

POSC 160

Political Philosophy

Fall 2019

Class Hours: TTH: 1:15-3:00

Classroom: Weitz Center 233

Professor: Mihaela Czobor-Lupp

Office: Willis 418

Office Hours: **T: 3:15-5:00, Th: 3:15-4:30, or by appointment**

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

Aristotle, *Politics*, translated and with an introduction, notes, and glossary by Carnes Lord, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984, ISBN: 9780226026695
Th. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, ISBN: 9780521567978
Im. Kant, *Political Writings*, translated by H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge University Press, 2000, ISBN: 9780521398374
J.S. Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, Oxford's World Classics, ISBN: 9780199535736
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, Hackett Publishing Company, 1980, ISBN: 9780915144945

Film Screenings:

***Agora*, Gould Library, Room 344, 7:15-9:45 PM, on October 5 and Room 305, 7:15-9:45, on October 6.**

***Leviathan*, available via streaming at the following link:**

<http://search.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy.carleton.edu/view/work/3373163>, watch it at your own convenience, by October 15.

***1984*, Gould Library, Room 344, 7:15-9:30 PM, November 2 and Room 305, 7:15-9:45, on November 3.**

Course Requirements:

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

1) ***In The Republic, Plato argues that philosophy and the rule of philosophers are central to the arrangement of a just city. Do you agree with Plato? Provide at least two reasons for the position you choose to defend.***

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

For a good essay you need to:

- (i) Identify the premises of Plato's argument (by premises I mean the ideas that Plato starts from in order to reach his conclusions);
- (ii) The more you identify the fundamental assumptions of Plato's argument, the better, because it will show how well you read and understood Plato's dialogue (fundamental assumptions might refer to Plato's metaphysics and its relevance to politics, Plato's conception of human nature, Plato's view of the role of education in human life, etc.);
- (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) ***Reconstruct Aristotle's argument for the best form of government and then provide two reasons for which, you think, Aristotle's argument is different from that of Plato on the same issue (the best form of government).***

The essay is due on October 18, 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 some common ideas with Hobbes (which, of course, you need to identify), he reaches very different conclusions from those of Hobbes on the issue of internal (the preferred form of government) and international (relations among states) affairs. As a part of your explanation also provide two reasons for which you agree with one thinker more than with the other.***

The essay is due on November 1, 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 defense of liberty (freedom of thought, discussion, and association), which he thinks is under threat in modern societies. Do you agree with his argument about the importance of freedom in human life? Do you think Mill's argument is still relevant for the contemporary world? Provide at least two reasons as justification for your point/position.*

The essay is due on November 15, 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 become aware of 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. Then, starting from these assumptions try to understand why individual freedom is so important for Mill.
- (iii) After you have thus dismantled Mill's argument, provide one reason for which you think Mill is right (or wrong) about the tremendous importance of individual freedom and one reason for which you think Mill's fears about the threats to freedom and individuality are still present or not in contemporary liberal-democratic societies.

B. Active and informed class participation: This includes: (i) attending classes and (ii) doing the readings for the day (10%).

C. Final Take Home Exam (40%) will be posted on Moodle on Saturday, November 23 at 10 AM (Central Time) and will be due on Monday, November 25 by 5 PM (e-mail a copy to mlupp@carleton.edu). Please do not forget to write your name inside your exam document and number your pages!

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 17:

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 19:

Politics and education: Justice in the soul and the city

Reading: Plato, *Republic*, Books II and III, and IV

September 24:

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 26:

Political Regimes and Plato's criticism of democracy

Plato on Myth, religion, and politics

Reading: Plato, *Republic*, Books VIII, IX, and X

October 1:

Conclusions to Plato and Introduction to Aristotle

The place and role of political partnership in the human life

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1

October 3: *Citizenship*

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 3, Chapters 1-13, 18, Book 4, Chapters 1-4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, Book 5, chapters 1-3, 5-8, Book 7, chapters 1-3, 7, 13-15

October 8: *Political Regimes*

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 10: *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 15: *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 17: *Introduction to Kant: Enlightenment and politics*

Reading: Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* in *Political Writings*

October 22: *Kant on Human nature, history, and reason*

Reading: Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, in *Political Writings*

October 24: No class!

October 29: *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 31: *Introduction to Mill: Rethinking liberalism*

Why does liberty matter? What kind of liberty?

Reading: J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapters One and Two

November 5: *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 1984

November 7: *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 12: *Nietzsche on the uses of abuses of history*

Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 28-49

November 14: *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 19: *Final Review*

EVENT!

Wednesday, Oct. 30 at 7:00pm in Weitz 236: Wendy Brown, "Politics in Nihilistic Times: Thinking with Max Weber"--public lecture

--The lecture tackles topics in her new book (the rise of right-wing and populist politics, the resurgence of the politics of the patriarchal family and appeals to white supremacy and Christian nationalism, and resistance to a different, more just or equitable future) in conversation with Max Weber's claims about knowledge and politics in his two essays "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation."