

POSC 160

***Political Philosophy***

Fall 2015

Class Hours: TTH: 1:15-3:00

Classroom: Weitz Center 233

Professor: Mihaela Czobor-Lupp

Office: Willis 418

Office Hours: **TTH: 3:00-5:00, W: 4:00-5:00 or by appointment**

**Course Description**

In this course we will explore and discuss ancient and modern responses to questions such as: What are the nature, the causes, and the effects of good government? How far are people able to influence the regimes that govern them? Can political philosophy help us identify the best form of government? What are the qualities of a good citizen? Who should rule? What are the qualities of a good ruler? How should political change occur: by reform or by revolution? Is democracy the best form of government? What is liberty? Why is liberty politically and morally relevant? What is the relationship between history and politics?

In answering these questions we will understand the differences between ancient and modern political philosophy. We will also understand how modern political philosophers differed from each other in the way they theorized about politics and its relationship with moral, socio-economic, and cultural aspects.

**Course objectives**

To understand what political philosophy is: what are its main concerns and its specific method;  
To grasp the foundations of Western political philosophy, as set by Greek political philosophy, particularly, by Plato and Aristotle;  
To learn about the specific concerns and ideas of ancient and, respectively, of modern political philosophy;  
To understand the differences (and the similarities) between ancient and modern political philosophy;  
To know some of the differences between modern approaches to politics;  
To become better readers, thinkers, speakers, and writers

**Achieving the Course Objectives:**

We will learn about the specific nature of political philosophy, particularly, of ancient and modern political philosophy by carefully and closely reading the following books:  
Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Richard W. Sterling and William C. Scott, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, ISBN: 9780393314677

Aristotle, *Politics*, translated and with an introduction, notes, and glossary by Carnes Lord, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984, ISBN: 9780226026695  
 Th. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, ISBN: 9780521567978  
 Im. Kant, *Political Writings*, translated by H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge University Press, 2000, ISBN: 9780521398374  
 J.S. Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, Oxford's World Classics, ISBN: 9780199535736  
 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 9780521585842

We will also watch two movies: *Agora* and *Leviathan*

**The schedule for the screenings that will take place at the Gould Library:**

10/03/2015 Sat	7:30 PM	Library 344	<b>Agora</b>
10/04/2015 Sun	7:30 PM	Library 344	<b>Agora</b>
10/10/2015 Sat	7:30 PM	Library 344	<b>Leviathan</b>
10/11/2015 Sun	7:30 PM	Library 344	<b>Leviathan</b>

**Course Requirements:**

**A. Four short (two page) essays**

**Advice:** This is a difficult exercise. It requires you to have very clearly understood the ideas that you are asked to write about and to expose them with a maximum degree of clarity and soundness of the argument. The goal of the exercise is to increase your ability to decide on which information is relevant for correctly answering the question(s) of the essay(s). This is an exercise in being able to judge, to be non-redundant, and crystal-clear in the exposition of your ideas. In order to write a good essay you need to produce at least two drafts, thus planning in advance would be a plus. Moreover, coming to talk with me during my office hours always pays off!

The topics for the essays (**10% each**):

**First Essay**

- 1) ***Reconstruct Plato's conception about the moral and political role of stories and myth in the just city. Then, provide one reason for which you think Plato is right and one reason for which you think he got it all wrong. (Hint: Reflect on the relationship between religion (faith) and politics and try to decide where you stand on this issue!)***  
**The essay is due on October 1 by 5 PM (e-mail copy)**

For a good essay you need to:

- (i) Reconstruct Plato's argument about the role of stories and myth in politics. An important part of this reconstruction is to explain the role that religion plays for Plato in politics, in general, and in a just society, in particular (in the best political regime);
- (ii) Provide a reason for which you agree with Plato. A good reason would be, for example, one that shows how Plato's argument seems to be confirmed by developments in contemporary politics;
- (iii) Provide a reason for which you disagree with Plato. A good reason would be, for example, one that shows the limitations in Plato's assumptions about good politics and about human nature.

### **Second essay**

- 2) *Present Aristotle's conception of the best form of government and then provide two reasons for which Aristotle disagrees with Plato on this issue.*

**The essay is due on October 15 by 5 PM (e-mail copy)**

For a good essay you need to:

- (i) Clearly explain why polity is the best form of government for Aristotle. Part of the task is to show what Aristotle means by the 'best' or 'ideal' political regime;
- (ii) Then, you need to identify the main differences between Plato and Aristotle regarding the meaning of 'the best political regime;'
- (iii) Finally, based on a successful presentation of (ii), present two reasons for which Aristotle rejects Plato's recommendation for the rule of the philosopher. Also, as a coda, you can briefly state Aristotle's position on the relationship between philosophy and politics.

### **Third Essay**

- 3) *Present Hobbes' argument about the state of nature and its consequences for the political arrangements that the English philosopher recommends. Then, relying on Kant's conception of the state of nature and history, as well as of the role of human reason and freedom in the advancement of human societies, show the limitations of Hobbes' view of both domestic and international politics.*

**The essay is due on October 28 (e-mail copy)**

For a good essay you need to:

This is a tougher essay to write!

- (i) First, you should summarize Hobbes' view of the state of nature. More precisely, you should present his view of human psychology and the consequences for human behavior in the absence of any form of authority. Then, based on these premises, show the conclusions Hobbes draws about the best political arrangements, both domestically and internationally;
- (ii) Second, summarize Kant's view of the state of nature (unsociable sociability) and history (how human societies develop throughout time and how civil society comes into

- being). Then, show why, in contrast with Hobbes, Kant does not abandon humans in the hands of nature. On the contrary, he thinks that reason has an important part to play in human affairs.
- (iii) This is the turning point of your essay. Now you need to talk about the different conceptions that Hobbes and Kant have on the nature of reason and on its role in human history and politics. Your essay needs to present and briefly contrast Hobbes' and Kant's views of reason and of its role in politics
- (iv) Based on a successful completion of (iii) show on which points Kant disagrees with Hobbes' recommendations for domestic and international political arrangements and explain why this is the case.

#### **Fourth Essay**

- 4) *In On Liberty, J. S. Mill strongly argues in favor of liberty (freedom of thought, discussion, and association), as well as, in favor of individuality and its development, in accordance with what he calls the Greek ideal of self-development. Identify and explain the philosophical and moral assumptions that ground Mill's argument. The essay is due on November 11 (in class)***

For a good essay you need to:

- (i) Clearly present Mill's argument in favor of liberty. An important part of this task is to show Mill's critical analysis of modern society and its dangers for individual freedom. Also, you should explain what kind of freedom Mill has in mind when he constructs his argument. Also, briefly state what Mill understands by the Greek ideal of self-development.
- (ii) Then, you need to move on a deeper level and show the philosophical and moral assumptions that underlie Mill's argument. Part of the task is to identify what is a philosophical assumption and what is a moral one in the argument that Mill makes, and then show how these assumptions help to better grasp his view of freedom and its connection to the Greek ideal of self-development.

#### **B. Final Take Home Exam (40%)**

- C. Active and informed class participation:** This includes: (i) attending classes; (ii) doing the readings for the day; and (iii) in class assignments that will test your degree of familiarization with and understanding of the reading that you were requested to prepare for the current day (10%).

#### **What is Expected from the Students?**

Students will be expected to read, think, form arguments and counter-arguments, understand the fundamental concepts, and participate (in a critical and creative manner) in class discussion. That means that students must keep up in their reading assignments and attend class regularly. Students must be fully prepared *at all times* to discuss the arguments and concepts from the

previous readings. The best students will be knowledgeable, critical but balanced in their critical assessments, and will develop coherent and sound arguments that they can defend in their essays, in their exams, and in class discussion.

### **Academic dishonesty:**

"All assignments, quizzes, and exams must be done on your own. Note that academic dishonesty includes not only cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism, but also includes helping other students commit acts of academic dishonesty by allowing them to obtain copies of your work. You are allowed to use the Web for reference purposes, but you may not copy material from any website or any other source without proper citations. In short, all submitted work must be your own.

Cases of academic dishonesty will be dealt with strictly. Each such case will be referred to the Academic Standing Committee via the Associate Dean of Students or the Associate Dean of the College. A formal finding of responsibility can result in disciplinary sanctions ranging from a censure and a warning to permanent dismissal in the case of repeated and serious offenses.

The academic penalty for a finding of responsibility can range from a grade of zero in the specific assignment to an F in this course."

### **SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS:**

#### **September 15:**

*Introduction: What is Political Philosophy? Why Study Political Philosophy? How to Study Political Philosophy? A lesson from Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Allegory of Good and Bad Government*

*Greek politics and philosophy*

*Plato and Socrates*

**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Book I

#### **September 17:**

*Politics and education: Justice in the soul and the city*

**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Books II and III, and IV

#### **September 22:**

*Political virtues and political life in the just city: property, family, and the education of the guardians*

*The argument for the rule of the philosopher*

**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Books V, VI, and VII

**September 24:**

*Plato's criticism of democracy*

*Myth, religion, and politics*

**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Books VIII, IX, and X

*Conclusions to Plato*

**September 29:**

*Aristotle: Introduction*

*The place and role of political partnership in the human life*

**Reading:** Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1

**October 1:**

*Citizenship, qualifications for citizenship: the difference between the good citizen and the good man*

*The nature of the political regime, types of political regimes, and the stability of political regimes*

**Reading:** Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 3, Chapters 1-13, 18, Book 4, Chapters 1-4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14

**October 6:**

*The best (practicable) political regime*

**Reading:** Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 4, Chapters 8, 9, 11, Book 5, chapters 1-3, 5-8, Book 7, chapters 1-3, 7, 13-15

Conclusions to Aristotle and discussion of the movie *Agora*

**October 8:**

*Introduction to Hobbes: Rethinking the foundations of politics*

*Speech, reason, and power*

**Reading:** Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, Part One, Chapters i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi, viii, x, and xi

**October 13:**

*The natural condition of man: natural law and natural rights*

**Reading:** Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part One, Chapters xiii, xiv, xv, and xvi

*The commonwealth*

*Conclusions to Hobbes and discussion of the Russian movie, *Leviathan**

**Reading:** Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part Two, Chapters xvii, xviii, xix, xxi

**October 15:**

*Introduction to Kant: Enlightenment and politics*

**Reading:** Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*

**October 20:**

*Human nature, history, and reason*

**Reading:** Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose, in Political Writings*

**No class on October 22!**

**October 27:**

*Morality and politics*

**Reading:** Kant, *On the Common Saying: 'This May Be True in Theory, But It Does Not Apply in Practice, in Political Writings*

**October 29:**

*Politics and reason*

*How to get there? Prophetic history and human freedom*

**Readings:** Kant, *The Contest of Faculties, in Political Writings* and Hermann Hesse, *Strange News from Another Planet*

Conclusions to Kant and Hobbes: Politics, violence, and war

**November 3:**

*Introduction to Mill: Rethinking liberalism*

*Why does liberty matter? What kind of liberty?*

**Reading:** J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapters One and Two

**November 5:**

*The Value of individuality and its development*

**Reading:** J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapters Three, Four, and Five

**November 10:**

*Overturning Platonism: What are the virtues of the philosopher and what role does he/she play in relationship to politics?*

*Nietzsche's criticism of modern culture: education and individuality*

**Reading:** Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, pages 127-161

**November 12:**

*The role of culture: its uses and abuses*

**Reading:** Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, pages 161-194

**November 17: *Final Review***