

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE  
OUR PREMODERN HERITAGE – PART I  
PLATO, ARISTOTLE, AND CICERO

**Terms and concepts to know:**

Plato / Aristotle	Socrates and Socratic method
Athens and Sparta	<i>The Republic</i>
Idealism v. realism (materialism)	The 4 Cardinal Virtues
The “just” republic	Guardians / Auxiliaries / Citizens
States as “communities”	The “organic” state
Kingship / tyranny	Aristocracy / Oligarchy
Constitutional govt. / democracy	The “mixed” constitution
“Active” citizenship	Cicero

**Study and discussion questions:**

1. How does Heineman describe the city-states of classical Greece? How do you think this atmosphere contributed to the rise of philosophical thought?
2. Reflecting both Greek and Roman philosophical thought, De Zayas notes that “[g]rowing up means advancing from naïveté critical judgment, keeping an open mind, questioning more, discarding old canards, acknowledging that we have been mistaken here and there, recognizing incongruities and rejecting cognitive dissonance.” How often does America’s political class appear to be guided by these principles? If they are not, why do you think this has been the case?
3. Discuss Plato’s four “cardinal virtues.” Of the four, does the concept of justice appear the most problematic? What is justice and what does it entail?
4. Do you agree with Plato’s concept of justice and the “just man?” Does America resemble Plato’s “republic” in any way or should it if it does not?
5. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines the highest good as happiness; not the common view of happiness as consisting in wealth, power, of pleasure, but instead what he describes as “activity of soul in accordance with excellence” (for Aristotle, these “excellences” consist of moral [courage, justice, moderation] and intellectual [art, science, practical wisdom, abstract reasoning] which are acquired by learning). Discuss this notion and your opinions on it.
6. The core idea of Aristotle’s work *Politics*, is that humans are social by nature; in fact, he says anyone who lives without society “is either a beast or a god.” What do you think he means by this and do you agree with the statement?
7. Do you believe that works from political philosophers constitute the only real or important ideas for politics? What other sources of political wisdom exist?

**Readings:**

Heineman. *Political Science*, Chapter 3  
Stevenson. *Twelve Theories of Human Nature*, Chapters 4 and 5.

**Video:** *What is Democracy?*