I. Purpose and Scope

In this course we will examine the development of Western political philosophy through a careful reading of several classic texts spanning more than two millennia. We will begin at the beginning—that is, with Socrates, as he is presented by both Plato and Aristophanes—and then consider ancient political science 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. 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. However, I encourage you to read the primary texts 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 should be available for purchase at the bookstore:

Plato and Aristophanes, *Four Texts on Socrates* (trans. West and West)
Hobbes, *Leviathan*

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.

March 26: Introduction

I. Ancient Political Philosophy

A. Politics and Unreason: The Problem of Socrates

March 28: Plato, *Apology of Socrates* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)

March 30: Aristophanes, *Clouds* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)

April 2: Plato, *Crito* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)

B. Reconciling Politics and Reason: Aristotle

April 4: Aristotle, Book One, chapters 1-2

April 6: Review previous reading

April 9: Aristotle, Book One, remainder

April 11: Aristotle, Book Two, chapters 1-5 and 7-8
II. The Modern Departure

A. Machiavelli and the Launching of Modernity

April 23: Machiavelli, Dedicatory Letter and chapters 1-11
April 25: Machiavelli, chapters 12-19
April 27: Machiavelli, chapters 20-26
April 30: Mid-term break.

May 2: Review previous reading

B. Hobbes and the Beginning of Modern Liberalism

May 4: Hobbes, Introduction (his intro., not the editor’s) and chapters 11 and 13-15
May 7: Hobbes, chapters 17-18, 19 (first 7 paragraphs only), 21 and 29
May 9: Review Hobbes reading
May 11: From Hobbes to us: no additional reading

III. Second Thoughts About Modernity

A. Rousseau’s Radical Critique

May 14: Rousseau, Second Discourse, Dedication to Geneva, Preface, and Part One
May 16: Rousseau, Second Discourse, Part Two
May 18: Review Second Discourse

B. Tocqueville’s Sympathetic Critique: Saving Liberal Democracy from Itself
May 21: Tocqueville, pp. 1-15 and 34-44

May 23: Tocqueville, pp. 102-46


May 28: Tocqueville, pp. 297-319

May 30: Conclusion

VI. Due dates

Papers should be submitted via email <lcooper@carleton.edu>, either as Word attachments or as PDF files. The take home final exam will need to be submitted by hand (instructions forthcoming).

First paper due Thursday, April 19, 5:00 PM
Second paper due Thursday, May 17, 5:00 PM
Take-home final exam due Monday, June 4, 9:30 PM