

Western Political Thought II (PS 341)

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Purpose and Objectives of the Course

In this course, we shall read three of the most important texts that laid the intellectual foundations for the moral and political life of our own age. In the first, The Prince, Machiavelli announces a fundamental change in moral and political orientation, a change that implies the rejection of much in the classical philosophic and the Christian traditions. The main aim of the course is to understand this change as fully as possible, first by a careful reading of The Prince, and then by readings of the Leviathan and the Two Treatises of Government. The latter two works elaborate and extend while somewhat modifying Machiavelli's path breaking innovation. In reading and thinking about these books, we will raise and examine for ourselves the questions about justice, conquest, war, property, the family, and God that animated these thinkers. Our goal is not so much to learn about Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke, although that is important, but to follow their lead in thinking philosophically about some of the most important questions of concern to a thoughtful human being.

Required Texts

Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince
Thomas Hobbes, The Leviathan
John Locke, Two Treatises of Government

Other Requirements:

Attendance is required and you are expected to attend all class meetings having read the assigned texts carefully and prepared to discuss them. The core of the course will be our careful examination and discussion of the texts in class. As much as possible this course will be run as a seminar, so that the more you prepare and the better you know the texts, the more you will get out of it. Your thoughtful participation (questions, comments, and objections) is required. A record of unexcused absences may reduce your final grade by up to one grade point (e.g., from a B to a C) at the instructor's discretion.

Plagiarism is presenting someone else's words or ideas as your own work. Plagiarism is a form of intellectual dishonesty; it will result in an "F" for the assignment and may result in an "F" for the course. In addition, all instances of plagiarism are reported to the registrar's office. If you are in doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism or how properly to document a source, consult with me before turning in your essay. You should study the statement on academic honesty in the AU Student Handbook. I will strictly apply the policy stated there.

Grading:

In-class contribution 20%
First Essay 35%
Second Essay: 45%