

POSC 160

Political Philosophy

Fall 2021

Class Hours: TTH: 10:10-11:55

Professor: Mihaela Czobor-Lupp

Zoom Office Hours: TTH 3:15- 5:15 PM

Course Description

The objective of the course is to 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*, Hackett Publishing House, 1994, ISBN: 0-87220-177-5
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

Course Requirements:

A. Four short essays (each 600 words) on the following topics (15% each):

- 1) *We are witnessing in the US today intense social turmoil due to racism and social injustice. Moreover, both in the US and in other parts of the world, there are individuals who protest against the demand to respect public protocols (such as wearing a mask) which would protect us all during the current COVID 19 pandemic, thus serving larger social goals and a common good. Given Plato's conception about the relationship between the city and the soul, his view of justice, and his criticism of democracy, how do you think he would judge the current situation and what recommendations do you think he would make?*
The essay is due on October 1, by 4 PM Central Time (email the paper to mlupp@carleton.edu in WORD FORMAT)
- 2) *In Politics, Aristotle argues that the best achievable form of government is one that allows for most individuals to live a happy life, which is mainly a life of moderation, as well as a life where individuals have the leisure to perfect their ability to deliberate, judge, and converse with each other about the meaning of what is right and wrong, what is just and unjust. Do you agree with Aristotle? Did modern societies live up to Aristotle's recommendation?*
The essay is due on October 20, by 4 PM Central Time (email the paper to mlupp@carleton.edu in WORD FORMAT)
- 3) *If we look at today's political and social realities, we see a divided world, of nationalism, racism, and xenophobia, a world where nation states and national interests won the day, while international organizations like The United Nations are powerless and ineffective. Was Kant a naïve philosopher when he argued in favor of a cosmopolitan order? Is his project achievable? Was then Hobbes right and does his realistic view, about the preeminence of self-interest, egoism, competition, and mistrust, win the day? How would you judge the current situation? With whom would you side, Kant, Hobbes, or both?*
The essay is due on October 29 by 4 PM Central Time (email the paper to mlupp@carleton.edu in WORD FORMAT)

- 4) *In On Liberty, J. S. Mill argues that in modern societies a new threat to individual freedom is taking shape. This new threat is not coming from the state, but from society. Mill calls it “the tyranny of the majority.” Do you think Mill’s argument is still relevant today?*

The essay is due on November 12 by 4 PM Central Time (email the paper to mlupp@carleton.edu in WORD FORMAT)

For a good essay you need to take the following elements into consideration:

- (i) Identify as many premises of the argument as possible (by premises I mean the ideas the thinker starts from to reach his conclusions).
- (ii) Dig as deep as possible into the argument of the philosopher. The deeper you dig into the premises of the argument, the better it is, because it will show how well you have grasped the specifics of that conception of politics, or the nature of human beings, etc.
- (iii) To agree with someone’s ideas or to reject them are both forms of criticism because they entail the examination of the ideas/arguments at stake. A good criticism would then require that you examine 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 the thinker that you are examining, whose ideas you are discussing.
- (iv) Comparing two thinkers is a more complex exercise. If we add your voice, then we have three minds conversing with each other as part of this game. 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, Hobbes and Kant) is required, as well as a nuanced and subtle understanding of the similarities and differences between different thinkers and their arguments. Ideas are not clearly separated from each other. They have family resemblances, like siblings do...
- (v) And only after you are sure that you fully understood where the thinker under discussion is coming from you can start playing with his ideas and see how they help us to better understand the world we live in and to better see its limitations. This is supposed to be a complex process, where ideas help us see our world in a critical light and our world and our values can help see the limitations of ideas that were formulated by thinker from the past. The past is not necessarily wrong, and we are necessarily right. Do not start from the assumption that you are much better than Plato simply because you live at the beginning of the 20th century and believe in individual freedom and are an emancipated and progressive person. Be subtle and complex in your thinking and generous in your intellectual opening.

- 5) **Active and informed class participation:** This includes: (i) attending classes and (ii) doing the readings for the day (5%).
- 6) **Final Take Home Exam (35%) will be posted on Moodle on Monday, November 22 at 10 AM (Central Time) and will be due on Wednesday, November 24 by 5 PM Central Time (email the exam to mlupp@carleton.edu in WORD FORMAT)**
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 counterarguments, 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 16:

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 21:

Politics and education: Justice in the soul and the city

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

September 23: *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 28:

Political Regimes and Plato's criticism of democracy

Plato on Myth, religion, and politics

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

September 30:

Conclusions to Plato and Introduction to Aristotle

The place and role of political partnership in the human life

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1

October 5:

Citizenship and Political regimes

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 3, Chapters 1-12, 13, 15, 17, and 18, Book 4, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14 and Book 7, Chapters 1-3 and 13-15

October 7: *Civil Strife and Stability - Conclusions to Aristotle*

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 5

October 12: *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 14: *The natural condition of man: natural law and natural rights – Conclusions to Aristotle*

Reading: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part One, Chapters xiii, xiv, xv, and xvi

October 19: *The commonwealth – Conclusions to Hobbes*

Reading: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part Two, Chapters xvii, xviii, xix, xxi

October 21: *Introduction to Kant: Enlightenment and politics*

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

October 23: *Kant on Human nature, history, and reason*

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

October 28: *Morality and politics – Conclusions to Kant*

Reading: Kant, *On the Common Saying: ‘This May Be True in Theory, But It Does Not Apply in Practice*, in *Political Writings*.

October 30: *Introduction to Mill: Rethinking liberalism*

Why does liberty matter? What kind of liberty?

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

November 2: *The Value of individuality and its development-Conclusion to Mill*

Reading: J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapters Three, Four, and Five

November 9: *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 11: NO CLASS

November 16: *Nietzsche on the uses of abuses of history*

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

November 18: *The modern excess of historical education and its cultural and political dangers: Nietzsche’s recommendations - Conclusions to Nietzsche*

Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 49-64
Conclusions to Nietzsche

Final Review