

Government 6: Political Ideas

Spring term, 2013

MWF 11

Professor Russell Muirhead

Silsby 218

Office hours: Wed 1-3

Politics is about power. It is difficult—perhaps impossible—to get power and to keep it without advancing an *idea* about why one should have it. There is no power without ideas about what makes power right: politics, therefore, is about ideas. Who should rule? Toward what ends? What is justice? Or perhaps we should ask, *whose* justice? Maybe more important even than justice is injustice: what counts as intolerable injustice? Every politics contains answers (and often rival answers) to these questions.

Whether we know it or not, our own answers owe a great debt to the history of political thought in the West—to thinkers we will encounter this term like Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau and Marx. On the traditional or ancient conception, politics would ideally be about excellence: the excellent would rule. On the modern conception, the point of politics is not to foster or recognize excellence, but to secure the goods we can all agree are good: security and prosperity. Should we regard modern politics as an advance over older understandings and practices? Or should ancient political ideas linger, and inform even contemporary understandings of justice?

Course requirements:

Attendance, short exams 30%

midterm 30%

final 40%

Doing well in the class will require keeping up with the readings. Passing the course requires passing each requirement. Missing more than 3 classes will make it hard to earn a B+ or better; missing more than 6 will make it hard to earn a B or better; missing 9 or more classes will make it almost impossible to pass the course.

The Registrar schedules the final exam—not me. Please check with the registrar for accurate information. No exemptions will be given for the final exam, even if you are ill.

Books for purchase:

All of the readings are contained in Michael L. Morgan, *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, fourth edition, (any edition will be fine, though the page numbers may be off), Hackett Publishing, 2005.

The book is also on reserve in Baker Library.

Assignments

Week 1 (March 25-27-29)

Fukuyama, "The End of History"

Plato, *The Republic*, Book I

Week 2 (April 1-3-5)

Plato, *The Republic*, Books II, III (pp. 125-130)

Week 3 (April 8-10-12)

Plato, *The Republic*, Books IV, V, VI (pp. 169-73), VII (pp. 183-90)

Week 4 (April 15-17-19)

Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book I (chapters 1-7); III, (1, 5, 7-9), IV (4, 6, 8-11)

Week 5 (April 22-24-26)

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Preface (482-3), 15-19

Week 6 (April 29, May 1-3)

Midterm exam, May 8th

Week 7 (May 6-8-10)

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch 7 (570-72), 11-15 (582-604), 17 (606-08)

Week 8 (May 13-15-17)

Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapters 1-5, 7-11, 18-19

Week 9 (May 20-22-24)

Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 785-815

Week 10 (May 27-29)

Marx, "Alienated Labor," 1086-1092

Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morality," 1146-60