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:**

Course schedule:

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

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

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

- **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


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


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]