I. Purpose and Scope

In this course we will examine the development of Western political thought through a careful reading of several classic texts spanning more than two millennia. We will begin at the beginning (of political philosophy) – that is, with Socrates, as he is presented by both Plato and Aristophanes – and then consider ancient political philosophy as presented by Aristotle, its most straightforward practitioner. Notwithstanding the tremendous political and cultural changes of the intervening centuries, it was not until the appearance of Machiavelli that the philosophic reign of the ancient Greeks was decisively ended, and so we will proceed next to Machiavelli and Hobbes, founders of the modern age whose revolutionary works not only broke with the old but also sought – with success – to remake the world in the most concrete, practical terms. One concrete result of modern political philosophy was the appearance of such liberal regimes as our own, and in order to understand the nature of that regime and some of its key presuppositions we will turn next to Locke, whose influence on the American Declaration of Independence will quickly become apparent. The success of these early modern thinkers provoked a still ongoing series of critical reactions: perhaps the chief theme of late modern and post-modern political philosophy has been discontent with what the early moderns wrought, especially liberalism. Foremost among modernity’s and liberalism’s critics, in terms of the span of his legacy as well as the penetration of his analysis, was our next author, Rousseau, whose critique has exerted great influence on revolutionary thought on both the Left and the Right to the present day. But Rousseau’s influence was not limited to liberalism’s enemies. It is also seen in some of liberalism’s sober friends, such as Tocqueville. In Tocqueville we find a defender of liberalism who learned from liberalism’s critics, and a modern who was animated by insights of the ancients. He is therefore a fitting thinker with whom to conclude our survey.

Since the works to be read are often difficult and subtle, you should be sure to give them the time and attention they require. It is very important that you come to class prepared to discuss the assigned material. For additional help with the reading, you may consult the appropriate chapters of *History of Political Philosophy*, edited by Strauss and Cropsey, which has been placed on closed reserve in the library. I encourage you, however, to read the texts carefully on your own before consulting any secondary works.

II. Course Requirements

You should read the assigned texts **carefully and before class**. Grades will be based on two papers (each counting for 25% of your grade), a take-home final exam (40%), and class participation (10%). Paper assignments will be passed out over the course of the term. I may also give unannounced quizzes from time to time.
III. Academic Honesty

Strict standards of academic integrity will be upheld in this class. Your submission of written work means that your work is your own, that it is in accord with Carleton’s regulations on academic integrity, and that you have neither given nor received unauthorized aid. Be sure you are familiar with Carleton’s principles and policies on Academic Honesty: if you haven’t done so already, review the website found at https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/. I take academic honesty very seriously: students who are found to have violated these standards should expect severe sanctions.

IV. Assigned Texts

The following books are available for purchase at the bookstore:

Plato and Aristophanes, *Four Texts on Socrates* (trans. West and West)
Hobbes, *Leviathan*
Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*

V. Class Schedule

Note that this is an approximate schedule. We are likely to depart from it as class discussions, etc. so require. Adjustments will be announced in class, typically at the end of the class period.

January 4: Introduction

**PART ONE: ANCIENT POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

A. Politics and Unreason: The Problem of Socrates

January 6: Plato, *Apology of Socrates* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)

January 9: Aristophanes, *Clouds* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)

January 11: Plato, *Crito* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)

B. Reconciling Politics and Reason: Aristotle

January 13: No class

January 16: Aristotle, Book I, Chapters 1-2
January 18: Review previous reading

January 20: Aristotle, Book I, remainder

January 23: Aristotle, Book II, Chapters 1-5 and 7-8

January 25: Aristotle, Book III

January 27: Aristotle, Book IV, Chapters 1-12; Book V, Chapters 1-4, 8-9, 11-12; and Book VI, Chapter 2

January 30: Aristotle, Book VII

PART TWO: THE MODERN DEPARTURE

A. Machiavelli and the Launching of Modernity

February 1: Machiavelli, Dedicatory Letter and Chapters 1-11

February 3: Machiavelli, Chapters 12-19

February 6: Mid-term break

February 8: Machiavelli, Chapters 20-26

February 10: Review previous reading

B. Modern Liberalism

February 13: Hobbes, Introduction (his intro., not the editor’s) and Chapters 11 and 13-15

February 15: Hobbes, Chapters 17-18, 19 (first 7 paragraphs only), 21 and 29

February 17: Review Hobbes reading

February 20: Excerpts from Locke (TBA) and the American Declaration of Independence

PART THREE: SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT MODERNITY

A. Rousseau’s Radical Critique


February 24: Rousseau, Second Discourse, Part Two
February 27: Review Second Discourse

**B. Tocqueville’s Sympathetic Critique: Saving Liberal Democracy from Itself**

February 29: Tocqueville, pp. 1-15 and 34-44  
March 2: Tocqueville, pp. 102-46  
March 7: Tocqueville, pp. 297-319  
March 9: Conclusion

**VI. Due dates**

Papers should be submitted via email <lcooper@carleton.edu>, either as Word attachments or as PDF files.

First paper due Thursday, January 26, 5:00 PM.  
Second paper due Thursday, February 23, 5:00 PM  
Take-home final exam due Wednesday, March 14, 2:30 PM