Course description
The course examines the historical and theoretical foundations of democracy. The underlying assumption is that political arrangements and institutions are the embodiment of political ideas and theories. The course will investigate the historical emergence of democracy as a form of government based on equality before the law and equal access to all citizens to the deliberative, decisional and control processes. The historical starting point is identified in Solon’s reforms in Athens which dramatically broke the hegemony of ancient nobility; we will then study Cleisthenes’ reforms and their redefinition of citizenry; in the context of the new political ideal of isonomia. We will proceed to examine the theoretical debate of the fifth century BCE, which includes Herodotus (III, 80-82), Thucydides and Protagoras. We will then examine the criticism levelled at democracy by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle: their thought enables us to compare the ancient idea of democracy to our own. Finally, we will study the Roman contribution to the theory of democracy, namely Cicero’s ideal of ‘republic’ and the role that ius, codified law, played in it.

Required readings:

Classes
September 12: Introduction: what is democracy? The historical background to the emergence of democracy. The role of tyranny in the establishment of democracy.
September 14: Solon and his reforms: their meaning and importance. Reading: Solon’s Poems.
September 26: Herodotus as defender of Pericles’ democratic regime. Reading: Herodotus V, 55-77.
October 5: Thucydides: the two meanings of democracy. Debate.
October 12: Protagoras in Plato’s Theaetetus. Reading: Plato, Theaetetus 165a-168c.
October 17: The apology of Protagoras in the Theaetetus. Reading: Plato, Theaetetus 165a-168c (First paper due in class or by email).
October 26: Plato: the decline of the perfect city and the forms of government. Reading: Republic Book 8.
October 31: Plato: why the perfect city is not democratic. Reading: Republic Book 9.
November 2: Plato: Athenian democracy as a bad form of government that works. The Old Oligarch.
November 7: Aristotle: the notion of polis as community and its origin. Reading: Politics book 1. (Second paper due in class or by email).
November 30: Cicero: the role of the laws. Reading: De legibus.
December 5: Cicero: the best form of government and the ideal republic. Reading: De legibus.
December 7: Review session. (Third paper due in class or by email).

Course evaluation.
Graduate students: One Final Paper. The topic of the paper is free provided it relates to the topics of the course.
Undergraduate students: 3 Papers (1st paper due: October 6; 2nd paper due: November 10; 3rd paper due: December 8), 1200-1500 words (5-6 pages) each.