Course Description

In this course we will explore and discuss ancient and modern responses to questions such as: What is the relationship between philosophy and politics? What are the qualities of a good citizen? What is a political regime? Which is the best political regime? Who should rule? What are the qualities of a good ruler? What is political power? What is the nature of man and how does this influence the arrangement of government? What is liberty? What is authority? Are political revolutions necessary? What is the nature of political change? What is the nature of private property? How does the existence of private property and of class structure affect politics? Can politics be reinvented outside capitalism?

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 manner of answering them;
To grasp the foundations of Western political philosophy, the way they have been 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 the differences between modern approaches to politics;
To comprehend diverse modern arguments about the nature of man, the nature of government, the role and limits of political power, and about the relationship between socio-economic and political factors
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:


In this class we will also watch four movies:
The British movie *Agora* will provide us with the framework for discussing the merits and limits of the Greek conception of politics;
The French movie *Z* will provide us with the framework for discussing Machiavelli’s and Hobbes’ conceptions of political power and politics;
The French-Polish movie *Danton* will provide us with the framework for discussing Burke’s and Kant’s views of the French Revolution;
The American movie *New World* will provide us with the framework for discussing Locke’s and Marx’s conceptions of the relationship between private property and the values associated with it, and politics.

**Schedule for the movie projections:**

*Agora:* Thursday, 1/20, 7:10 PM, Library 344  
Sunday, 1/23, 7:10 PM, Library 344

*Z:*  
Sunday, 2/6, 7:10 PM, Library 344  
Tuesday, 2/8, 7:10 PM, Library 344

*Danton:* Thursday, 2/17, 7:10 PM, Library 344  
Sunday, 2/20, 7:10 PM, Library 344

*New World:* Tuesday, 3/1, 7:10 PM, Library 344  
Thursday, 3/3, 7:10 PM, Library 344
Course Requirements:

1. Five short (two page) essays on topics provided by the professor, at the end of each course section (9% each). First essay is due on January 17 (topic: Plato’s argument about who should rule); Second essay is due on January 26 (topic: Aristotle’s argument about the best political regime and its citizens); Third essay is due on February 11 (topic: Compare Machiavelli’s and Hobbes’ arguments about the nature of political power); Fourth essay is due on February 23 (topic: Imagine the kind of argument that Kant would have written as an answer to Burke’s criticism of the French Revolution); Fifth essay is due on March 7 (topic: Explain how Locke’s and Marx’s conceptions of labor and private property shape their vision of politics)

2. One final exam (40%)

3. Active and informed class participation (15%)

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) to in-class discussion. That means that students must keep up in their reading assignments, in watching the movies, 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 quizzes, 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 3: Introduction – What is political philosophy? Why study it?
Differences and similarities between ancient and modern political philosophy

Politics and Philosophy: Plato and Aristotle

Plato: Politics, Philosophy, and Rhetoric

January 5: Plato, background: the Sophists, Socrates, the Peloponnesian war, and the crisis of Athenian democracy

January 7: Power and justice: what defines real power?
Reading: Plato, Gorgias, 447a-465e

January 10: The best way of life: what defines good rule?
Reading: Plato, Gorgias, 466a-482c

January 12: The ideal ruler and the true art of politics: the aim of politics (Plato’s argument against the sophists)
Reading: Plato, Gorgias, 482d-527e

Aristotle: Politics, Philosophy, and Ethics

January 14: The place and role of political partnership in the human life
Reading: Aristotle, Politics, Book 1

January 17: Citizenship, qualifications for citizenship; the difference between citizen and the good man
Reading: Aristotle, Politics, Book 3, Chapters 1-13, 18

January 19: 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, Book 5, chapters 1-3, 5-8

January 21: The best (practicable) political regime
Reading: Aristotle, Politics, Book 4, Chapters 8, 9, 11, Book 7, chapters 1-3, 7, 13-15

January 24: Discussion: Agora: Contemplation versus action, reason versus emotion: the merits and the limits of the Greek conception of politics
Political Power and Human Desires: Machiavelli and Hobbes

Machiavelli and the New Prince

January 26: Politics and war
Reading: Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapters I-XIV

January 28: What makes a prince successful? Machiavelli’s conception of virtu and Fortuna
Reading: Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapters XV-XXVI

Hobbes about the Modern Foundations of Political Power

January 31: Speech, Reason, and Power
Reading: Hobbes, Leviathan, Introduction, Part One, Chapters iv, v, vi, viii, x, and xi

February 2: The natural condition of man: natural law and natural rights
Reading: Hobbes, Leviathan, Part One, Chapters xiii, xiv, xv, and xvi

February 4: The commonwealth
Reading: Hobbes, Leviathan, Part Two, Chapters xvii, xviii, xix, xxi, xxx, Part Four, Chapter xlvi

February 9: Discussion: Z: The argument for absolute power

The Dangers and the Promise of the French Revolution: Burke and Kant

Burke: The Destruction, Terror, and Violence of the French Revolution

February 11: Change and conservation
Reading: Burke 97-143, 275-284, 297-306

February 14: Power, liberty, and authority
Reading: Burke 145-154, 183-200, 204-214, 244-249, 252-259

Kant: The Ideal of the French Revolution and the Enthusiasm of the Public

February 16: Kant’s conception of history
Reading: Kant, Political Writings, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”

February 18: Prophetic history and the interpretation of the French Revolution
Reading: Kant, Political Writings, “The Contest of Faculties: A Renewed Attempt to Answer the Question: ’Is Human Race Continually Improving?’”

February 21: Discussion: Danton: Perspectives on the French Revolution: terror or freedom?
Capitalism, Private Property, and Politics: Locke and Marx

Locke: Private property, liberty, and the ends of government

February 23: The state of nature: liberty, reason, and acquisition
Reading: Locke, Two Treatises of Government, Book II, Chapter II, III, V, VI, VIII

February 25: The ends of government
Reading: Locke, Two Treatises of Government, Book II, Chapters IX-XIX

Marx: Private property, alienation, and the end of politics

February 28: Labor, alienation, and the power of money in bourgeois society
Reading: Marx, from The Marx-Engels Reader, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, pp. 70-81, 101-106

March 2: Private property and communism
Reading: Marx, from The Marx-Engels Reader, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, pp 81-93

March 4: The end of politics
Reading: Marx, from The Marx-Engels Reader, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 473-491

March 7: Discussion: New World: a discussion of the relationship between utopia and politics

March 9: Final Review