What would Machiavelli say about the invasion of Iraq? What would have been John Stuart Mill’s take on Obamacare? What would Aristotle say about economic inequality? What would Immanuel Kant have said about immigration? What did John Rawls think about the possibilities for stable democracy in the post-Soviet states of Eastern Europe...or the United States of America?

This course explores classic texts in the history of Western political thought (and a few modern ones). One reason to study these texts is that the past is the source of the present. The ideas explored in these texts are the sources of our own thinking, whether we know it or not. That does not make them right or wrong, but you are curious about yourself you should be interested to know where your mind gets its material. It is also interesting to see the way constellations of ideas that today seem mutually contradictory seemed to go together naturally a century or a millennium ago. There may be a warning there—Plato advocated a form of a totalitarian state. Does that mean that if I recognize Platonic elements in my own thinking I am headed down a slippery path toward justifying totalitarianism? Or there may be a different kind of warning. If I take something for granted that every major classical writer agrees is wrongheaded, should I consider the possibility that they understood something I do not? In the graded assignments for this class you are asked to show that you have studied and understood the assigned texts: we hope you will also think hard about the possibility that you have something to learn from them. We will also try to show you how modern debates in political theory grow out of earlier philosophies.

The other reason for reading these texts is that the past has nothing to do with the present. As the man said, “the past is another country, they do things differently there.” The present tense of “do” is the best part of that line: it emphasizes the fact that the past is always present, but always strange. We constantly appeal to the past in one way or another, whether to the wisdom of ancient Rome, the intentions of the American Founding Fathers, or the great religious texts of the Abrahamic traditions. But when we sit down and read those texts carefully we may be startled at the strangeness of them. Which should provoke a whole slew of interesting questions, starting with this one: if the texts and thinkers you believed to be the source of your beliefs are unutterably strange, then were did
your beliefs actually come from? ("I am a purely original thinker and I made them up myself" won't do, unless you were raised by wolves.)

In choosing the readings for this course I have tried to accommodate three mutually incommensurate goals: to provide an introduction to the range of Western political thought, to engage texts that are demonstrably sources for modern political thinking, and to keep the cost of textbooks and the reading load from getting out of hand. To achieve these goals I have asked you to buy only one textbook, and have uploaded additional materials to a course moodle available at courses.moodle.wisc.edu (if you are enrolled in the class, you should be able to access this moodle with your usual login in formation – if you are unable to access the moodle, check the status of your registration!)

The graded work in this class comprises three midterm exams, a final exam, and graded assignments in section. The breakdown of grading is as follows:
- first midterm: 15%
- second midterm: 20%
- third midterm: 20%
- final exam: 30%
- participation in section, including graded assignments: 15%
All exams are take-home essay exams. Your answers are to be typed and stapled to a cover sheet (specific requirements will be distributed with exam instructions). These are open-book, open-note exams that you will be permitted to write with a partner if you so choose. Further details will be distributed with examination instructions.

9/3 Introduction: what is the meaning of “political” in the term “political theory”?

9/5 power and authority -- Hebrew Bible [moodle]:
- Genesis Book 1 (first Creation)
- Genesis Book 2 (second Creation)
- Genesis Books 3-4 (Eden and the Fall)
- Genesis Books 6-9 (Noah)

9/10 tribalism and law -- Hebrew Bible [moodle]
- Genesis Books 11, 18, 19 (Babel and Sodom and Gomorrah)
- Exodus Book 18 and Deuteronomy Books 16-17 ("judges and officers")
- Exodus Books 20-23 (law/legislation)
- Exodus Book 23:23, Book 33:1, and Deuteronomy 20 and Judges 3 (war)

9/12 the birth of the polis -- Aeschylus, Eumenides [moodle] and “Introduction to Eumenides” [moodle]

9/17 republicanism and Idealism -- Plato, Republic Book I-II
9/19  “a city built in words” -- Plato, Republic Books III, IV, V, VII excerpts

9/24  Athens at war -- Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War excerpts [moodle]
- Pericles Funeral Oration
- the Mitylenean debate
- the Corcyran civil war
- the Melian debate

9/26  classical republicanism -- Aristotle, Politics Books I and III

10/1  Roman republicanism and the wheel of history -- Polybius and Cicero [moodle] and “Background – Rome” (moodle)

10/3  Christian republicanism -- Augustine [moodle] and “Background – Augustine” [moodle]
      TAKE-HOME MIDTERM 1

10/8  civic republicanism in the Renaissance -- Machiavelli
      "Intro to the Renaissance" [moodle]
      "Machiavelli – Discourses on Livy Book I, Chapt.s 18, 55, 58 [moodle]
      Discourses Book I, Chapt. 2 (231-33)
      Discourses Book II, Chapt.s 2, 20, 29 (235-40)
      Discourses Book III, Chapt. 9 (240-41)

10/10 the failure of civic republicanism -- Machiavelli, continued
      The Prince Chapt.s 14-26 (212-27)

10/15  the authoritarian social contract – Thomas Hobbes
      Leviathan Chapt.s 13, 14, 17, 18 (258-66, 276-83)

10/17  the liberal social contract – John Locke
      Second Treatise on Government Chapt.s 1-5 (332-45)
      Chapt. 8 sec.s 95-104 (356-59)
      Chapt. 9 (364-65)
      Chapt. 19 sec.s 211-230 (386-91)


beyond republicanism and liberalism? – the American experiment Madison, Hamilton, Jay, Federalist Papers #’s 9, 10, 51, 78 (548-62) Brutus essay [moodle]

conservatism Edmund Burke (604-10) Russell Kirk, "Ten Principles of Conservatism” [moodle]

TAKEHOME MIDTERM 2 DISTRIBUTED


historical materialism – Karl Marx “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts” and “German Ideology” (692-715)

the political implications of historical materialism – Karl Marx, continued “The Communist Manifesto,” parts 1 and 2 (717-27)

two versions of “liberty” – Benjamin Constant “The Liberty of the Ancients and the Liberty of the Moderns” [moodle]
11/21  the case of Zionism
Herzl
Ahad Ha’Am
Jabotinsky [moodle]

**TAKEHOME MIDTERM 3 DISTRIBUTED**

11/26 feminism – Simone de Beauvoir
“The Second Sex” (782-95)

**11/28 THANKSGIVING**

12/3 libertarianism – Robert Nozick
“Anarchy, State, and Utopia” (907-24)
Stephen Metcalf, “The Liberty Scam” [moodle]

12/5 deliberation and democracy – John Rawls
“Public Reason Revisited” [moodle]

12/10  the rhetoric of modern party politics -- reading tba [moodle]

12/12  reading in new ways –
Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence” and
Bonnie Honig, “Declarations of Independence” [moodle]

***TAKEHOME FINAL EXAM DISTRIBUTED: DUE DECEMBER 19***