilities who need academic accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Disability Services (294-2320), located behind (and below) Earl Infirmary in Room 002. After this meeting, please set up a meeting with me. It is in your interest to attend to this EARLY in the term.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:
Honesty, respect, and personal responsibility are principles that guide academic life at Furman, in and out of the classroom. Academic misconduct in any form (plagiarism, cheating, inappropriate collaboration, and other efforts to gain an unfair academic advantage) threatens the values of the campus community and will have severe consequences, such as failure in the course, and/or suspension or dismissal from the University.
If you have any question about what constitutes plagiarism or any other form of academic misconduct, it is your responsibility to speak with me so that we can dispel any and all ambiguity. Given the severity of the consequences, it is crucial that you fully understand what is expected of you in this regard. If you have any doubts, just ask! You should also be familiar with the information available at www.furman.edu/main/integrity.htm. A copy of Furman’s policy on academic dishonesty can also be found at this site.

SOMewhat Tentative Course Schedule:

Course Introduction

Part One: Exploring Ambition

- Plato, Alcibiades I, (Roots of Political Philosophy)
- Plato, Hipparchus, (Roots of Political Philosophy)
- Plato, Laches, (Roots of Political Philosophy) (time-permitting)

Part Two: The Contested Nature of Political Philosophy

- Aristophanes, Clouds, (Four Texts on Socrates)
- Plato, Apology, (Four Texts on Socrates)

- Midterm Exam: Monday, February 25 (tentative)

Part Three: Whatever is the Political Association?

- Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, selections (time-permitting)

Schedule of Required Lectures in Political Thought

- Jan 29: Patrick Deneen, “The Only Natural State” (tentative title)
- Feb 20: James W. Ceaser, “Tocqueville’s World and Ours”
- April 3: Dianna Schaub, “Tocquevillian Perspectives on Slavery”

Final Exam: Tuesday, April 30 at 8:30