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 about 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
Film Screenings:
Agora, Gould Library, Room 344, 7:30 PM, on October 1 and 2
Leviathan, Gould Library, Room 344, 7:30 PM, on October 8 and 9
Hannah Arendt, Gould Library, Room 344, 7:30 PM, on October 29 and 30

Course Requirements:

Four short essays (each, two double-spaced pages) on the following topics (12.50% each):

1) Reconstruct Plato’s argument about 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.
   The essay is due on September 26 by 4 PM (e-mail a copy to mlupp@carleton.edu)

For a good essay you need to:
(i) Identify as many premises of Plato’s argument as possible (by premises I mean the ideas that Plato starts from in order to reach his conclusions);
(ii) The deeper you dig into Plato’s premises, that is, the more you identify of the fundamental assumptions that Plato makes, the better, because it will show how well you have grasped Plato’s conception of politics and its relationship with philosophy and the nature of human beings;
(iii) To agree or reject with someone’s ideas are both forms of criticism because they entail the examination of the ideas/arguments at stake. A good criticism of Plato would require that you examine his ideas/arguments and see if you agree or disagree with them. To decide, you would have to somehow confront your own ideas/experiences/arguments with those of Plato.

2) Present Aristotle’s conception of the best form of government. Then provide two reasons for which you think Aristotle disagrees with Plato on this issue.
   The essay is due on October 7 by 4 PM (e-mail copy to mlupp@carleton.edu)

This is an exercise of comparing two thinkers. If we add your voice, then we have three minds conversing with each other as part of this game. Hence, the exercise is more complex. Part of the exercise is that you stage (make possible) the conversation of the two philosophers. To criticize
does not mean only to say ‘I disagree.’ It also means to be able to mediate conversations where people agree/disagree with each other in different ways and degrees (a messy situation, not as clear cut as in saying ‘I disagree, X is wrong’). For a successful staging of the encounter of different conceptions intense familiarization with both positions (in this case, Plato and Aristotle) is required, as well as a nuanced and subtle understanding of the similarities and differences between different thinkers and their arguments.

Hence, for a good essay you need to:

(i) To immerse yourself as deeply as you can in the thinking of both Plato and Aristotle, that is, to understand them, in a way, better than they understood themselves, without giving up the capacity to critically judge them.

(ii) Part of the task is to show what Aristotle means by the ‘best’ or ‘ideal’ political regime;

(iii) Then, taking part (ii) as a guide, you need to provide two reasons for which Aristotle does not accept Plato’s argument for the best political regime. Again, the trick here is to identify the basic premises of their arguments and see where the differences are.

3) Explain why although Kant shares at least one common premise with Hobbes (which, of course, you need to identify), he reaches very different conclusions from those of Hobbes. Then, in the second part of the essay clarify your own position in relationship with Hobbes’ and Kant’s views of the role of reason in human history and politics. That is, provide two reasons for which you agree with one thinker more than with the other.

The essay is due on October 28 by 4 PM (e-mail copy to mlupp@carleton.edu)

For a good essay you need to:

(i) Identify the premise (s) that Kant shares with Hobbes.

(ii) Explain why despite the fact that Kant shares some premises with Hobbes, he reaches different conclusions about politics and morality. More precisely, identify those ideas of Kant that account for the difference from Hobbes.

(iii) One of the ideas that differentiates Kant’s conception of politics from that of Hobbes is his view of reason, of its role in human history and politics. After you explain this difference (which you have already done by now in your essay), take one side on the issue of reason in politics (that of Hobbes or that of Kant) and explain (provide reasons) for which you agree with the thinker you decided to team with.

4) In On Liberty, J. S. Mill 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 the assumptions that ground Mill’s argument and take a position, that is, provide two reasons for which you agree or disagree with Mill.

The essay is due on November 11 by 4 PM (e-mail copy to mlupp@carleton.edu)

For a good essay you need to:

(i) Show why Mill thinks that a new theory of liberty is needed to account for the changes in modern society. An important part of this task is to reconstruct Mill’s critical analysis of modern society and its dangers for individual freedom.
(ii) Then, you need to move on a deeper level and show the assumptions that underlie Mill’s argument. For example, the assumptions Mill makes about human nature and about the nature of truth and its connection with politics.

(iii) After you have thus dismantled Mill’s argument, provide two reasons for which you think that his fears about the threats to freedom and individuality are still present or not in contemporary liberal-democratic societies.

Final Take Home Exam (40%) is due on Monday, November 21 by NOON (e-mail a copy to mlupp@carleton.edu) Please, do not forget to write your name on your exam and number your pages!

Active and informed class participation: This includes: (i) attending classes and (ii) doing the readings for the 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 13:**
*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 15:**
*Politics and education: Justice in the soul and the city*
**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Books II and III, and IV

**September 20:**
*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 22:**
*Political Regimes and Plato’s criticism of democracy*
*Plato on Myth, religion, and politics*
**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Books VIII, IX, and X

**September 27:**
*Conclusions to Plato and Introduction to Aristotle*
*The place and role of political partnership in the human life*
**Reading:** Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1

**September 29:**
*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 4:**
*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 6:
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 11:
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
Conclusions to Hobbes and discussion of the movie *Leviathan*

October 13:
Introduction to Kant: Enlightenment and politics
Reading: Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* in *Political Writings*

October 18:
Kant on Human nature, history, and reason
Reading: Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, in *Political Writings*

October 20: No Class. I will attend the Annual Conference of the Association for Political Theory where I will present a paper on Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault

October 25:
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 27:
Introduction to Mill: Rethinking liberalism
Why does liberty matter? What kind of liberty?
Reading: J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapters One and Two

November 1:
The Value of individuality and its development
Reading: J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapters Three, Four, and Five
Conclusions to Mill and discussion of the movie *Hannah Arendt*

November 3:
Introduction to Nietzsche: the criticism of Western philosophy and culture
Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 7-27
November 8:
Nietzsche on the uses of abuses of history
Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, 28-49

November 10:
The modern excess of historical education and its cultural and political dangers: Nietzsche’s recommendations
Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, 49-64
Conclusions to Nietzsche

November 15: Final Review