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

- Understand what political philosophy is: what are its main concerns and its specific method.
- Grasp the foundations of Western political philosophy, as set by Greek political philosophy, particularly, by Plato and Aristotle.
- Learn about the specific concerns and ideas of ancient and, respectively, of modern political philosophy.
- Understand the differences (and the similarities) between ancient and modern political philosophy.
- Know some of the differences between modern approaches to politics;
- 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

**Course Requirements:**

Four short (two double-spaced pages) essays on the following topics:

1) *Reconstruct Plato’s argument in favor of the rule of the philosopher. 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 January 22 and it represents 10% of the final grade.

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, by adding a missing element that he might have failed to consider in the case he makes for philosophy (as both a body of knowledge and as a way of life) that is 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 February 3 and it represents 10% of the final grade.

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 briefly explain what the main differences are between Plato and Aristotle on 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 and for the utmost importance of philosophy to the life of the polis.

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 and on his conception 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 February 24 and it represents 12.50% of the final grade

For a good essay you need to:
(i) First, you should summarize Hobbes’ view of the state of nature. More precisely, you should present his view of human psychology, of the way human beings behave 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). However, in contrast with Hobbes, Kant does not abandon humans in the hand 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: the different conceptions that Hobbes and Kant have on the nature and role of reason and human history and politics. Your essay needs to present and briefly contrast at this point 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.

4) Present Burke’s and Kant’s arguments about the faults and merits of the French Revolution. Then, relying on Kant’s conception of history, show one limitation of Burke’s position on the French Revolution and, relying on Burke’s conception of history, show one limitation of Kant’s position on the French Revolution.

The essay is due on March 10 and it represents 12.50% of the final grade

For a good essay you need to:
(i) Summarize Burke’s argument against the French Revolution and Kant’s rather peculiar endorsement of the effects of the French Revolution on the public.
(ii) Then, relying on Burke’s conception of history, think of one important criticism that he would have formulated against Kant’s (partial) endorsement of the effects the French Revolution had on its contemporary public.
(iii) Finally, relying of Kant’s conception of (prophetic or universal) history, think of one important criticism that he would have made of Burke’s total or unqualified rejection of the effects of the French Revolution.

Final Take-Home Exam (45%): The exam will be posted on Moodle on Friday, March 13 at 10 AM and will be due on Sunday, March 15 at 5 PM.
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:

January 5:
Introduction: What is Political Philosophy? Why Study Political Philosophy? How to Study Political Philosophy?
January 7:
Greek politics and philosophy
Plato and Socrates
Justice in the soul and the city
**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Book I

January 9:
Politics, tradition, and education
**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Book II

January 12:
The origin of the city, the structure of the soul, and its virtues
**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Books III and IV

January 14:
The education of the guardians: philosophy and politics
**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Books V and VI

January 16:
The education of the philosopher and the benefits of his rule:
**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Book VII

January 19:
The decay of the city: types of political regimes (the critique of democracy)
**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Books VIII and IX

January 21:
Poets in politics
**Reading:** Plato, *Republic*, Book X
Conclusions to Plato and transition to Aristotle

January 23:
Aristotle: Introduction
The place and role of political partnership in the human life
**Reading:** Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I
January 26:
Citizens and political regimes, qualifications for citizenship: the difference between the good citizen and the good man
Reading: Aristotle, Politics, Book 3, Chapters 1-13, 18 and Book 4, Chapters 1-4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14

January 28:
The best (practicable) political regime
Reading: Aristotle, Politics, Book 4, Chapters 8, 9, 11, Book 5, chapters 1-3, 5-8,

January 30:
Conclusions to Aristotle
Reading: Aristotle, Politics, Book 7, chapters 1-3, 7, 13-15

February 2:
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

February 4:
The natural condition of man: natural law and natural rights
Reading: Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Part One, Chapters xiii, xiv, xv, and xvi

February 6:
The commonwealth
Reading: Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Part Two, Chapters xvii, xviii, xix, xxi

February 11: Introduction to Kant: Enlightenment and politics
Reading: Kant, An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? in Political Writings

February 13: Human nature, history, and reason
Reading: Kant, Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose, in Political Writings

February 16: 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, 61-73
February 18: Kant’s view of domestic and international government  
**Reading:** Kant, *On the Common Saying: ‘This May Be True in Theory, But It Does Not Apply in Practice, in Political Writings*, 73-93

February 20: Prophetic history and human freedom  
**Reading:** Kant, *The Contest of Faculties, in Political Writings*

February 23: Introduction to Burke: Burke and the main tenets of European Conservatism  
**Reading:** Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pages 85-122

February 25: Burke on politics and political change  
**Reading:** Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pages 123-145 and 149-154

February 27: Burke on corporate groups and their role in politics  
**Reading:** Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pages 183-200 and 242-306

March 2: Introduction to Nietzsche: the criticism of Western philosophy and culture  
**Reading:** Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 7-14

March 4: Nietzsche on the uses of abuses of history  
**Reading:** Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 14-27

March 6: The modern excess of historical education and its cultural and political dangers  
**Reading:** Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 28-49

March 9: Nietzsche’s recommendations  
**Reading:** Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 49-64

March 11: Final review