

History of Political Theory I: Classical Sources of Political Philosophy

Fall-2017

Instructor: Ashraf El Sherif

MR- 11:30-12:45- WALEED C149

Office hours: MR 2-3:30

RM 2026

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*I keep six honest serving men (They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When And How and
Where and Who.*

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is the first of two historical introductions to political thinking in the Western tradition. It begins with a consideration of the meaning of political philosophy –ancient and modern-, and moves on to examine how political life was fundamentally different in ancient Greece as well as the nature of the social, political and economic context within which Greek political thought developed through the writings of one classical and one modern political historian. After this introduction to “the world of the Polis,” the course directs itself to the primary political writings of Plato and Aristotle and to engagement with their systems of politics, ethics, philosophy and morality. The classical period will commence with the Roman Empire and its systems of politics and philosophy. The second part of the course will cover the medieval period in the wake of the medieval Christian political thought. To be highlighted will be the parallel developments in political and social thought in a different civilizational tradition that is the Muslim World and its political philosophy and theories. Finally, the course will commence with the dawn of modern political thought and the writings of Machiavelli and Hobbes as two of its early paragons.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY

A sage (Karl Jaspers) once said: “University life is no less dependent on students than on professors. The best professors flounder helplessly at a school where the student body is unfit. Hence, it is all up to the young people who are supposedly entitled to study. They must show themselves worthy of this privilege to the best of their ability.”

This course has been organized on the premise that you are worthy of this privilege. The success of this course depends entirely on your continued and sustained participation. Thus, I ask that you be agile participants and intervene as often as possible in class discussion by posing questions and comments or even disagreements (based on additional or alternative readings or personal experiences).

In this course you will be exposed to a wide range of ideas, norms, preferences, and values different from your own. This exposure may force you to question, rethink (and if needed, abandon) your present "understanding" of your own political life. Who knows by the end of the course you might feel that you have taken part in a serendipitous voyage of discovery!

The readings will introduce the students to some of the more important scholarship on the subject, and form the springboard for interactive class discussions. Please do not hesitate to drop by my office should you have problems with the course, or just want to talk. My office hours provide us with an opportunity to get to know each other better. So, it is incumbent upon you to take advantage of my office hours to pursue interests and concerns not raised in class. Students who may need special consideration because of any sort of disability should make an appointment to see me in private at the beginning of the semester.

ACADEMIC QUALITY

In addition to the above issue, my main priority now is to promote academic quality and make sure that students who come out of my classes meet the highest educational standards. This is a shared responsibility of the instructor and the students. My part is to come to class prepared, update my lectures, be involved, address your questions, and be available during office hours. Your part is to come to class on time, do the readings in advance, raise questions and participate effectively in class discussions, turn in your assignments on time, and be involved. Let us all strive to fight mediocrity (According to Oxford Dictionary, a mediocre person is: indifferent, ordinary, common place, average, medium, third-rate, inferior, and poor).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

A) Attendance and Participation	10%
B) Midterm	20%
C) Reaction Papers	20% (10% x 2)
D) Final paper	20% (draft 10% + final 10%)
E) Final exam	30%

A) Participation: In view of the fact that my presentations will complement rather than reiterate the assigned readings, it is expected that you attend *all* class meetings. You will be held responsible for all the material we cover in readings, lectures, and films. Attendance is also mandatory for all exams, and make-ups will be given only for bona fide emergencies (i.e., severe illness documented by a physician). Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. If, for unavoidable reasons, you are unable to make it to a class on time, you are welcome to join us when you are able. However, students who arrive after attendance has been taken will not be

counted as present. Chronic lateness and absence is unacceptable. **Absences will result in a lowered participation grade.** In addition to being physically present, I expect you to be mentally present as well! As such, you should complete all assigned readings *before* each class meeting, so that you are familiar with the concepts, facts, theories, and controversies with which we are dealing. All students should be aware that participation is heavily weighted and is meant to stimulate lively classroom discussion. There is no correct interpretation or opinion about a given text, but there are degrees of value for argumentation and reasonability. Students are therefore highly encouraged to voice their opinions and to offer challenging commentary in class, but to do so with an emphasis upon justification, coherence and reasoning. Excellent participation means consistent and ongoing contribution to our discussion and analysis of the texts.

C) Course Papers:

i) **2 Reaction papers:** Each student will be responsible for writing two reaction papers. In each of these papers, students will be asked to respond to something that they found particularly compelling in one of the readings. They should choose a contentious issue or set of issues in one particular reading, take a position on these issues, provide argumentation in support and analyze this reading's take on the issue.. **IMPORTANT:**

1st reaction paper deadline: Oct. 26th

2nd reaction paper deadline: December 7th

ii) **Final paper:** Students should formulate a paper topic as early as possible. There is an opportunity for you to present and defend a thesis in an argumentative paper format using textual support. Students are encouraged to put different authors in comparative perspective or take a single philosopher as a case-study. Creativity is welcomed. The final paper is made up of two parts:

a) **Draft:** Students will be responsible for submitting a draft version 1 month prior to the final deadline. This draft will be worth 10% and will provide you with feedback useful to the completion of the final paper. The draft submission should be 6-10 pages long (300 words/page).

Draft submission deadline: Nov. 27th

b) **Final Paper Submission:** After receiving feedback on their draft submission, students will have a chance to revise and develop their papers. Given the feedback on all previous assignments, it will be assumed that students will have a full understanding of the demands of the argumentative paper form and will be graded accordingly. Final submission length is 10-15 pages (300 words/page).

Final submission deadline: Dec 11th

Should you have any concerns whatsoever regarding academic writing and the development of an argumentative paper, I strongly suggest you visit the AUC writing center where you can drop-in for feedback and support on your papers before, during or after the writing process. The writing center also has an excellent, step by step guide to academic paper writing. Also, the course's teaching assistant is authorized to help you on this process. Papers which do not adhere to the argumentative format will not merit higher than a satisfactory grade.

Course basic readings:

Plato, The Republic

Plato, Dialogues

Aristotle, Politics

Aristotle, Nicomachean ethics

St. Augustine, City of God

Al-Farabi, the ideal city

Al-Mawardi, Sultanic rules

Ibn Khaldoun, al-Muqaddima

Corbin, Henry, History of Islamic philosophy

Rosenthal, Erwin, Political thought in Medieval Islam

Machiavelli, The Prince

Thomas Hobbes, the Leviathan

Other readings TBA

Course Outline:

Part I : Prologue

September 11th - 14th

What is political philosophy?

Readings:

Leo Strauss, What is political philosophy? The Journal of Politics, Vol. 19, No. 3. (Aug., 1957), pp. 343-368.

Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics" Social Research, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Spring 1990)

Recommended:

Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?" Between Past and Future
_____, "What is freedom?", Between Past and Future

September 18th

The Ancient World , the Polis and the pre-Socratic political philosophy

Readings:

Benjamin. Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns"
<http://www.uark.edu/depts/comminfo/cambridge/ancients.html>

George Sabine, A History of Political Theory, chapters one and two

Chester Starr, "Crystallization of the Polis" 34-51, "Patriotism and Divisiveness", 52-66 from Individual and Community.

Chester Starr, "Upheaval and Reform" 67-86, "The Polis World in 500BC" 87-100 from Individual and Community.

Part II: Classical Greek political Philosophy

September 25th

Plato, Republic, BK I

Plato, Apology of Socrates

Plato, Meno dialogue

Plato, Theaetetus dialogue

September-28th

Plato, Republic, BK II

Plato, Crito dialogue

October 2nd

Plato, Republic, BK III

Plato, Gorgias dialogue

Plato, Protagoras dialogue

Plato, Sophist dialogue

October 5th

Plato, Republic, BK IV

Plato, Gorgias dialogue

Plato, Laches dialogue

October -9th

Plato, Republic, BK V

October 12th

Plato, Republic, BK VI

Plato, Statesman dialogue

October 16th

Plato, Republic, BK VII and VIII

Plato, Parmenides dialogue

Plato, Laws dialogue

October 19th

Aristotle: Politics, Book I and II

October 23rd -26th

Aristotle, Politics, Book III and Book IV

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book V, VI and VII

October 30th

Theory of the Universal Community under the Roman empire: Cicero and Seneca

Readings

TBA

Part II: Medieval Christian and Muslim Political and Social Thought

November 2nd

St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Dante

Readings:

Universitas Hominum: Thomas Aquinas: Selected Political Writings TBA

Other readings TBA

November 6th – 13th

Muslim political lexicon

Readings:

Lewis, Bernard.. The Political Language of Islam

Watt, Montgomery, Islamic Political thought

Crone, Patricia, Medieval Islamic political thought

Ahmed, Shahab. What is Islam?

Other readings TBA

November 16th- December 4th

Muslim political philosophy: Mutazalites, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazzali, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khaldoun, al-Juwaini and Ibn Taymiya

Readings:

Rosenthal, Erwin I., Political thought in Medieval Islam, chapters 2-9

Corbin, Henry, History of Islamic philosophy, chapter 3

Mahdi, Muhsin, Al-Farabi and the Foundation of Islamic political philosophy, chapters 1-7

Watt, Montgomery W, "The Political Attitudes of the Mu'tazilah." The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland No. 1/2 (Apr., 1963), pp. 38-57

Abdel-Meguid, Ahmed. Political realism in the Naturalistic-Psychological roots of Averroës' Critique of Plato's theory of political constitutions in the Republic. Matter and Form from Natural Science to Political Philosophy, ed. Ann Ward. Lanham: Lexington Press, 2009. pp. 71-84.

Abdel-Meguid, Ahmed, "Reversing Schmitt: The Common-Sense Sovereign and the Peculiarity of the Islamic state of Exception in al-Juwaini's political theology", unpublished manuscript

Al-Farabi, Selections from the ideal city

Al-Mawardi, Selections from the Sultanic rules

Ibn-Qutaiba, Selections from the Imamate and politics

Ibn-Khaldoun, Selections from al-Muqaddima

Ibn Rushd, Selections from Fasl al-Maqal

December 7th

Shiite Muslim political philosophy

Corbin, Henry, History of Islamic philosophy, chapter 2

December 11th

The advent of the modern age

Machiavelli, Nicola, Selections from The Prince

Hobbes, Thomas, Selections from The Leviathan

December 14th

Conclusions and final insights