Ancient Aesthetics Honours 2017-8

Course organiser: Dr Andrew Mason
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Description

The course will examine theories of beauty and the arts (especially, though not limited to, poetry and drama) in ancient thinkers, beginning with Plato and Aristotle; and going on to consider thinkers from later antiquity. Topics discussed include the nature of beauty, artistic representation or imitation, censorship and the place of art in education, and the concept of tragedy. The impact of ancient aesthetic theories on later thought may also be considered.

Teaching will consist of a weekly lecture (5.10-6.00 p.m. Monday; place TBA), and a tutorial, for which there will be two groups (1.10-2.00 p.m. and 4.10-5.00 p.m. Thursday; places TBA). A list of readings for tutorials will be published at the start of term. The tutorial in week 1 will be introductory; after this tutorials will move a week behind lectures, i.e. the tutorial in week 2 will be based on material from the lecture in week 1, etc.

There will be an additional fortnightly meeting for M.Sc. students (time and place to be arranged).

Assessment

Assessment consists of a midterm essay of 1500 words, due at noon on Thursday 1st March (40%) and a take-home test at the end of the semester (60%). Questions will be released on Monday 9th April, and answers due by noon on Thursday 12th April. (Note that this is a change from previous years.) Midterm essay topics will be posted at the start of week 3.

Fourth year honours students who have chosen to submit a coursework dissertation (5000 word essay) in this course should follow the usual procedure for coursework dissertations. They should consult the course organiser about their plans for the dissertation before the decision deadline (Monday 26th February).

M. Sc. students will be assessed by an end-of-term essay of 2500 words, following the usual procedure for the M. Sc., and will have the opportunity to submit a midterm formative essay.

Lecture Content.

1. Plato (I): The content of poetry; censorship.
   Republic 376d-392c.
2. Plato (II): The form of poetry; *mimesis* (imitation) and character. *Republic* 392c-400d: 602c-608b.

3. Plato (III); *Mimesis* revisited; poetry and knowledge. *Republic* 595a-602c.

4. Plato (IV): Poetry and inspiration. *Ion; Phaedrus* 244a-245a, 248d-e.


6. Aristotle (II): The definition of tragedy; the concept of *catharsis*. *Poetics* 6 and *Politics* VII.5-7.

7. Aristotle (III): The form of tragedy; the concept of *hamartia*. *Poetics* 10-18

8. Aesthetics in the Hellenistic Age.
Sextus Empiricus *Against the Professors* 1 (Against the Grammarians) 270-99; Lucretius *On the Nature of Things* I.926-50; Strabo *Geography* 1.2.3.-10; Cicero *On Duties* 1.27.93-9 and 1.35.126-36.130; *Tusculan Disputations* 4.13.28-31. Other philosophers, and especially Philodemus, will also be referred to.

9. Aesthetics in the Roman Empire.
Horace, *Art of Poetry*; Longinus, *On the Sublime*; Plutarch, *On the Study of Poetry*. (These will be introduced in the lecture: students should pick one to read more closely.)

See also Plato *Phaedrus* 246a-247b; *Republic* 400d-402c; 472b-e; 500b-501c; Cicero, *Orator*, 2.7-3.10; Seneca, *Letters* 65.

11. Themes and conclusions
followed by a question period for revision.

Reading

**Primary texts.**
Plato, *Ion*; extracts from *Republic* and *Phaedrus*.
Aristotle, *Poetics*: extracts from *Politics*.
(Reference may also be made to other works by Plato and Aristotle.)
Sextus Empiricus, extracts from *Against the Professors*. 
Lucretius, extracts from On the Nature of Things.
Strabo, extracts from Geography.
Cicero, extracts from On Duties
Horace, The Art of Poetry
Longinus, On the Sublime
Plutarch, On the Study of Poetry
Plotinus, extracts from Enneads

Many of these texts may be found in:
A. Sheppard and O. Bychkov, eds, Greek and Roman Aesthetics
D. Russell and M. Winterbottom, eds, Ancient Literary Criticism: the Principal Texts in New Translations
D. Russell and M. Winterbottom, eds, Classical Literary Criticism (a shorter version of the previous volume).

Recommended secondary reading.
A. Mason, Ancient Aesthetics.
C. Janaway, Images of Excellence; Plato’s Critique of the Arts.
I. Murdoch, The Fire and the Sun: why Plato Banished the Artists.
N. White, A Companion to Plato’s Republic (commentary on relevant sections)
J. Annas, An Introduction to Plato’s Republic (extracts from chapters 4 and 14).
N. Pappas, Plato and the Republic, chapters 9 and 12.
S. Halliwell, Aristotle’s Poetics.
S. Halliwell, Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus.
D. O’Meara, Plotinus; an Introduction to the Enneads.
(Further reading may be recommended during the course)