



Yeshiva University  
THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS  
CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

## Great Political Thinkers: Introduction to Political Thought

Spring 2022  
Stern College, Yeshiva College  
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### Course Summary

Political philosophy examines the fundamental problems faced by human beings both as individuals and as members of associations that, in the Western tradition, have come to be called political. They ask two fundamental questions: “how should I live my life?” and “how can and should we live together?” The great thinkers of the Western tradition have explored these and related questions with tremendous depth. In this class, we will study three seminal thinkers in the history of Western political thought: Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli. Plato and Aristotle produced the central writings of ancient political philosophy, while Machiavelli was the founder of modern political philosophy. Between the study of Plato and Aristotle on the one hand and Machiavelli on the other, students will be introduced to both the “ancient” and “modern” perspectives on politics.

However, the purpose of this study is not merely to gain historical understandings of how people thought in the past. Rather, through careful study of these writers, students should attempt to grapple with what these authors have to teach *us* about fundamental political and thus human questions. Such questions include: What is justice? Is thought superior to action, or is action superior to thought? What is philosophy, and how does it relate to politics? How much can expertise or reason be employed in resolving political conflict? What demands does morality make on politics, and what demands do politics make on morality? Along the way, Jewish perspectives on the themes covered will be considered.

**For Political Science Majors:** The class counts toward the Intro course requirement or Political Theory distribution.

### Expectations

Students will be expected to carefully read between 100 and 150 pages a week. Prior to every class, students will be expected to have read and reflected upon the readings of that week and to participate in class discussions about them. Students will write two interpretative essays which carefully analyze the books studied. A take-home final exam will ask for comparisons between

thinkers covered and major themes addressed in the course.

## **Attendance**

Active attendance and participation are essential for the functioning of the course and learning experience. All absences are to be cleared in advance with the instructor. Any more than two unexcused absences will result in a docked grade.

## **Grading**

10%: Class Attendance and Participation  
20%: Short Paper  
30%: Long Paper  
40%: Final Exam

## **Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, (646) 592-4280, [akelsen@yu.edu](mailto:akelsen@yu.edu) during the first week of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter to ensure the successful implementation of those accommodations.

## **Reading Material**

All students are required to obtain their own copies of the following works **in the following noted editions/translations**. Please contact the instructors if you have any difficulty, financial or otherwise, in obtaining these texts.

Plato's *Republic* (Basic Books, Allan Bloom translation)  
Aristotle's *Politics* (University of Chicago, Carnes Lord translation)  
Machiavelli's *The Prince* (University of Chicago, Harvey Mansfield translation)

Other readings may be distributed.

## **Schedule**

Week I (Jan. 24/26): Introduction. What is political philosophy? Can there be political science?  
Reading: Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?"

Week II (Jan. 31/Feb. 2): Aristotle's *Politics* Book I

Week III (Feb. 7/9): Aristotle's *Politics* Books III-IV



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Week IV (Feb. 14/16): Plato's *Republic* Book I

**Guest Lecture (Feb. 14) - Prof. Alex Priou, University of Colorado, on Plato's *Republic* - 6:45pm, Wilf Campus.**

Week V (Feb. 21/23): Plato's *Republic* Book II

Week VI (Feb. 28/March 2): Plato's *Republic* Book III **Shorter Paper Due**

Week VII (March 7/9): Plato's *Republic* Book IV

**Guest Lecture (March 9) Prof. James Diamond, University of Waterloo, on Aristotle and Maimonides - 6:45pm, Wilf Campus.**

Week VIII (March 14): Plato's *Republic* Book V

Week IX (March 21/23): Plato's *Republic* Book VI

Week X (March 28/30): Plato's *Republic* Book VII-VIII

Week XI (April 4/6): Reading: Machiavelli, *The Prince* **April 4, No Class (Paper Writing day). April 6: Guest Lecture, TBA.**

Week XII (April 11/13): Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Week XIII (April 27): Machiavelli, *The Prince* **Longer Paper Due**

Week XIV (May 2/4): Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Week XV (May 9/11): Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Review **Take Home Final Exam Distributed**