We study political philosophy to understand different eras in human history, to participate in an ongoing conversation about political affairs, and to think about how we may act in the present moment. Political philosophy gives us a sense of what make us think the way we do about such matters as justice, freedom, equality, and democracy; enables us to transcend and challenge the common sense of our historical moment; and empowers us to change the world. At its best, political philosophy is an exhilarating search for new political possibilities.

In this course, we introduce students to many of the most important names in the history of European political philosophy, including Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, and Wollstonecraft. We will also read work by seminal Chinese political thinkers such as Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, and Han Feizi. In the last section of the course, we enter a contemporary debate about the prospect of Confucian democracy.

Required Texts


Course Requirements

(1) Class Presentations. Students will lead discussion twice this semester, once on a European thinker and once on a Chinese thinker. Each time, make a handout with a chronology of key dates for the thinkers, excerpts from the Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought and/or other secondary sources, and an outline summary of the argument with quotes. See how much information you can get on a single double-sided page (print and bring to class).

(2) Midterm. I will distribute six questions a week ahead of the midterm and randomly select two on the day of the exam. Answer both in one hour. You may study in groups, but the exam is closed-book.
(3) Final. Same format as midterm.

(4) Research paper. Write a 3000 word essay comparing and contrasting a European and Chinese thinker we have read this semester. You could research topics like Confucius and Plato on the good life, Machiavelli and Han Feizi on political realism, or Aristotle and Mengzi on human nature. Make it “look” like an academic article, e.g. with a 100 word abstract summarizing the argument. Cite at least 5 academic books and articles. Use subheadings where appropriate. Due on the last day of class.

(5) Class participation. Students should attend every class having read the material and ready to talk. Buy the books and bring the one with the readings to class.

Grade Distribution

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Course Schedule

1. August 31 – No Class; I’m at the American Political Science Association Conference in San Francisco.

Classical and Medieval European Political Thought

2. September 6 – Thucydides

   *Pericles' Funeral Oration*, 13-18

3. September 7 – Plato

   *The Apology*, 19-38

4. September 11 – Plato

   *The Republic*, 39-94

5. September 14 – Plato

   *The Republic*, 94-106
6. September 18 – Aristotle
   *The Politics*, 107-117

7. September 21 – Aristotle
   *The Politics*, 117-123

8. September 25 – Cicero on Roman politics
   *On the Republic*, 124-126

9. September 28 – St. Augustine
   *City of God*, 133-143

10. October 2 – St. Thomas Aquinas
    *Politics and Law*, 144-152

11. October 5 – Christine de Pizan
    *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 153-158

12. October 12 – Midterm

**Chinese Political Thought in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods**

13. October 16 – Kongzi (Confucius)
    “The Analects,” Book 1-29

14. October 19 – Kongzi (Confucius)
    “The Analects,” 30-58

15. October 23 – Mengzi
    *Mencius*, 115-160

16. October 26 – Xunzi
    *Xunzi*, 255-310
17. October 30 – Han Feizi

Han Feizi, 311-362

**Modern European Political Thought**

18. November 2 – Machiavelli

*The Prince*, 167-187

19. November 6 – Machiavelli

*The Discourses*, 188-193

20. November 9 – Hobbes

*The Leviathan*, 205-242

21. November 13 – Locke

*Second Treatise of Government*, 243-279

22. November 16 – Rousseau

*On the Social Contract*, 280-292

23. November 20 – Smith

*The Wealth of Nations*, 314-334

24. November 27 – Wollstonecraft

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 362-370

**Modern Chinese Political Thought**

25. November 30 – Confucianism as Rule by Elites


26. December 4 – Confucian Democracy 1

27. December 7 – Confucian Democracy 2

- Final paper due

Wednesday, December 13, 9: 30 am - Final Exam