

**Political Studies Program, Summer 2012**  
**THE LIMITS OF POLITICS: BENEATH AND BEYOND**  
**Instructor: Amy Kass and Leon Kass**  
**Washington, D.C.**

We intend this week to look at politics from the perspective of what is, at first glance, *not* politics, both from beneath politics (the household or family) and from beyond it (the divine). We contend that these perspectives have much to contribute to politics: they not only illuminate politics by shining light from across its borders; they may also inform politics rightly considered.

We can distinguish three different senses of “*limits*” of politics: (a) Limits in the sense of “*boundaries*” and “*limitations*”: What are the boundaries of the political domain? What are the limitations of its authority? Does it hold sway, e.g., over birth and death, private life (the household, thought), or the divine? (b) Limits in the sense of “*sources*” and “*standards*”: What are the sources of political authority and legitimacy? What are the standards for its teachings and pronouncements? Do these come, for example, from nature, from human reason, or from God or gods? (c) Limits in the sense of “*goals*”: What is the purpose or aim of politics? As war is for the sake of peace, what is politics for: (i) Something beneath politics? (ii) Something beyond politics? (iii) For its own sake—e.g., for the sake of self-governance? More concretely: Is the purpose of politics the securing of individual rights and the safeguarding of private liberty? The promotion of virtue or the perfection of our humanity? Service to the divine, in part through the sanctification of human life and community? We submit that a proper understanding of politics will require attention to all three senses of limits: limitations of political authority, standards for judging political ways and teachings, goals toward which politics point.

To make things complicated and interesting, we will offer two perspectives on these matters, one from Greek tragedy, one from the (Hebrew) Bible. Both look at the city in relation to what is not the city. Yet they offer different views of man’s relation to nature and the divine, and profoundly different views of the divine’s relation to the human. They therefore point to different answers to our questions about limits. For the most part, we will come at these matters indirectly, concentrating instead on the texts themselves, read carefully for their own meaning. But we hope to show that a deeper understanding of politics—including American politics—requires thinking hard about the matters we will be examining this week.

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**Monday, July 16, 2012, 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm**

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**The Tragic View: “*The Double Frame of Tragedy: Human Being and Citizen*”**

Reading:

- *Antigone*, Sophocles, especially “Ode on Man” (lines 332-372)

Discussion Questions:

1. What is wrong with Babel, the universal city of man?

## **The Biblical View: “The Meaning of the City and the Trouble with Politics”**

### Reading:

- Genesis, paying special attention to Chapters 4 (Cain and Abel; the first city), 11:1-9 (Babel), and 18-19 (Sodom and Gomorrah). Pay special attention to Gen. 11:1-9 for today.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What are the essential elements of tragedy and the tragic view of human life?

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**Tuesday, July 17, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon**

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## **The Tragic View: “The Case For and Against Antigone”**

### Reading:

- *Antigone*, Sophocles, especially the Prologue (lines 1-99); the Second Episode (lines 373-581); and the Fourth Episode (lines 801-943).

### Discussion Questions:

1. What animates Antigone?
2. How does she understand the family?
3. How should we judge her?

## **The Biblical View: “Biblical Correctives: Founding through Enslavement, Deliverance, and Divine Covenant”**

### Reading:

- Read Exodus Chapters 1-19. Re-read Genesis 8:20-9:17, Genesis 12:1-7, and Genesis 15 and 17. Pay special attention to Exodus 13:17-19:9, especially Chapter 19:1-9 for today.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Why this path to people formation?
2. What is a covenant, and what difference does it make for politics?

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**Wednesday, July 18, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon**

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**The Tragic View: “The Case For and Against Antigone”**

Reading:

- *Antigone*, Sophocles, especially the Parodos (lines 100-161); the First Episode (lines 162-331); the Third Episode (lines 626-780). Review the Second Episode, as well.

Discussion Questions:

1. What animates Creon?
2. How does he understand the city?
3. How should we judge him?

**The Biblical View: “The Divine Lawgiver: Principles for a Better Polity”**

Reading:

- Finish Exodus. Pay special attention to Exodus 19 and (especially) Exodus 20 (the so-called “Ten Commandments”) for today.

Discussion Questions:

1. What’s new here?
2. What unifies the God-centered and the human-centered principles of the Decalogue?
3. What follows for the polity founded on such a set of principles?

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**Thursday, July 19, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon**

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**The Tragic View: “The Divine Messenger: Teiresias”**

Reading:

- *Antigone*, Sophocles, focus on the Fifth Episode (lines 988-1114); the Hyporchema (lines 1115-1151); and the Exodus (lines 1152-1352).

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Teiresias know?
2. Why does he have the effect that he does?

**The Biblical View: “The Character of the Divinely Given Law”**

Reading:

- Reread Exodus. Focus again on Exodus 20, plus Exodus 21-24 for today.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the overall tenor and drift of these ordinances?
2. What follows for the polity founded on these principles and laws?

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**Friday, July 20, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon**

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**The Tragic View: “The Teachings of Tragedy”**

Reading:

- *Antigone*, Sophocles. Re-read the “Ode on Man”

Discussion Questions:

1. What light does the Ode shed on the tragedy we have witnessed?
2. What is the purpose of tragic-drama?
3. What are its teachings for politics, and for human life generally?

**The Biblical View: “The Goal of Politics: Holiness”**

Reading:

- Exodus Chapters 24-40. Leviticus 18-19. Focus on Exodus 32-35; Leviticus 18-19 for today.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why the Tabernacle?
2. What is this summons to “holiness”?
3. What follows for the polity so summoned?