

## Theoretical and Practical Wisdom in Classical Greek Thought

This panel explores the relationship between theoretical and practical wisdom in Classical political thought. Are the two complementary, or is the theoretical unable to come down to earth? The dichotomy between these two levels of wisdom remains a contested philosophical issue today. A study of the origins of this question can perhaps suggest a new starting point for intellectual discourse about the role of the philosopher in society. Our panel examines how several Classical authors—Aristotle, Herodotus, Xenophon, and Plato—responded to this issue.

Paper One, “Aristotle on *Nous*’s Role in Practical and Intellectual Capacities,” frames this question via Aristotle’s philosophy. It first focuses on what role intellectual activity plays in producing the best life, and then suggests a similarity between good intellectual activity and good practical activity, connecting the two as both representing the activity of *nous*.

Paper Two, “Herodotus’ Critique of Solon’s Political Theory,” examines Herodotus as an early commentator on the relationship between theoretical and practical wisdom in Book I of his *Histories*. The historian’s juxtaposition of a faction-torn Athens in the Peisistratus digression with discussion of Solon’s legislation and political theory in the Croesus-Solon *logos* suggests a divide present between Solon’s political theory and practice, implying a need for the two to be reconnected.

Paper Three, “Socrates on the *Cyropaedia*’s Pedagogy: Persia’s Zero Tolerance Education,” reads Xenophon’s description of the Persian state and its education system in the *Cyropaedia* in the light of Socrates’ statements about pedagogy in the *Memorabilia*. The Persian failure to fully implement the Socratic method they imitate produces a system of indoctrination rather than education weakening the Persian’s ability to defend themselves from harmful

ideologies. The collapse of the Persian republic emphasizes politicians' need for philosophical understanding.

Our final two papers present competing interpretations of Plato's depiction of politics and philosophy in the *Republic*.

Paper Four, "The *Republic*: Plato's Case Against Political Idealism," argues that Plato repeatedly undermines the *Republic's* surface assertion that the philosopher is the only fit ruler. Through examination of Socrates' statements, Plato's own life, and the presence and role of Homer in the text, this paper argues for the philosopher's engagement with society but refusal to participate in politics.

Paper Five, "Rereading Plato's *Republic* through Er: The Clash of the Political and the Theoretical" suggest as a solution to the puzzle of the myth of Er that this myth functions as a framing device for a second reading of the text. Socrates begins the *Republic* by recounting his own *katabasis*, which associates him with Er. Socrates-as-Er's subsequent rejection of Thrasymachus' ideas seems to recommend a sort of universal education similar to the practice of modern liberal democracies.