

Ancient Political Theory

POL-390-1

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Cornell Social Sciences Hall 251

Office Hours: Wed, 5-6

Class 2:00:00 - 3:15:00 TR Cornell Hall 229

This course will review the political and ethical thought of the most important classical thinkers living in ancient democratic Athens, the late Roman republic/empire, and early Christianity. We will study basic questions of political theory related to the justification of political authority, the role of the rule of law, the meaning of citizenship, and ultimately, the requirements of human virtue and morality. We will learn that for many of the philosophers under study, the art of governing a city adequately was inextricably linked to virtue of character and wisdom. These thinkers engaged in the complex analysis of different forms of government such as democracy, tyranny, and aristocracy, and provided elaborated reasons why one or the other were to be preferred in the name of “the public interest.” They also studied the factors fostering regime change and how those conditions could be controlled. Despite the fact that many of the approaches we will examine rested on normative premises that seem outdated in important respects today, they offer principles that serve as foundations for our modern institutions. Thus, the role of law, the importance of justice, and the duty to rule with the common interest in mind, for example, are all legacies of the classic tradition. The study of ancient political theory is fundamental to understanding not only contemporary political theory, but also the normative justifications behind the functioning of institutions and governments in current times.

The readings for this class may prove dense and suffused with conceptual and theoretical abstractions. For this reason, it is advised that you take the necessary time to do them, perfunctory reading will not be sufficient to pass your exams (besides representing a waste of time for you). Additionally, the participation requisite (see below) requires that you are familiar with the arguments to be discussed every time the class meets.

Requirements: one midterm exam, one final exam (**cumulative**), and a discussion paper of 4-6 pages. The midterm will be worth 20% of the final grade, the final will be worth 35%. The paper will be worth 30%, and your participation will be worth 15%. (your participation grade includes daily class-room discussion and your role as discussion leader, see below). In the paper you should depart from one theoretical problem or question studied in this course and apply it to some contemporary, or historical, issue so as to provide insights on how political theory bears on current, or past, political and social phenomena. You are encouraged to come to my office hours to discuss your ideas about the paper. The papers will be presented in class so that the student can receive abundant feedback. Presentation will count towards your participation grade. Examples of possible topics are 1) an analysis of the U.S. electoral college in the light of Plato's view (as presented in the *Republic*) that only the best and wisest should rule, 2) an analysis of the role of the U.S. supreme court in the backdrop of Aristotle's advocacy for the rule of law over the rule of men, 3) an analysis of international sovereignty (European Union, for example) in the backdrop of Cicero's reflection on the requirements of citizenship, 4) an analysis of the principle of separation between State and Church in the context of St. Agustin's arguments in *The City of God*, to take a few. More guidance as to possible topics will be provided in due course.

Discussion Leaders:

Each week, a pair of students will be responsible for helping to lead our discussion. As discussion leader, your job will be to draw from the week's readings to pose interesting questions and offer comments and interpretations. Everyone must be a discussion leader at least once. The message boards on Foxlink and Blackboard are also a good medium for conversing with me and with your fellow classmates if you have queries or contributions between class meetings.

Academic Integrity:

You must become familiar with Rollins' Academic Honor Code. You can find the code online at: http://www.rollins.edu/studentrecords/main/academic_regulations.html
Please read the honor pledge and learn what constitutes an honor code violation, especially as regards cheating and plagiarism. Plagiarism is intellectual theft and you must know what constitutes it to avoid it. Failing to cite sources or incorrectly citing your sources constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism can be unintentional, but it should be punished regardless of intention since it devalues academic quality, and irrevocably damages the credibility of the individual responsible for it. Because of this, please refrain from committing it, by getting familiarized with the honor code.

Required books (available at the college bookstore, although other editions are acceptable)

Cicero, *On the Commonwealth & On the Laws*

Plato, *Five Dialogues*

Plato, *Republic*

Plato, *The Laws*

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Aristotle, *Politics & Constitution of Athens*.

Other materials will be posted on Blackboard.

Week 1: 8/25: Intro, What is Political Theory? 8/27: Xenophon on Constitution of Athens, Aristotle, On Constitution of Athens (last part), Constant "Liberty of Ancients"

Week 2: 9/1: Crito, 9/3: Apology

Week3: 9/ 8: Plato's Republic I and II, 9/10: Republic, IV

Week 4: 9/ 15: Plato's Republic V, VI (and ship metaphor p. 162), VII . 9/17: VIII

Week 5: 9/22 : Plato's The Laws (Intro), VI 9/24: VII

Week 6: 9/29: The Laws, VIII, 10/1: Aristotle's Politics Book I, chs 2,5,12,13

Week 7: 10/ 6: Politics Book II, chs 1,2,5,6, Book III chs1-5. 10/8: Midterm.

Week 8: 10/13 (fall break, no class), 10/15: Politics, Book III, chs 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15.

Week 9: 10/20: Politics, Book V, chs. 1-9. 10/22: Book VI, chs. 1-6

Week 10: 10/27: Paper Proposal, 10/29: Aristotle's Ethics, book I, chs 7 -10 + p. 24, 29

Week 11: 11/3: Ethics, book V: chs 1-7, book VIII, chs. 1, 2,3, 9, 10, 11. 11/5: Cicero , On the Commonwealth, Book I

Week 12: 11/10: Cicero, On the Commonwealth, Books III-V 11/12: Cicero, On The Laws, Book I

Week 13: 11/17: Cicero, On The Laws, Book III 11/ 19: Agustin's City of God, book XIX, pp 870-78, 881-84, 890-94

Week 14: 11/24: City of God, book I, pp. 42-47, book II, pp. 72-79, 86-88. 11/26: Thanksgiving

Week 15: 12/1: Aquinas, Summa Theologica, pp. 69-93, 12/3: review

Final exam: Thursday, December 10