History 211: Suggested Paper Topics

Paper #1, Due February 18

2-3 pages, 10% of total grade

Remember that the purpose of this paper (and the second and third) is to craft a clear thesis or argument and to support it with evidence from the TWO primary sources you choose. The following topics are simply suggestions. Feel free to choose another issue around which to organize your comparison.

1. The nature of justice is a recurrent theme in the Greek texts we have read. Please discuss the way in which two texts deal with the topic of justice. To write a strong paper on this topic, you need to have a clear argument and also be precise about how each text is using the term “justice.”

2. The dead are an important presence in at least three of the texts we have read. Book 24 of the *Iliad*, “Pericles’ Funeral Oration,” and *Antigone* are all shaped by the presence of dead men and by the obligations the living owe to them. Discuss the role of the dead in two of these three texts. To what extent does concern for the dead really motivate the living in ancient Greek society and to what extent are the dead used as an excuse or pretext for the living to express their own values and priorities?

3. Class discussions have made it clear that the relative importance of the individual and of society was a recurrent problem and tension in texts written by the ancient Greeks. Discuss two works and the ways in which they deal with the role of the individual in ancient Greece.

4. Did those living in Golden Age Athens think they were living in the best society on earth or were they aware, even in Athens’ heyday, of tensions and problems within their society? Discuss with relation to two of the following: “Pericles’ Funeral Oration,” the Parthenon and *Antigone*.

5. **According to the values of ancient Athenian society**, was the death of Socrates necessary? In answering this question, be sure to discuss another primary source in addition to the *Apology*.

6. So far this semester, we have encountered two fictional female characters, Antigone and Lucretia. Both are presented as admirable. Both commit suicide to protect their honor and that of their families. Discuss the similarities and differences between them and what these suggest about ancient Athenian and Roman society. (Remember that *Antigone* was premiered in 442 BC and Livy’s *From the Founding of the City*, which includes “The Rape of Lucretia,” was written between 57 and 17 BC.)