

POSC 252/350: HERODOTUS & THE ORIGIN OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Professor Laurence Cooper
Willis 416
x4111

Winter 2012
Office hours: MW3-4, F 10-12,
and by appt.

Purpose and Scope

Our goal in this course is to read and interpret one of the treasures of Western literature, Herodotus' *Histories*. Our presumption is that Herodotus has much to teach us about the fundamental issues of politics and indeed about life. Arguably his greatest theme is human nature and the ways in which it is shaped by and expresses itself through the varieties of regimes (or cultures). To discern what Herodotus wants to teach us will not be easy. He offers stories and observations rather than arguments. Rather, he offers stories and observations *as* arguments. He does occasionally offer what sound like official pronouncements or morals of his stories, but these pronouncements are relatively few and they don't necessarily express the heart of his thought. This may seem a strange way to write a book. Consider, though, whether this isn't in fact the most natural way to write a book, in one respect: In presenting us with tales rather than explicit arguments Herodotus does for us what life itself does for us. With one difference: he chooses and shapes his narratives in such a way as to help us see the heart of things, if only we know how to look. Fortunately, his primary intention is to teach us just that: to know how to look.

Course Requirements

By far the most important requirement is that you read all assigned passages **closely and before class**. The *Histories* is a very strange book. Part story-telling, part political analysis, part anthropological reportage, part geography, and other things besides, it fits into no conventional genre. Nor is the order of the book readily apparent. You must read without presupposing that you know what's coming or how it's coming; you must read with the greatest care and patience you can muster.

Students enrolled in POSC 350 will be asked to present a short paper (5 to 7 pages) on a selected portion of the text (chosen by me in accordance with your preferences, if possible) and to lead class discussion for a portion of that day's meeting. The short paper will count for 25% of your grade. A twenty-page seminar paper will count for 50% of your grade. The seminar paper will be due on Wednesday, March 14; paper topics must be approved by me by Monday, February 27 (preferably earlier). The remaining 25% of your grade will be based on class participation, including your class presentation: since this is a seminar, your active and sustained participation is expected.

Students enrolled in POSC 252 will be asked to write three 6-8 page papers, due on February 3, March 2, and March 14. You will also be asked to help lead one day's class discussion. Each paper will count for 25% of your grade. The remaining 25% of your grade will be based on class participation.

All papers should be submitted electronically <lcooper@carleton.edu>, either as Word attachments or as PDF files.

Academic Honesty

Strict standards of academic integrity will be upheld in this class. Your submission of written work means that your work is your own, that it is in accord with Carleton's regulations on academic integrity, and that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Be sure you are familiar with Carleton's principles and policies on Academic Honesty: if you haven't done so already, review the website found at <https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/>. I take academic honesty very seriously: students who are found to have violated these standards should expect severe sanctions.

Texts

This course has one assigned text and two recommended texts.

The assigned text is *The Landmark Herodotus*, ed. Robert Strassler. This volume includes a complete translation of the *Histories* plus numerous maps and other helpful ancillary material. Without the maps, you're bound to lose your way at times. *The Landmark Herodotus* is available at the bookstore.

In the view of various scholars, the translation included in *The Landmark Herodotus*, though adequate, does not do justice to Herodotus' style. Since style in Herodotus' case has something to do with substance, this is a bit of a loss for us. Therefore, I am additionally recommending an alternative translation, by David Grene. This book too is available for purchase at the bookstore.

There is a voluminous secondary literature on Herodotus. One book in particular is recommended: *Herodotean Inquiries*, by Seth Benardete (St. Augustine's Press). I will be reading and drawing on this book in class. This book is not stocked at the bookstore. However, it should be readily available from online booksellers if you'd like to buy it.

I will be happy to recommend additional secondary reading for those interested. However, the primary text is not only demanding, it's also long. So you should spend much time with Herodotus first and Benardete second before looking into additional resources.

Class Schedule

Note: the following schedule is *approximate*. We may depart from it if and when class discussion so requires. Numbers refer to book and chapter, respectively: i.e., 7.25 means book seven, chapter 25.

January 5: 1.1-1.28

January 10: 1. 29-1.95

January 12: No class

January 17: 1.96-1.216

January 19: 2.1-2.99

January 24: 2.100-2.182

January 26: 3.1-3.82

January 31: 3.83-3.160

February 2: 4.1-4.98

POSC 252—FIRST PAPER DUE FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 5:00 PM

February 7: 4.99-4.205

February 9: 5.1-5.77

February 14: 5.78-6.26

February 16: 6.27-6.140

February 21: 7.1-7.53

February 23: 7.54-7.107

POSC 252—SECOND PAPER DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 5:00

February 28: 7.108-7.201

March 1: 7.202-8.96

March 6: 8.97-9.43

March 8: 9.44-9.122

ALL STUDENTS—FINAL PAPER DUE MONDAY, MARCH 14, 2:30 PM