

Department of Political Science
Rutgers University, Newark
Spring 2019

Early Political Theory 21:790:371

Tuesday: 6:00 to 9:00 Pm

Instructor: Paul-Aarons Ngomo

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Office hours: **Tuesday: By appointment between 2.30-5.30, SASN
Political Science 360 M.L. King Jr Boulevard, Rm 717**

This course charts the origins and development of early political theory in the Western political tradition as seen through foundational thinkers such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Cicero, St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Martin Luther, and Niccolò Machiavelli.

The course provides close readings of key texts and explores a wide range of topics pertaining to the elucidation and justification of various forms of government in the ancient and premodern worlds through such political experiments as the *polis*, the *republic* and the *Christian commonwealth* (Church and State).

While the thinkers considered in this course lived in times and worlds different from ours, some of their questions and insights about the good life and the best form of government still overlap with ours to a considerable extent, especially so in the value some of them placed on equality, freedom, and justice, their debates on leadership, war, authority, and obligation. We will probe canonical texts with an emphasis on such issues as: What is the best kind of life for a human being? What is happiness? What kind of political community can enable us to achieve the good life? What is the best form of government? What is political virtue? Can one be an effective ruler and a good person? What is the proper relation between the church and the state?

Course requirements:

1. Midterm (Week VII) and final exam (Week XIV): 30% each
2. **Two response papers:** 20 % (10% each):
 - (a) (**Paper#1, no more than 1 single spaced page**) Précis summarizing key points of the week's reading and raising some questions for class discussion; Schedule will be worked out in class
 - (b) (**Paper #2**) Short essay (3-5 double spaced pages) on a topic approved by me. **Due no later than Week # 11**
3. Class participation: 20% (You must bring a copy of the relevant texts to each class meeting and be prepared to discuss them).
4. Attendance is mandatory, all absences must be properly documented

Required Texts:

1. Herodotus, 2008, *The Histories*, Oxford University press [**Do not purchase, excerpts on Blackboard**]
2. Thucydides, 2009, *The Peloponnesian War*, Oxford University press
3. Plato, 2016, *The Republic*, Basic Books (Alan Bloom's translation)
4. Aristotle, 2009, *The Politics*, Oxford University Press
5. Polybius, 2010, *The Histories*, Oxford University press [**Do not purchase, excerpts on Blackboard**]
6. Cicero, 2017, *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws*, Cambridge University Press
7. St Augustine, 2004, *The City of God*, Penguin
8. St Thomas Aquinas, 2012, *On Kingship (De Regno)* in *Political Writings*, Cambridge University press. [**Do not purchase, excerpts on Blackboard**]
9. Niccolò Machiavelli, 2008, *The Prince*, Oxford University Press

Course schedule:

- **Week I: Introduction, housekeeping: No assigned readings**

- **Week II: Law, freedom and forms of government**

Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 1 to Book 3.66-90, Book 5.49-97, Book 7.99-145.

- **Week III: Power and civil strife, collective decision-making, democracy, imperialism:**

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Book 1 to Book 3.85.

- **Week IV: Power and Civil strife, collective decision-making, democracy, imperialism (Continued)**

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Book 5.63-7; 84-116; Selections Book VIII

- **Week V: Law, obligation and Citizenship**

Plato: Apology and Crito (a Pdf file is available. See Blackboard)

- **Week VI: Justice and the best constitution**

Plato: *The Republic*, 1-5

- **Week VII: Justice and the best constitution (Continued)**

Plato: *The Republic*: Books 6-10

- **State formation, the best regime and the best life**

Aristotle, *The Politics*, Books 1-4

MIDTERM EXAM (Take Home)

- **Week VIII: State formation, the best regime and the best life (continued)**

Aristotle, *The Politics*, Books 5-8

- **Week IX: The Mixed constitution**

Polybius, *The Histories*, Book VI

On the Commonwealth. Books I, II, III, IV

- **Week X: The Mixed Constitution (Continued)**

Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, Books III, IV

Cicero, *On the Laws*, Book I

Week XI: The Christian commonwealth: City of God and the earthly city; Justice and the State

St Augustine: *The City of God*: (Selections, See Blackboard)

- **Week XII: The Christian commonwealth: Natural law, Political society, Justice**

Aquinas, *On Kingship (De Regno)* in *Political Writings*, CUP. Pp. 5-52; pp.76-95; pp.114-126

John

William of Ockham *A short discourse on tyrannical government*, See excerpts on Blackboard

- **Week XIII: Renaissance and Reformation**

Martin Luther, “*On Secular Authority*” and John Calvin, “*On Civil Government*” (See Pdf files on Blackboard)

- **Leadership, New Modes and Orders**

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1-12)

- **Week XIV: Leadership, New Modes and Orders (continued)**

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (13-26)

Review and Conclusion

[Final Exam: Take Home]