In this introduction to the history of political thought, we will undertake to critically rethink the foundations of Western political philosophy from the ancients to the early modern period. We will ask, what is “politics,” and what might it mean for concrete questions of justice, democracy, war, citizenship, and law? What might politics mean for philosophical questions of ethics, morality, human nature, and knowledge? We will begin with the Athenian democratic tradition. We will then go on to consider how Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle respond to this tradition, especially with regard to its various conceptions of knowledge, virtue, citizenship, and the state. We will then examine Epicureanism as a political response to both Athenian democracy and Athenian philosophy during the early Hellenistic period and then later during the crisis of the Roman Republic. Finally, we will take up Niccolo Machiavelli’s revision of these classical traditions in the early modern European context of The Prince.

Course Requirements

Midterm exam I: 20%
Midterm exam II: 30%
Final exam: 40%
Class participation: 10%

The final exam will be held on Monday, December 19 2-4pm. Location to be announced.

Required Texts

The following texts are available for purchase at the campus bookstore:

Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff ed. Early Greek Political Thought (Cambridge).


Plato, Five Dialogues, translated by GMA Grube and John Cooper (Hackett).

**Readings Schedule**


September 19, 21, 23: Thucydides.

September: 26, 28, 30: Plato.

October 3, 5, 7: Plato.

October 10, 12, 14: Plato.

October 17, 19, 21: Plato. Midterm I.

October 24, 26, 28: FALL RECESS

October 31, November 2, 4: Aristotle.

November 7, 9, 11: Aristotle.

November 14, 16, 18: Epicurus and Lucretius.

November 21: (no class Wednesday, November 23) Midterm II.

November 28, 30, December 2: Machiavelli.

December 5, 7, 9: Machiavelli.

December 12: Concluding reflections.