

“I’m sick of utopias. I’m tired of hearing about them. I’d trade the lot for one practical difference that owes nothing to anybody’s ideal society, one commonsensical action that puts right an injury to one person....”

-- “Belinsky,” in Tom Stoppard, *The Coast of Utopia (Part II: Shipwreck)*

Political Science 7981

Classical and Medieval Political Theory: The Best Regime Fall 2003

In Book IV [VI] of his *Politics*, Aristotle writes that political science, like the science of physical training, has four topics: What is the best regime simply? What is best given the circumstances? What is best in most cases? What is best upon a presupposition? In this course we will investigate the first topic in classical political theory, with attention to the way the question of the best regime changes in light of the question of the city of God. We will conclude (and begin) by asking how the question of the best regime figures in modern political theory, considering on the one hand More’s *Utopia*, and on the other Machiavelli’s rejection of the quest for imaginary principalities and republics.

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:00-3:30
Thursdays, 2:00-3:30, and by appointment

Course requirements:

Five 4-5 page papers on topics in the readings [60%]
Class attendance and participation [10%]
Final take-home examination [30%]

Books available for purchase:

More, *Utopia* [tr. David Wootton] (Hackett)
Plato, *Republic* [tr. Allan Bloom] (Basic)
Plato, *Laws* [tr. Thomas Pangle] (Chicago)
Cicero, *On the Commonwealth and the Laws* [ed. James Zetzel] (Cambridge)
Augustine, *City of Man* (Penguin)
Aquinas, *On Kingship, to the King of Cyprus* [tr. Phelan] (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies)
Dante, *Monarchy* (Cambridge)
Marsilius, *Defender of the Peace* (Columbia)
Machiavelli, *Prince* [tr. Mansfield] (Chicago)

Out of print:

Averroes, *On Plato’s Republic* [tr. Ralph Lerner] (Cornell)

Library Reserve:

Many of the readings for the course will be made available on reserve in Middleton Library. In addition, I may from time to time place on reserve certain secondary works that I think you might find particularly useful in helping you interpret the authors we are studying. It should go without saying that secondary works are no substitute for the assigned reading; indeed, read without knowledge of the originals they are more apt to mislead than assist you. At the same time, graduate students must begin to engage the scholarly arguments about the interpretation of the leading texts.

SYLLABUS:

- Tues., 8/26 Introduction:
Leo Strauss, "What Is Political Philosophy?"
- Tues., 9/2 More, *Utopia*
- Tues., 9/9 Plato, *Republic*, books I-IV
Tues., 9/16 *Republic*, books V-VII
Tues., 9/23 *Republic*, books VIII-X
- Tues., 9/30 Plato, *Laws*, books I-VI
Tues., 10/7 *Laws*, books VII-XII
- Tues., 10/14 Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*
- Tues., 10/21 Augustine, *City of God*
Tues., 10/28 *City of God*
- Tues., 11/4 Averroes, *On Plato's Republic*
- Tues., 11/11 Aquinas, *On Kingship, to the King of Cyprus*
Dante, *On Monarchy*
- Tues., 11/18 Marsilius of Padua, *Defender of the Peace*
- Tues., 11/25 Machiavelli, *Prince*
- Tues., 12/2 More, *Utopia*