

POL 2000H1F: ANCIENT POLITICAL THOUGHT TO THE RISE OF MODERNITY

(Ph.D. core in political theory, part I)

Fall 2022

Course meeting time: Thursdays, 1-4 pm

University College 248

Tentative syllabus: 29 August 2022

Prof. Andrew Sabl

Sidney Smith 3030

Office hours: Wednesdays 2:30-3:30 pm and

Thursdays, 4:30-5:30 pm, or by appointment.

In person (preferred) or via Zoom. Please make

Appointments for either via Calendly:

<https://calendly.com/andrew-sabl/core-student-meeting-with-andy-sabl>

Email: andrew.sabl@utoronto.ca

Prof. Torrey Shanks

Sidney Smith 3118

Office hours: Fridays 10 – noon (in person).

Or by appointment (online or in-person):

contact by email

Email: torrey.shanks@utoronto.ca

We will spend one to two weeks apiece on eight major political philosophers. The course presupposes some familiarity with these theorists. By the time of class on a given theorist you will be expected to have read all of their work that is under consideration in the course. This will enable us to consider the relationship between earlier and later parts of a work, or in some cases relationships among different works, in addressing questions of interpretation.

Requirements:

1. Six short papers (**maximum one page – single spaced, 11 point type, one inch margins**).

Completion of these papers is worth **5 percent of the final grade**.

We will provide three sets of questions to guide each week's discussion, and each short paper should respond to one of the sets of questions for the class in which the paper is submitted. Your papers should not attempt to develop an argument in detail. Rather you should provide a summary statement of claims that you are prepared to support with arguments and **explicit references to the text** in the course of class discussion.

The papers must be posted on the class website (on Quercus, under "Discussions") by **5:00 pm on the Wednesday before class**. They will be graded on a pass/fail basis. **Late papers (i.e., papers submitted after 5:00 pm) will not be accepted**. If you fail to turn in at least one paper on each theorist or fail to turn in the six on time, you will be required to write a five page makeup paper for each one you have missed. These makeup papers will also be graded on a pass/fail basis.

2. Active and informed participation in class discussion (including familiarity with your colleagues' short papers): **20 percent of the final grade**. Regardless of whether you have written a paper or not, you should come prepared to discuss the week's questions and you should have read carefully the comments of your fellow students.

3. One 15-page paper on a topic of your choice dealing with the theorists from the term. The paper may either analyse one theorist or compare two of them. The paper is worth **75 percent of the final grade** and is due on 8 December 2020. Please submit your papers electronically in .docx or .rtf format via Quercus under "Assignments".

Academic honesty clause: "Normally, students will be required to submit their course assignments to the University's plagiarism detection tool website for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their material to be included as source documents in the University's plagiarism detection tool reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the University's plagiarism detection tool service are described on the company web site."

CLASS SCHEDULE

Sept. 8: Introduction; discussion of Sophocles' *Antigone* (any translation).

September 15: No class (APSA conference).

Sept. 22 and 29: Plato, *Republic*, all.

Oct. 6: Aristotle, *Politics*. Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book X, chapters 6-9. (This *Ethics* reading will be posted on the class website.)

Oct. 13: Machiavelli, *The Prince* and selections from the *Discourses*

Oct. 20: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Parts I and II; chapter 46 from Part IV; and "A Review and Conclusion"

Oct. 27: Locke, *Second Treatise*, Preface – chapter 14

Nov. 3: Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapters 15 – 19 and *Letter Concerning Toleration* (all).

Nov. 10: Reading week. No class.

Nov. 17: David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (any edition, or online, e.g. via the Online Library of Liberty, which has a good edition in many useful formats): Sections 1-4, 9; Appendices 1-4, and "A Dialogue."

_____, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (any edition, or online, e.g. via the Online Library of Liberty): "Of the Original Contract", "Of Passive Obedience", "Of Commerce", "Of Refinement in the Arts", "Of the First Principles of Government", "Of the Origin of Government", and "That Politics May be Reduced to a Science".

(Note: the standard edition of the *Essays* is the one ed. Eugene F. Miller, revised ed. (Liberty Fund, 1987). You may use any edition of the *Enquiry* but please number the paragraphs within sections.

Nov. 24: Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*

Dec. 1: Rousseau, *Social Contract*

Dec. 8: Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

RECOMMENDATIONS ON TEXTS:

Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. Grube revised by C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett) or R.E. Allen (Yale) or A. Bloom, ed. (Basic Books).

Aristotle, *Politics*, trans.. C. Lord (Chicago) or S. Everson (Cambridge).

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings: The Prince* and Selections from the *Discourses*, ed. D. Wootton, (Hackett) or *The Prince*, trans. H.C. Mansfield (Chicago) and the same selections from the *Discourses* (details TBA), trans. H.C. Mansfield and N. Tarcov (Chicago).

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. Ed. Macpherson (Penguin), Oakeshott (Collier), Schneider (Bobbs-Merrill), Tuck (Cambridge), or Curley (Hackett).

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. P. Laslett (Cambridge) or C.B. Macpherson (Hackett).

_____, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. J.H. Tully (Hackett).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality (Second Discourse)*. ed. R. Masters (St. Martin's); or V. Gourevitch (Cambridge), or J.T. Scott (Chicago).

_____, *On the Social Contract*, ed. R. Masters, (St. Martin's); or V. Gourevitch (Cambridge) or J.T. Scott (Chicago).

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. M. Brody (Penguin); or *Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of the Rights of Men and a Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Hints*, ed. S. Tomaselli (Cambridge).

QUESTIONS FOR SHORT PAPERS AND CLASS DISCUSSION:

SOPHOCLES

September 8

1. What are the sources of law and obligation that come into conflict in *Antigone*? Why is the conflict so intractable?
2. What is the relationship between gender and authority in *Antigone*? Is it a fixed order or does it change with the action of the play and/or the perspective of the characters?

SEPTEMBER 15: NO CLASS DUE TO THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION (APSA) CONFERENCE. (Class will meet on December 8 instead.)

PLATO

September 22:

1. Before outlining a novel theory of justice, Socrates first must contend with other, rival theories of justice. What theories are offered by Thrasymachus and Glaucon? What is at the heart of the challenges posed by these characters? How does Glaucon's theory of justice contrast with the one proposed by Socrates? Do you want to be just and, if so, why? How does your answer relate to the ones offered in this exchange?
2. Why is the *Republic* written as a dialogue? How, and where, should the fact that it is written as one affect our reading of it? (Give concrete examples.) Analytic philosophers often ignore the dialogue and analyse Socrates' position as the one to be taken seriously and/or as representing Plato's own view. What, if anything, would be lost by doing so?
3. The discussions of women and the family in the *Republic* have given rise to many different interpretations. What is yours? Does Socrates (and/or Plato) ultimately advocate a radical alteration in family structure, or does he intend this example as instructive in other ways? Do we have anything to learn today from Plato on these matters? Support your views with explicit references to the text.

September 29:

1. How apt, given the *Republic* as a whole, is Socrates' analogy between the just soul and the just regime (introduced at 368c)? Socrates suggests that the "city in speech" is best seen as a model for the well-ordered soul, not as a political ideal: to what extent does this make sense? Are there viable psychic analogies to all the institutions and practices attributed to the ideal city?
2. What is the character of Plato's utopianism? Is the Kallipolis intended to embody an ideal which human beings can and ought to try to approximate? Is it rather an unattainable standard intended to criticize the project of utopianism altogether? Or, something different again, is it a hypothetical thought-experiment designed to stimulate readers to think more profoundly about politics, whatever the practical outcomes? On what do you base your answer to this question – the words of Socrates, the literary or dramatic features of the work, or something else?
3. The explicit theme of the *Republic* is justice. Can it be read instead as a reflection on the disadvantages or hazards of over-emphasizing justice at the expense of other values (e.g. political stability, liberty, a diversity of chosen lifestyles, government by consent)?

ARISTOTLE

October 6:

1. What does Aristotle mean by claiming that "by nature the human being is a political animal"? Does his account imply that politics is (or ought to be) overwhelmingly friendly or free from conflict? Why or why not? How (and to what extent) does Aristotle portray inquiries about human nature as helpful for addressing political conflict?
2. Two of the aspects of Aristotle's thought that appear least congenial to contemporary readers are his discussions of women and slavery. What does he have to say about each and how integral are these accounts to his overall political philosophy? What is the relationship between these two topics in Aristotle's political philosophy?
3. Raphael's School of Athens (<https://is.gd/GUtbIO>) famously portrays Plato pointing up to the heavens while Aristotle insists on starting from what's in front of him. With respect to Aristotle's political writing, is this right? To what extent does Aristotle's inquiry rest on observable phenomena? To what extent could it be undermined by observing—or choosing to take note of—political states or events different from those that Aristotle discusses?

MACHIAVELLI

October 13:

1. What does Machiavelli mean by *virtù*? Discuss the similarities and differences among the historical figures whom Machiavelli cites as examples of *virtù* or as men lacking crucial elements of *virtù*. What do you find most puzzling and what most illuminating in his discussion of these figures?
2. Machiavelli has been described by J.G.A. Pocock as "rehabilitating secular time"—which means, to a first approximation, restoring respect for human agency (whereas a Christianity-centred world-view had stressed God's plan for morality and politics and the need for human beings to acknowledge and submit to that plan). How accurate is this as a description of Machiavelli's outlook? What are the potential downsides or costs to a single-minded endorsement of human agency, and does Machiavelli acknowledge those downsides or costs?
3. What is the relationship between morality and politics in Machiavelli's thought? Does he advance the view that "the end justifies the means"? If so, what is the end and how is it justified?

HOBBS

October 20:

1. Before he presents his theory of the social contract, Hobbes offers a psychological account, giving lengthy consideration to the body, the imagination, and language. Why does Hobbes's theory of sovereignty and obligation depend on these principles of moral and natural philosophy? Could one consistently be a political Hobbiest while rejecting Hobbes' science and/or psychology?

2. Hobbes is famous as the founder of the social contract tradition. But is consent really relevant in Hobbes? What makes political authority legitimate in Hobbes' view? Is his account coherent?
3. To what extent is Hobbes a “liberal” (a word not used in the political sense in Hobbes’ time, but a useful anachronism)? How does his work illuminate the link—if any—between methodological individualism and an attachment to individual rights (and/or their political institutionalization)?

LOCKE

October 27 (Second Treatise)

1. How do people come to own property according to Locke? To what extent does the unequal distribution of property in existing societies violate the requirement that clear property entitlement requires "enough and as good" for others to use?
2. Why are “settled standing laws” or “stated rules” so crucial to Locke’s theory of government? What is the role of the legislature in setting up such rules, and why does it matter? What is the opposite of government by law, and why does Locke fear it so much?
3. Locke’s theory has been denounced in recent years for being a justification of dispossession of Indigenous people in North America. To what extent is this a fair reading of his theory? Or is this a badly posed question (and if so, why)?

November 3 (Second Treatise [Continued] and Letter Concerning Toleration)

1. What is the justification of armed resistance to government? Is it anarchistic to assert (§168) that “any single man” who feels the government has violated his rights may legitimately resist government by force of arms? In addressing these questions, consider Locke’s distinction between the dissolution of government and the dissolution of society and/or the distinction between a political and social revolution.
2. Locke’s *Letter* addresses the problems of the post-Reformation English State, which had long been roiled by conflict among Christian sects. Does his argument require Christian (specifically Protestant) assumptions? Does it assume a state that takes on relatively few functions?
3. On what principles does Locke base his call for toleration? Whom does he portray as outside the possible bounds of toleration, and how easily could his argument be extended so as to include them?

NOVEMBER 10: U OF T READING WEEK—NO CLASS.

HUME

November 17:

1. Hume believes that every quality we praise as a virtue is so praised because it is useful or agreeable to the person holding the virtue, or to others. Are these two criteria adequate for judging for social/political purposes? What virtues are ruled out if we are limited to these two?
2. In several essays, Hume suggests that the human “sciences”, like societies generally, achieve greater “perfection” over time due to ever-growing industry and ever-accumulating data. Is this persuasive? What does your answer suggest about a course like this that seeks to draw insight from the history of political thought?
3. Hume has been accused of providing plenty of resources for valuing a plurality of human cultures and moral orders—as well as diversity within each culture—but fewer resources for fundamental social critique. How would he respond to this accusation? Do these two goals for theory conflict?

ROUSSEAU

November 24:

1. According to the *Discourse on Inequality*, in what ways and to what extent can nature provide a guide to politics? For example, does nature prescribe anything with regard to relations between men and women? As another example, what, if anything, might nature prescribe regarding how we should alter the distribution and management of goods, land, and other forms of wealth?
2. *The Discourse on Inequality* provides a sharp critique of progress and civilization as conventionally understood. Why does Rousseau think that the life of ‘savage man’ is preferable to the life of the ‘citizen’? Are there any ways in which the life of the man within civil society is superior to that of the savage? What kind of evidence could be appealed to on this point (or is the presence or absence of evidence beside the point)?
3. What are the various ways that the human propensities to *amour de soi*, *amour propre*, *pitié* and perfectibility as noted by Rousseau could be understood, and what is at stake in these competing interpretations in terms of the broader message of Rousseau in this text?

December 1:

1. What is the general will? Does this concept provide any illumination in thinking about politics? Why or why not? Is the general will compatible with individual freedoms of speech, of association, of religion, and of property ownership? Is it compatible with an appreciation of individual and social diversity?
2. In the *Social Contract* Book I, Chapter 6, Rousseau states his “fundamental problem” (in John T. Scott’s translation): “How to find a form of association that defends and protects the person and goods of each associate with all the common force, and by means of which each, uniting with all, nonetheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before?” (a) Is this a reasonable problem to address? What is the point of seeking a form of association that does not sacrifice freedom for (say) security or prosperity but leaves us as free as before? (b) Does Rousseau solve the problem?

3. Does Rousseau offer an inspiration for contemporary democratic thought, or does his project muddle and undermine the task of pursuing just and workable democratic institutions?

WOLLSTONECRAFT

December 8:

1. Does Wollstonecraft primarily seek changes for the status of women or does she advocate changes to social and political life for both men and women? What turns on your answer?
2. The *Vindication* has been variously cast as liberal, socialist, republican, feminist, or even occasionally misogynist. How would you classify Wollstonecraft's political commitments?
3. Early attacks on Wollstonecraft portrayed it as immoral and dangerous, effectively excluding it from serious consideration as a work of political theory until the late twentieth century. To what values or principles might Wollstonecraft be considered threatening? To what extent can we draw from this instance general lessons about what should be considered valuable or respectable political theory?