

## POSC 160: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Professor Laurence Cooper  
Willis 416  
x4111

Spring 2021  
Office hours: by appt.

### 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—which means, with Socrates as he is presented by both Plato and Aristophanes—and then consider classical political philosophy as presented by Aristotle, whose *Politics* is the most complete and straightforward exercise in classical political philosophy.

Notwithstanding the enormous political and cultural changes of the intervening centuries—including the decline of the Greek polis, the rise and fall of Rome, and the ascendancy of Christianity—it was not until the appearance of Machiavelli early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the philosophic reign of the ancient Greeks was decisively undercut, and so we will proceed next to Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, founders of the modern age whose revolutionary works not only broke with the old but also sought—with considerable success—to remake the world in the most concrete, practical terms. The modern world has known many kinds of regimes, but all of these regimes have foundations in the philosophic revolution and reconstruction they these two thinkers helped bring about.

If Machiavelli and Hobbes and their heirs were successful in bringing about something new, they also provoked a series of powerful critical reactions. One could argue that the chief theme of late modern and post-modern political thought has been discontent with what the early moderns wrought, including liberalism and capitalism. Perhaps foremost among liberalism's and capitalism's critics, both in terms of the depths of his analysis and in terms of his influence on subsequent generations, was our next author, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau resurrected important features of ancient thought but also took modern political philosophy in an even more radical direction. That's one paradox about Rousseau. Here's another: Rousseau can rightly be seen as a major source, even the creator, of both the modern Left and the modern (nationalist) Right. But if Rousseau influenced liberalism's most formidable enemies, he also influenced some of liberalism's sober friends, one of whom was our final author, Alexis de 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. For these reasons he is a fitting thinker with whom to conclude the course.

### II. Course Requirements

All of the books that we're going to read in this course are demanding and subtle, even—perhaps *especially*—when they don't seem to be. Be sure to give them the time, the energy, and the patience that they deserve. If you do, you'll not only do well in the course, you'll also receive the beginning of the deeper education that all of our authors, whatever their differences, mean to offer you. You should always read the assigned texts **carefully** and **before class**. For additional

help with the reading, you may consult the appropriate chapters of *History of Political Philosophy*, edited by Strauss and Cropsey, which will be placed on closed reserve in the library. But you should never turn to Strauss and Cropsey or to any other secondary material until after you have carefully read the primary text.

Course grades will be based on two papers (each counting for 25% of your grade), a take-home final exam (40%), and class participation (10%).

Regarding class participation: I recognize that in a class that is both large and online, it can sometimes be difficult to participate in discussion as much as one would like. But this needn't be a problem. Class participation means engagement with the course material. A student's contributions to class discussion are one indication of engagement, but there are others, beginning with attendance and evidence that you've completed the reading ahead of class.

### **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**

All but one of the books assigned in this class has been translated into English from another language. The quality of translations varies greatly. If possible, therefore, you should purchase the translations I have chosen. If you already own different translations of any of these books, check with me to see whether they are reliable.

Because you will not be on campus during first week, I have posted the week's readings on Moodle.

The following books are available for purchase online and at the College Bookstore:

Plato and Aristophanes, *Four Texts on Socrates* (trans. West and West)  
Aristotle, *The Politics* (trans. Lord)  
Machiavelli, *The Prince* (trans. Mansfield)  
Hobbes, *Leviathan*  
Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses* (trans. Masters)  
Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (ed. Kessler, trans. Grant)

### **V. Class Schedule**

The schedule that appears below is only *approximate*. We are likely to depart from it as needed.

Adjustments will be announced in class, either at the end of the class period or via email or Moodle.

## **INTRODUCTION: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY—WHAT AND WHY?**

March 30: Plato, “Image of the Cave” (posted on Moodle)

### **PART ONE: CLASSICAL POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

#### **A. Politics, Reason, and Unreason: The Problem of Socrates**

April 1: Plato, *Apology of Socrates* (in *Four Texts on Socrates* and posted on Moodle)

April 6: reread *Apology* and read Aristophanes, *Clouds* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)

April 8: Plato, *Crito* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)

April 13: The Problem of Socrates—review all three previous readings

#### **B. Reconciling Politics and Reason: Aristotle**

April 15: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I (read chapters 1-2 at least twice)

April 20: Aristotle, Book II, chapters 1-5 and 7-8; and Book III, entire

April 22: Aristotle, Book IV, chapters 1-12; Book V, chapters 1-4, 8-9, 11-12; and Book VI, chapter 2

April 27: Aristotle, Book VII

### **PART TWO: MODERN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

#### **A. Machiavelli and the Launching of Modernity**

April 29: Machiavelli, Dedicatory Letter and Chapters 1-15

May 4: Machiavelli, Chapters 15-26

#### **B. The Foundations of Modern Liberalism**

May 6: Hobbes, Introduction (*his* intro., not the editor’s) and Chapters 11 and 13-15

May 11: Hobbes, Chapters 17-18, 19 (first 7 paragraphs only), 21 and 29

May 13: From Machiavelli and Hobbes to *us* (no additional reading)

### **PART THREE: SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT MODERNITY**

#### **A. Rousseau's Radical Critique**

May 18: Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, Dedication to Geneva, Preface, and Part One

May 20: Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, Part Two

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

May 25: Tocqueville, pp. 1-15, 34-44, and 102-46

May 27: Tocqueville, pp. 169-78, 201-214, 219-39, (recommended but not required: 239-48), 268-70 and 281-86 (recommended but not required: 270-81)

June 1: Tocqueville, pp. 297-319

#### **VI. Due dates**

I will provide suggested paper topics over the course of the term, but I encourage you to develop original topics according to your own interests. Papers should be submitted via email <lcooper@carleton.edu> as Word attachments.

First paper due Wednesday, April 28, 5:00 PM\*\*

Second paper due Monday, May 31, 5:00 PM\*\*

Take-home final exam due Monday, June 7, 9:30 PM

\*\*You are welcome to submit papers prior to the due dates. If you do so, you'll receive comments and grades early as well.