

POSC 160

***Political Philosophy***

Fall 2014

Class Hours: TTH: 3:10-4:55

Classroom: Weitz Center 133

Professor: Mihaela Czobor-Lupp

Office: Willis 418

Office Hours: **TTH: 2:00-3:00, 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  
*The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, ISBN: 9780393090406

### **Course Requirements:**

**Five short (two page) essays** on the following topics (**10% each**):

- 1) ***Reconstruct Plato's argument in favor of the philosopher's rule. Then, identify what you think might be the weakest point in his argument and help Plato defend himself against possible critics (make Plato's argument stronger).***

**The essay is due on September 30 (in class)**

For a good essay you need to:

- (i) Clearly explain why Plato thinks that philosophers are the best rulers (why philosophy is essential to politics);
- (ii) Identify a weak point in Plato's argument;
- (iii) Find a way to strengthen Plato's argument; that is, add a missing element that Plato (might have) failed to consider in the case he makes for philosophy (as both a body of knowledge and as a way of life) as being essential to politics.

- 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 14 (in class)**

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.

- 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 30 (in class)**

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.

- 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.

5) *The notion of alienation is central to Marx's criticism of capitalism, but also to his recommendations for the best society. Show how the notion of alienation reflects Marx's view of human nature and explain its role in understanding Marx's recommendations for the best society.*

**The essay is due on November 19 (at the end of the day)**

For a good essay you need to:

- (i) Define alienation.
- (ii) Present Marx's view of human nature and, consequently, of what it takes for human beings to achieve their nature
- (iii) Then, show how capitalism hampers this achievement and present Marx, thus eliminating the causes of human alienation,

**Final Take-Home Exam (40%)**

**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 16:**

*Introduction: What is Political Philosophy? Why Study Political Philosophy? How to Study Political Philosophy?*

*Greek politics and philosophy*

*Plato and Socrates: the issue of justice*

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

#### **September 18:**

*Justice in the soul and the city*

*Politics and education*

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

#### **September 23:**

*The education of the guardians*

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

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

#### **September 25:**

*The decay of the city: types of political regimes (the critique of democracy)*

*The enemies of justice: the tyrant and the poets (orators included)*

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

*Conclusions to Plato*

**September 30:**

*Aristotle; Introduction*

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

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1

**October 2:**

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

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 3, Chapters 1-13, 18

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

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

**October 7:**

*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*

**October 9:**

*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 14:**

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

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

*The commonwealth*

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

**No class on October 16**

**October 21:**

*Introduction to Kant*

*Enlightenment and politics*

*Human nature, history, and reason*

Reading: Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? And Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, in *Political Writings*

**October 23:**

*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 28:**

*Politics and reason*

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

*Reading: Kant, Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch and The Contest of Faculties, in Political Writings*

*Conclusions to Kant*

**October 30:**

*Introduction to Mill: Rethinking liberalism*

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

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

**November 4:**

*The Value of individuality and its development*

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

**November 6:**

*Introduction to Marx*

*Labor, alienation, and the power of money in bourgeois society*

*Reading: Marx, from The Marx-Engels Reader, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, pp. 70-81, 101-106*

**November 11:**

*Private property and communism*

*Reading: Marx, from The Marx-Engels Reader, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, pp 81- 93*

**November 18:**

*The end of politics*

*Reading: Marx, from The Marx-Engels Reader, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 473-491*

*Conclusions to Marx*

**November 19: Final review (time to be determined)**