

Liberty, Power, and Right

A great many words have changed their meaning. The word *liberty*, for example, had at bottom among the ancients the same meaning as the word *dominion*. *I would be free* meant, in the mouth of the ancient, *I would take part in governing or administering the State*; in the mouth of a modern it means, *I would be independent*. The word *liberty* has with us a moral sense; with them its sense was purely political.

Joseph Joubert (1754-1824)

The Greek political writers, who lived under popular government, acknowledged no other force able to sustain them except that of virtue. Those of our own day speak of nothing else but of manufactures, of commerce, of finance, of wealth, and of luxury itself.

Montesquieu (1689-1755)

Yet give me leave to say, however strange it may seem, that the lawmaker hath nothing to do with moral virtues and vices.

John Locke (1632-1704)

Socrates: And can there be anything better for the interests of the State than that the men and women of a State should be as good as possible?

Glaucou: There can be nothing better.

Plato, *Republic* 456e

Instructor:

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Course Description:

This course will examine the fundamental problems of politics through a survey of texts in the history of social and political thought drawn primarily from the ancient Mediterranean world. These texts attempt to ground an objective and normative understanding of politics in human nature and in an interpretation of natural right. The course will consider the relationships between truth and power, thought and action, rulers and the ruled, reason and the passions, and the intellectual and society. At the centre of this course is a study of the quest of truth and of the relation of this quest and its results to political life. The study of the foundations of Western political thought is intended to provide perspective on the origin, nature, and grounds of the modern commitments to democracy, equality, liberty, peace, human rights, and modern science. This course will satisfy a foundation requirement in either political and social thought or moral and ethical reasoning and count towards the majors in Political Science, History, and Philosophy.

Credits: 4

Prerequisites: none

Tuesdays 16:00-18:00 & Fridays 14:00-16:00

Assessments

1. Papers (70 percent)

Two papers assigned at weeks nine and fifteen of the semester.

2. Class paper (20 percent)

A two-page paper written and presented to the class in response to the session's readings.

3. Participation (10 percent)

Awarded based on one's having completed the readings before class and engaged in discussions thoughtfully.

Required Texts

Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. T.J. Saunders (Penguin, 1992) or [online](#)

Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2018) [online](#)

The Bhagavad-Gita: A New Translation, trans. Georg Feuerstein (Shambhala, 2014); or tr. Swami

Mukundananda [online](#)

Cicero, *On Obligations (De Officiis)*, tr. P.G. Walsh (Oxford, 2008) and [online](#)

Constant, Benjamin, 'The Liberty of the Ancients as compared with that of the Moderns' (1819) [online](#)

Hegel, G.W.F., 'The Peloponnesian War', in *Philosophy of History* [online](#), with Leo Strauss' [commentary](#)

*Machiavelli, *Prince*, ed. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago, 1998) or [online](#)

Nietzsche, 'The Problem of Socrates', in *Twilight of the Idols* [online](#)

*Plato, *Republic*, ed. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 1969) or B. Jowett's translation [online](#)

*Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates* ed. G.M.A. Grube, 3rd ed. (Hackett, 2000) or [online](#)

*Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides*, ed. R. Strassler (Harper, 1996) or [online](#) and copied with paragraph numbers [here](#)

*These editions are especially recommended and will be referred to in class. Most of these works can be found in serviceable and affordable paperback editions by either Penguin or Oxford University Press. Alternative translations of Plato's *Republic* are those of Grube (Hackett), Emlyn-Jones (Loeb) and Jowett (Fingerprint Classics). Thomas Hobbes' [translation](#) of Thucydides is a classic.

Plan

W1	21 Jan	Introduction; Constant, 'Liberty of Ancients and Moderns'
W2	25 Jan	Thucydides, 1.1-23, 1.56-88, 1.139-146
	28 Jan	Thucydides, 2.34-65, 3.36-50, 3.69-85
W3	1 Feb	Thucydides, 5.13-26, 5.84-116, 6.6-41
	4 Feb	Thucydides, 7.1-18, 7.42-59, 7.70-87
W4	8 Feb	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>
	11 Feb	Plato, <i>Apology of Socrates</i> (17-29)

W5	15 Feb	Plato, <i>Apology of Socrates</i> (30-42)
	18 Feb	Plato, <i>Crito</i> , <i>Phaedo</i> (62-68, 113-118)
W6	22 Feb	Plato, <i>Republic</i> I
	24 Feb	Plato, <i>Republic</i> II
W7	1 Mar	Plato, <i>Republic</i> III
	4 Mar	Plato, <i>Republic</i> IV-V
W8	8 Mar	Plato, <i>Republic</i> VI-VII
	11 Mar	Plato, <i>Republic</i> VIII
W9	15 Mar	Plato, <i>Republic</i> IX-X
W10	22 Mar	[Midterm due] Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> I
	25 Mar	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> II.1-6, 8-9, 12
W11	29 Mar	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> III.1-13, IV
	1 Apr	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> V.1-9, 12, VI.1-5
W12	5 Apr	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> VII, VIII
	8 Apr	Cicero, <i>De Officiis</i> I; Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 1123a35-1125a35
W13	12 Apr	Cicero, <i>De Officiis</i> II
W14	19 Apr	Machiavelli, <i>Prince</i> , Letter to Vettori, I-VII
	22 Apr	Machiavelli, <i>Prince</i> VIII-XVII
W15	26 Apr	Machiavelli, <i>Prince</i> XVIII-XXVI
	29 Apr	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> I-III; Aurobindo, <i>Essays</i> , First Series, chs. 2-4
W16	5 May	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> IV-VII; Aurobindo, <i>Essays</i> , First Series, chs. 5-7
	6 May	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> cont.; Final review
W17	13 May	Final paper due