Critical Approaches to Classics

Week 2: Constanze Güthenke: Mods and Greats: A Very Short Introduction
This lecture will give a brief, critical introduction to the history of how Classics has been studied in Oxford, what changes and shifts of emphasis it has seen over the last two hundred years, why the degree course currently looks the way it does, and how institutional circumstances and the questions scholars ask have mutually shaped each other — and likely will continue to do so. There will be a Q&A session on Teams at Friday 12, week 2 (link to follow).

Week 4: Marchella Ward: The Case for Critical Classical Reception
Over the last few years there have been a number of calls to embrace 'critical classical reception', and to find ways of receiving the ancient past and studying its reception that do not neglect the role that ancient Greece and Rome have played in racist, colonial, Eurocentric, ableist, misogynist, heteronormative and other oppressive logics, both historical and actual. This lecture will give a brief introduction to this conversation and set out some tools for doing this work. There will be a Q&A session on Teams at Friday 12, week 4 (link to follow).

Week 6: Wolfgang de Melo: Language, Race, and Philology: Some Personal Reflections
This lecture will look at racism and comparative philology; we will focus on a few selected scholars and at how their views shaped the subject, or how the subject shaped their views. Given my own mixed background, I will also include some personal experiences and views. There will be a Q&A session on Teams at Friday 12, week 6: please email wolfgang.demelo@classics.ox.ac.uk for the link.

Week 8: Karen Margrethe Nielsen: Aristotle's Defence of Natural Slavery and its Legacy
Aristotle rejects the ‘conventionalist’ view of slavery attributed to the sophist Alcidamas. In his Messenian speech, Alcidamas is said to have argued that ‘the god has left everyone free; nature has made no one a slave’ (quoted in Rhetoric I 13). Instead, Aristotle maintains that some humans are incapable of leading a life in accord with their own decision (prohairesis), and so lack the psychological preconditions for self-governance. I examine Aristotle's argument in the Politics for the existence of 'natural slaves', and also explore how philosophical ideas that can be traced back to Aristotle played a role in shaping the modern world by providing ideological cover for conquest and enslavement of people that were said to fit Aristotle's description. There will not be a Q&A session this term but one may be arranged in Hilary Term if there is demand.