

Everyone is most warmly welcome at this term's LL sub-faculty seminar, on Wednesdays 4.00-5:30 pm in the First Floor Seminar Room of the Ioannou Centre.

### **Elitism, rationality, and sociability: themes in the intellectual and literary history of the ancient Greek world**

This term's language and literature seminar investigates the relevance of intellectual history for the study of Classical literature and thought. What do classicists have to gain from intellectual historians and why have they generally preferred to define themselves as literary critics, philologists, historians of ancient philosophy or cultural historians rather than as intellectual historians specifically? Does intellectual history provide a useful set of tools for placing ancient texts in dialogue with one another? Or do the related fields of the history of knowledge, cultural history or the history of mentalities offer more promising alternatives? The texts through which we will pursue these methodological questions range from medical writing, historiography, philosophy and tragedy to Hellenistic epic, Archaic elegy, Aristophanic comedy and the poetry of Plato and Aristotle.

Over eight weeks, we will consider questions shared by Classical texts from a range of genres. What did it mean to claim to be *sophos*, and who could claim that title, and how? What role did the sites, real or imagined, in which intellectuals discussed and presented their ideas have in shaping the content of cultural production of the period? What code of ethics underlay practices of dialogue and debate, and how far does the presence or absence of women affect the character of the gatherings represented so vividly, for example, in the Platonic corpus? If the achievements of Classical literature and thought are to be explained by the prominence of public debate, how can we account for the role that elitism and a fascination with the enigmatic plays in many of the period's best-known works?

Greek culture has often been studied both for its supposed rationality and its brilliant depictions of the irrational. But whose rationality are we talking about? How far should the Classical period be seen as comparable to the Enlightenment, and what is at stake in that question for us? Moreover, what (if anything) links phenomena typically depicted as irrational such as magic, madness and (for some sceptical thinkers) belief in the gods? Does the rubric of rationality still have anything to offer?

Finally, we consider the fixity or otherwise of categories of intellectual in the Classical period. To what extent does a distinction between (broadly speaking) literary and scientific activity already exist, and how might our answer to that question influence our methodology in studying ancient texts?

The programme is as follows:

#### Week 1 (24 April): Introduction

1. Constanze Guthenke (Oxford) and Will Winning (Oxford) on Intellectual History and Classics across various national traditions
2. Oswyn Murray (Oxford), 'Greek Histories in Context'

#### Week 2 (1 May): Elitism: Who owns wisdom, and who and what is it for?

1. Open and closed societies: Solon 36 & Theognis 31-8, 53-68, 183-92, 1197-1202 – Sara de Martin (Oxford)
2. Laypersons, experts and charlatans: *On Ancient Medicine* (esp. I-II, IX, XV, XX) – Alex Johnston (Oxford)

Week 3 (8 May): Rationality: varieties of (dis)belief

1. Religion and conspiracy theories: Sisyphus fragment – John Henry (Oxford)
2. (Re-)imagining the gods: *Hercules Furens* 1340-6 and Xenophanes D7-D21 Laks-Most – Simona Thompson (Oxford)

Week 4 (15 May): (Ir)rationality: madness and magic

1. The madness of Cambyses: Herodotus 3.27-38; cf. 3.16-38 more generally – Charles Baker (Oxford)
2. The death of Talos: Apollonius, *Argonautica* 4.1629-88) – Tom Nelson (Oxford)

Week 5 (22 May): Sociability: dialogue and debate

1. Rachel Barney (Toronto): Protagoras and Plato
2. Melian dialogue: Thucydides 5.85-112 – Tim Rood (Oxford)

Week 6 (29 May): Sociability: space and gender

1. Inside and outside sites for intellectual exchange: *Protagoras* (309a-316a) + *Phaedrus* (227a-230e) – Constance Everett-Pite (Oxford)
2. Homosociality and gender in intellectual elite discourse: Xenophon *Symposium* (esp. 1.14, 2.1-4, 2.9-10, 2.17, 2.22, 4.62, 5.1ff., 8.42-3) – Holly Hunt (Oxford)

Week 7 (5 June): Elitism: leisure

1. Richard Hunter (Cambridge) – ‘Following Phaedrus: Pindar, Plato and the life of leisure’
2. Philodemus on leisure – Michael McOsker (UCL/Oxford)

Week 8 (12 June): Fixed intellectual identities? Poets and philosophers

1. Intellectuals on the comic stage: *Clouds* (*passim*, but esp. 133-220 & 358-424) – Megan Bowler (Oxford)
2. Philosophers writing poetry: Aristotle, *Hymn to Virtue* and Plato, *epigrams* – Davide Massimo (Nottingham)

Please do come if you can and stay for further discussion over post-talk drinks!

All the best

Bill Allan and Will Winning