

**ORIGINS OF DEMOCRACY: THE GAME**  
**Arts and Sciences 1138.\*\*, First-Year Seminar**  
**1 Semester-hour Credit**  
**Day/Time      Room**

**Instructor Name: Tom Hawkins**  
**e-mail: hawkins.312@osu.edu**

**Office Hours: TBA**

**Course Description**

We travel back in time to ancient Greece, where the foundations of democracy were laid, in order to share a role-playing experience built around key debates that would determine the future of democracy as a political theory and as a practical template for actual governance. As we work through this project together, we will have three primary aims:

- To learn the earliest history of democracy in ancient Greece (key players, debates, turning point, dates, etc.)
- To better understand the range of possible variations within the umbrella concept of democracy by studying a version of democracy quite different from the structures of democracy in the US.
- To become better informed citizens capable of analyzing, critiquing, and participating in political debates that are shaping our world and charting a path for our future.

To achieve these goals, we will follow the structure of a game created by the Reacting to the Past Consortium, which has designed a host of similar games for a huge range of key historical moments across the globe. The designers of *The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 BCE* assume that we have no prior experience of either ancient Greek history or role-playing games, and we will learn everything we need in due time. Our class is organized around four units. We begin with four preparatory sessions in which we will get to know each other, learn about the mechanics of the game, and study the relevant historical context of ancient Athens. Next, we have six weeks of the game itself, with topics and debates prepared in advance for us. After the game has concluded, we have three sessions that go beyond what the Reacting to the Past Consortium has designed. These sessions focus on debriefing and expanding upon our thinking about democracy with discrete readings about how ancient political theories inform and shape our contemporary realities. And finally, our final session will be built around a micro-game that will take us to a closely related Athenian prequel to our main game.

**Texts**

*The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 BCE*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, by J. Ober, N.J. Norman and M.C. Carnes. W.W. Norton and Co., 2015.

**Course Policies**

This class offers an unusual and gamified approach to studying history. Like any role-playing game, the full effect can only be achieved if everyone does their part. To that end, attendance and participation are critical. Everyone will be expected to:

- Attend every class session – our game requires all of us to be present and active
- Be ready to play your assigned role (some weeks will require more than others)

- Write two, two-page papers (your role will determine the due date and topic)
- Deliver two short speeches that will build on your paper and the will delivered on behalf of your party's agenda

### Assignments

Before and after the six sessions devoted to our game, assignments will consist of readings that we will discuss in class. There will be nothing to submit during these weeks, but you will be expected to participate actively.

Once we are into the game itself, everyone will be assigned to a faction, such as the Periclean Democrats or the Followers of Socrates. Your assignment to a faction will determine your political outlook for the game. Each week several students will be assigned a 2-page paper, and each student will write two such papers during the game. Your assignment might be to argue for or against a proposition such as this: *the democratic state has the right to impose its will – including anti-democratic policies – upon its weaker allies*, or to argue in favor of one side in of this question: *should laws and major decisions be made by the Assembly [i.e., assembly of all citizens] or by a smaller governing council?* Such topics are deeply relevant to our world today, but you will not build your case based on information from Fox, CNN, or any other modern media outlet but, rather, from our readings by ancient Greek historians and philosophers.

After you have composed such a paper, you will deliver an impromptu speech based on that paper in the appropriate class session. As a speaker is delivering such a speech, members of the speaker's faction can add supportive comments to further bolster their position.

### Grading

This course will use a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grade. A Satisfactory grade will be assigned to any student who achieves at least 75% of the following points.

Office Hr Meeting	08 points
Attendance:	42 points (3 points per session)
Papers:	20 points (10 each)
Speeches:	20 points (10 each)
Participation:	10 points

### Academic Misconduct

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

### Disability Services

The university strives to maintain a healthy and accessible environment to support student learning in and out of the classroom. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic, or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion.

If you are isolating while waiting for a COVID-19 test result, please let me know immediately. Those testing positive for COVID-19 should refer to the [Safe and Healthy Buckeyes site](#) for resources. Beyond five days of the required COVID-19 isolation period, I may rely on Student Life Disability Services to establish further reasonable accommodations. You can connect with them at [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); 614-292-3307; or [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu).

### **Religious Accommodations**

Ohio State has had a longstanding practice of making reasonable academic accommodations for students' religious beliefs and practices in accordance with applicable law. In 2023, Ohio State updated its practice to align with new state legislation. Under this new provision, students must be in early communication with their instructors regarding any known accommodation requests for religious beliefs and practices, providing notice of specific dates for which they request alternative accommodations within 14 days after the first instructional day of the course. Instructors in turn shall not question the sincerity of a student's religious or spiritual belief system in reviewing such requests and shall keep requests for accommodations confidential.

With sufficient notice, instructors will provide students with reasonable alternative accommodations with regard to examinations and other academic requirements with respect to students' sincerely held religious beliefs and practices by allowing up to three absences each semester for the student to attend or participate in religious activities. Examples of religious accommodations can include, but are not limited to, rescheduling an exam, altering the time of a student's presentation, allowing make-up assignments to substitute for missed class work, or flexibility in due dates or research responsibilities. If concerns arise about a requested accommodation, instructors are to consult their tenure initiating unit head for assistance.

A student's request for time off shall be provided if the student's sincerely held religious belief or practice severely affects the student's ability to take an exam or meet an academic requirement and the student has notified their instructor, in writing during the first 14 days after the course

begins, of the date of each absence. Although students are required to provide notice within the first 14 days after a course begins, instructors are strongly encouraged to work with the student to provide a reasonable accommodation if a request is made outside the notice period. A student may not be penalized for an absence approved under this policy.

If students have questions or disputes related to academic accommodations, they should contact their course instructor, and then their department or college office. For questions or to report discrimination or harassment based on religion, individuals should contact the **Office of Institutional Equity**.

### **Biographical Statement**

After brief careers as an engineer and a classical guitarist, Tom Hawkins joined the Classics Department at OSU in 2005, where he teaches undergraduate courses on ancient Greek myth and literature and their enduring legacies. He has written one book (and co-edited another) on aggressive, humorous, raunchy and satirical literature from ancient Greece and another on how Greco-Roman antiquity has been adapted by Haitian authors. He is currently working on a project focused on nostalgia – about Homer’s *Odyssey* in an era of climate change. In 2015 he was selected (with Ken Rinaldo, Art and Technology) as part of the Executive Dean’s Interdisciplinary Team Teaching Project to co-develop ‘Odysseus in the Oculus Rift’, and in 2016 he won a Ratner Distinguished Teaching Award.

### **Weekly Schedule**

#### **Week 1 – General introduction to The Game and our plan for the semester**

READ: Selections from Plato’s *Republic* (*The Threshold of Democracy*, 95-147)

DUE: \*\*\*

#### **Week 2 – Assignment of roles and jobs; logistics of the Game; Plato on *Dêmokratia***

READ: Selections from Plato’s *Republic* (*Threshold*, 147-199)

DUE: \*\*\*

#### **Week 3 – Historical Context for The Game**

READ: Introduction and Historical Background (*Threshold*, 2-52)

DUE: \*\*\*

#### **Week 4 – Ancient Athenian *Dêmokratia* – how it worked**

READ: Pericles’ ‘Funeral Oration’ (*Threshold*, 89-94)

DUE: \*\*\*

#### **Week 5 – Game Session 1: Reconciliation Agreement**

READ: Selection from Xenophon’s *Hellenica* (*Threshold*, 226-235)

DUE: \*\*\*

**Week 6 – Game Session 2: The Electorate**

READ: Selection from Plato's *Protagoras* (*Threshold*, 200-202; and review pp. 147-171)

DUE: \*\*\*

**Week 7 – Game Session 3: Social Welfare**

READ: Selection from Xenophon's *The Economist* (*Threshold*, 213-226)

DUE: \*\*\*

**Week 8 – Game Session 4: Trial Day**

READ: Plato's *Apology* (pdf on Carmen) and review *Threshold* 118-147

DUE: \*\*\*

**Week 9 – Game Session 5: Governance**

READ: Selection from Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus* (*Threshold*, 202-208)

DUE: \*\*\*

**Week 10 – Game Session 6: Remilitarization and the Restoration of the Athenian Empire**

READ: Selection from Plutarch's *Life of Cimon* (*Threshold*, 209-213)

DUE: \*\*\*

**Week 11 – Debriefing on The Game**

READ: '[Lessons of Demopolis](#)', by Josiah Ober

DUE: \*\*\*

**Week 12 – Rules or Citizens**

READ: '[Rules of Citizens](#)', by Melissa Lane

DUE: \*\*\*

**Week 13 – Opposites of Democracy**

READ: '[Why We Love Tyrants](#)', by David L. Smith, 2018 and '[The Lure of Fascism](#)' by  
Jonathon Wolff, 2020

DUE: \*\*\*

**Week 14 – Concluding Micro-Game: 'Athens Besieged'**

READ: Details TBA

DUE: \*\*\*