

Introduction to Political Philosophy

Professor Flagg Taylor
PL 102, Fall 2020
Ladd 306A, 580-5044
ftaylor@skidmore.edu

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to political philosophy. It will consist of a close reading of texts written by the most influential and penetrating political thinkers of the ancient, medieval, and modern world. We seek to find, through these texts, comprehensive and consistent answers to the question of human happiness and its relation to political life, justice, friendship, obligation, regimes, political and moral virtue or excellence, science, and religious faith. Confronting thinkers from classical antiquity through the twentieth century, we will examine the abiding questions that have guided political philosophers, and their radically different answers to those questions. This course serves as the foundation for all upper level courses in political philosophy. Students will learn how to read various texts carefully, to think, and to write well.

Required Texts:

Aristotle, *The Politics*, C. Lord trans. (Chicago)
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Hackett)
Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, H. Mansfield trans. (Chicago)
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Signet)
Plato, *The Republic*, A. Bloom trans. (Basic)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Major Political Writings*, J. Scott trans. (Chicago)
****Cheryl Glenn and Loretta Gray, *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook*, 17th edition (Wadsworth Cengage Learning)****

Course Outline:

Introduction to the Study of Political Philosophy

- A. Introduction to the course [Aug. 25]
- B. Leon Kass, "The Aims of Liberal Education: On Seeking Truth"; Zena Hitz, "Learning, Leisure, and Happiness" [Aug. 27]

II. Classical Political Philosophy

A. Plato

- *Republic*, Book I, pp. 3-13 [Sept. 1]
- *Republic*, Book I, pp. 13-34 [Sept. 3]
- *Republic*, Book II, pp. 35-45 [Sept. 8]
- *Republic*, Book VIII [Sept. 10]

B. Aristotle

- *Politics*, I.1-2 [Sept. 15]
- *Politics*, III.1-5 [Sept. 17]
- *Politics*, III.6-11 [Sept. 22]
- *Politics*, III.12-18 [Sept. 24]

II. Political Philosophy and Divine Revelation

A. Augustine

- *Confessions*, Book II (hand-out) [Sept. 29]
- *City of God*, Book XIX (hand-out) [Oct. 1]

III. The Modern Turn

A. Machiavelli

- Pierre Manent, “Europe and the Theologico-Political Problem” (hand-out) [Oct. 6]
- *The Prince*, chs. 1-8 [Oct. 6]
- *The Prince*, chs. 9-15 [Oct. 8]
- *The Prince*, chs. 16-26 [Oct. 13]

B. Locke

- *Second Treatise*, chs. 1-8 [Oct. 15]
- *Second Treatise*, chs. 9-14 [Oct. 20]
- *Second Treatise*, chs. 15-19 [Oct. 22]

IV. The Modern Turn Debated

A. Rousseau

- *Second Discourse*, Preface, Part I (through p. 75) [Oct. 27]
- *Second Discourse* Part I (cont., pp. 75-90) [Oct. 29]
- *Second Discourse* Part II [Nov. 3]

B. Marx and Engels

- *The Communist Manifesto*, pt. I [Nov. 5]
- *The Communist Manifesto*, pt. II [Nov. 10]

V. Concluding Reflections

A. Hannah Arendt, “Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government” (hand-out) [Nov. 12]

B. Abraham Lincoln, *Lyceum Address* (hand-out) [Nov. 17]

C. Martin Luther King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (hand-out) [Nov. 17]

Course Requirements:

Quizzes, 5%

Response Papers, 10%

Essay #1, 25%

Essay #2, 30%

Final Exam, 30%

Response Papers:

These are short 1-2 papers where you lay out the argument of the assigned text or analyze and elaborate on a portion of that text. You must complete 5 of these over the course of the semester—no more than one on a single thinker.

Essays:

These are formal essays where you are expected to have an identifiable thesis with arguments to support it. They should demonstrate a command of the text at hand, and a thoughtfulness about the claims made therein. I will hand out topics approximately two weeks before the essays are due. These are not research papers and you are not required to read any secondary literature. I want you to engage these authors directly.

Final Exam:

This will be a comprehensive take-home exam (open book and open note). You will be asked to complete it in 24 hours.

General Expectations:

You are expected to read the assignments carefully and reflectively, remaining open to the possibility that what you are reading is right. Your first duty as an attentive reader is to understand what is being said. This means grasping the argument of the author—identifying central claims and seeing how these claims are supported. When you encounter something you strongly disagree with, make sure you first understand the argument. You are expected to give reasons for your opinions.

You will be attentive in class and always display the demeanor of one who is interested in the material and respectful of others. You will take your share of responsibility for the quality of class time, coming prepared to discuss the assignments thoughtfully.

No laptops are permitted in class unless you have a medical problem that prevents you from taking notes by hand.

Attendance:

My normal policy is 2 absences no questions asked but for each subsequent absence you get points taken off your final grade. I will be more flexible this semester for obvious reasons. Please just let me know ahead of time if you are not feeling well and therefore won't be in class.

