

POLITICAL SCIENCE 311
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THEORY I: PLATO TO LUTHER

Instructor: Scott Fast
Office: D3085
Local: 4444
Email: scott.fast@ufv.ca
Phone (home): 604-864-2762

I. POWER & KNOWLEDGE: THE GREEKS

*Violins and tambourines,
This is what we think they mean.
It's hard to say, it's sad but true
I'm kind of dumb and so are you.*

*When the mystic varies thus
You can send a man to bury us.
It's hard to say, it's sad but true
I'm kind of dumb and so are you.*

The Tragically Hip

1. a) Introduction to the Course

b) Introduction to the Greeks

- the oral tradition
- heroic paradigms of action
- knowledge: techne and paideia
- the Greek polis and public space

Required Reading:

Klosko, History of Political Theory, Vol. 1, Chapter 1.
Fast, "Politics and Paideia" (on reserve)

Recommended Reading:

Kitto, The Greeks
Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War

2. Socrates, Plato & Knowledge

- Recapitulation of the Homeric consciousness
- The Platonic dialogue
- The Socratic dialogue
- Separation of the know and the knower
- Knowledge and the emergence of “self”

Required Reading:

Klosko, Chapter 2

Plato, Euthyphro

Recommended Reading:

Havelock, Preface to Plato, Chapters XI and XII

Koyre, Discovering Plato

3. Socrates’ Conversation with Gorgias

- True education vs. rhetoric
- Freedom, manipulation and tyranny
- Knowledge and opinion

Required Reading:

Plato, The Gorgias

4. The Conversation with Polos

- Sin and knowledge
- Socratic geometry
- Harm and benefit
- The Socratic method

Required Reading:

Plato, The Gorgias

Gregory Vlastos, “The Socratic Elenchus” (see me).

5. The Conversation with Kallicles

- Hedonism vs. morality
- The futility of philosophy
- Morality, knowledge and the material context

Required Reading:

Plato, The Gorgias

6. Knowledge, Politics and Tragedy

- Socrates vs. Kallicles?
- Kallicles & Thrasymakos
- The value of philosophy?

Required Reading:

Klosko, Chapters 3 & 4

Plato, Republic (selections), from Porter.

Essay #1 due at beginning of class.

7. Art, Philosophy and the Political Task

- The ruling art
- The philosophical and political status of non-discursive symbolic forms
- Knowledge and dialectic: Plato's contradiction

Required Reading:

Plato, The Statesman

8. Aristotle on Politics

- Aristotle & Plato: Treatise & Dialogue
- Polis & household: Citizenship
- Classification of regimes
- Preservation of regimes

Required Reading:

Klosko, Chapter 5

Aristotle, Politics (selections), from Porter.

Essay #2 due at beginning of class.

II. ROME: FROM PAGAN REPUBLIC TO CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

"All roads lead to Rome".

9. Cicero & Augustine

- Extent of the empire
- Rome and Greek civilization-Cicero's education
- Stoicism et al.
- Natural law
- Republicanism
- Voluntarism & Republican Liberty
- The City of Gold and the City of Man

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- The Fall of Rome and the Manorial Organization of Society
- The Church symbolic order and political order

Required Reading:

Klosko, Chapters 6, 7 & 8

St. Augustine, The City of God, from Porter

III. POLITICAL THOUGHT IN THE CHRISTIAN MIDDLE AGES

"I've got to find myself a city to live in".

David Byrne

10. Thomas Aquinas

- Classical Greek thought and Christian thought
- Medieval organicism
- Medieval natural law
- Justice and kingship
- Aquinas and Aristotle
- Medieval rationalism

Required Reading:

Klosko, Chapter 9

St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica (selections), from Porter

St. Thomas Aquinas, On Kingship

IV. MORALITY & POLITICS: THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

"One has watched life badly if one has not also seen the hand that considerately – kills"

Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil

11. Machiavelli: The Reality of Power

- The historical setting
- The beginning of time as history
- Politics and public order
- Political virtue and fate
- On the proper uses of violence
- Democracy and tyranny

Required Reading:

Machiavelli, The Prince

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Machiavelli, Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius (selections), from Portor.

12. Machiavelli: Reflections & Details

- Realism and morality
- Morality as knowledge vs. morality as rules

Required Reading:

Sheldon Wolin, "Politics and the Economy of Violence" from Wolin, Politics and Vision (on reserve)

V. THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION: INSTITUTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE

13. Martin Luther

- The heterogeneity of the Protestant reaction
- Commerce, nation-state and church government
- Private morality and public space
- Voluntarism
- The appearance of the individual

Required Reading:

Martin, Luther, "Christian Liberty"

Roland H. Bainton, "The Reformation and the Political Sphere" from Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (on reserve)

Klosko, Chapter 11

Required Texts for Purchase:

Plato, The Gorgias

Plato, Statesman

Machiavelli, The Prince

St. Thomas Aquinas, On Kingship

Porter (Ed.), Classics in Political Philosophy

George Klosko, History of Political Theory: An Introduction. Volume 1.

Written Assignments & Evaluation

You will be evaluated on the basis of three written assignments, each worth 30% of your mark, plus 10% for class participation. Written assignments are not only (or principally) a method of evaluation, but also designated activities which are designated to develop specific aspects of your intellectual capabilities and your understanding of political theory. Thus, each of the three written assignments call upon you to approach different subject matter from the history of political thought, and to approach it as well in different ways. Look carefully at my somewhat different expectations for each assignment.

Political Science 311 focuses on the reading and interpretation of primary sources—for example, on reading and studying Plato’s Gorgias, rather than commentaries by contemporary scholars about Plato’s Gorgias. Nevertheless, scholarly treatments of classical works are included as part of the required and recommended readings listed in the course outline, and, of course, can also be found in the UFV Library holdings. I strongly recommend that you discuss your proposed choice of essay topics with me in advance, and we consider the range, suitability and availability of secondary source materials appropriate to your particular approach to your chosen topic. Do make appointments to see me; I am here to help.

A. First Essay Assignment: due Class Meeting #6

- Seven to twelve typed pages. 3000 words maximum.
- Proper footnotes and bibliography.
- Select one of the following questions.

The purpose of the first written assignment is to encourage you to examine particular questions regarding political life in light of a careful reading of Plato’s treatment of these and related questions in his Euthyphro and Gorgias.

1. “The idea that techniques of persuasion are morally neutral is a recurrent one in human society. But in order to hold that such techniques are neutral, it is necessary also to hold that it is morally irrelevant whether a man comes to a given belief by reasoning or in some non-rational way. And in order to hold that this is morally irrelevant, one would have to hold also that a man’s exercise or his rationality is irrelevant to his standing as a moral agent, irrelevant, that is, to deciding whether he is entitled to be called “responsible” and his actions “voluntary”. Thus, different elucidations of the concepts of responsibility and voluntary actions are presupposed by different moral attitudes to the standing of techniques of persuasion.” Discuss the light of Plato’s Gorgias.

2. Phaedrus: It is easy for you to make up tales from Egypt or anywhere else that you fancy.

Socrates: Oh, but the authorities for the temple of Zeus at Dodona, my friend, said that the first prophetic utterance came from an oak tree. In fact, the people in those days, lacking the wisdom of you young people, were content in their simplicity to listen to trees or rocks, provided these told the truth. For you apparently it makes a difference who the speaker

is, and what country he comes from; you do not merely ask whether what he says is true or false.

Discuss the significance and implications of the exchange for you as a citizen, and for political life in general.

3. "Speaking before a crowd is a form of violence." Discuss.
4. In Plato's Gorgias, Socrates suggests that gymnastics is like legislation and that medicine is like justice. What does he have in mind here? Does this analogical reasoning convince you? Why, or why not?
5. "The fundamental problem of political society is that those who do not know must judge those who do know by the measure of that which is known." Discuss.
6. "Because philosophy is what it is, it leaves everything as it is." Discuss.
7. Throughout Plato's dialogues, he suggests that the worst possible thing that can happen to a bad man is that his prayers are answered. What is Plato's meaning here? What is the significance of the position for the analysis of power in a democracy? In a tyranny? Are you satisfied with Plato's treatment of this matter?

B. Second Essay Assignment: due in Class Meeting #8

- Seven to twelve pages – 3000 words maximum.
- Proper footnotes and bibliography.

Compare Plato's analysis of the various kinds of regimes and the "decline of the state (polis)" as presented in Book VIII of The Republic with Aristotle's treatment of these matters in Books 3, 4, and 5 of The Politics.

In the second written assignment I would have you engage in comparative textual analysis. What does Plato have to say on this matter, and how is it similar and/or different from Aristotle's position? I am not here looking for a critical analysis or comparison, but rather a descriptive comparison. Substantiate your points largely, but not necessarily exclusively, with references to relevant portions of the primary classical texts.

C. Third Essay Assignment: due Last Day of Finals Week

- Seven to fifteen typed pages – 3500 words maximum.
- Proper footnotes and bibliography.
- Select one of the following questions.

In the third and final written assignment, I would encourage you to combine your ability to read primary sources accurately and your ability to employ classical ideas in critical analysis, to produce a scholarly

and critical treatment of your choice of the assigned topics. Secondary sources should play a meaningful role in your essay, but be sure that both you and your sources have read the original texts accurately.

1. Leo Strauss begins his Thought on Machiavelli in the following way:

We shall not shock anyone, we shall merely expose ourselves to good-natured or at any rate harmless ridicule, if we profess ourselves inclined to the old-fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil. Indeed, what other description would fit a man who teaches lessons like these: princes ought to exterminate the families of rulers whose territories they wish to possess securely; princes ought to murder their opponents rather than to confiscate their property since those who have been robbed, but not those who are dead, can think of revenge; men forget the murder of their fathers sooner than the loss of their patrimony: true liberality consists in being stingy with one's own property and in being generous with what belongs to others; not virtue but the prudent use of virtue and vice leads to happiness; injuries ought to be done together so that, being tasted less, they will be felt more strongly; a victorious general who fears that his prince might not reward him properly, may punish him for his anticipated ingratitude by raising the flag of rebellion; if one has to choose between inflicting severe injuries and inflicting light injuries, one ought to inflict severe injuries; one ought to say to someone whom one wants to kill "Give me your gun, I want to kill you with it," but can satisfy your desire. If it is true that only an evil man will stoop to teach maxims of public and private gangsterism, we are forced to say that Machiavelli was an evil man.

Based on your reading of *The Prince* and Wolin's chapter on Machiavelli, what is Strauss' understanding of evil (morality)? Does Machiavelli's treatment of political morality represent an improvement or corruption of Strauss' "old-fashioned and simple opinion" regarding moral action?

2. Many political theorists, Plato chief among them, have visualized the possibilities for human life in a society organized and ruled in accordance with moral knowledge. Yet they have also recognized that those political structures which might allow power to serve knowledge also allow power to serve tyranny. Furthermore, political theory seems to tell us that the difference between tyranny and democracy is not clear cut and cannot be guaranteed by political structure. For example, Plato argues that democracy can easily degenerate into tyrannical rule through the manipulation of the consent of "happy" slaves, while Machiavelli seems to be telling Lorenzo the Magnificent that in order to maintain his power he must carefully attend to the real needs and interests of his subjects.

In your view, his political theory correctly apprehended the complexity of the relation between power and knowledge, or has it simply served to obfuscate a vital and obvious distinction between freedom and slavery?

3. In Chapter VIII of *The Prince*, Machiavelli suggests that we can distinguish between cruelties and bad cruelties, “For it is the man who uses violence to spoil things, not the man who uses it to mend them, that is blameworthy.” (Discourses I, ix) Wolin summarizes this aspect of Machiavelli’s political theory as “The Economy of Violence.”

4. Compare and contrast Machiavelli’s the Prince with Aquinas’ On Kingship.