POLITICS AND THE GOOD LIFE

What constitutes a good life for a human being? Where, if anywhere, is human happiness to be found? What makes life worth living for a human being? To these perennial human questions, as students of politics we hasten to add another: How does politics shape the perception, understanding, and answers that citizens give to these questions? If it is clear that different political regimes decisively determine the range of responses available to citizens (consider, for example, the vastly different range of possible responses available to both men and women in contemporary Iran, North America and North Korea), a more subtle but no less important issue concerns the manner in which different political cultures shape the way in which citizens and subjects think about the questions themselves.

The tradition of classical political thought is characterized by attentiveness to fundamental human questions and the inescapable linkage between politics and quality of life. As citizens living in modern liberal democracies, we have been powerfully shaped by a political context that aspires to be neutral with respect to rival visions of the good life—a neutrality that the classical tradition as a whole denies is possible. Continuing controversy on this issue is especially persistent in the area of religion. It is reflected in several of the most vital debates in contemporary liberal theory and embedded as well in the range of controversies sometimes subsumed under the general rubric of “culture wars.” Our study this term not only provides an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the classical tradition, but also to do so in a way that enables us to become more thoughtful about what a “good life” for a human being would look like, and more aware of the powerful influence of politics on the kind of answer we are apt to give to this fundamental human question.

Hence, the aim in this course is not essentially historical. That is, we are not primarily attempting to understand how Aristotle or Plato reflect and/or criticize their own—now extinct—political cultures. Although we will necessarily give attention to some of the peculiarities of the political culture of ancient Greece, as a class in political thought our goal is to engage the most considered views of unusually thoughtful and reputedly wise human beings, with a view to determining what they can teach us as we seek to address questions about the relationship between politics and the good life in our own time and place. The class will be successful in the measure that it challenges some of our own opinions about the good life, enlarges and enriches our current views, and engenders greater thoughtfulness about our own desire to live a good human life.
Required Texts (available in the Bookstore):
So as to prevent unnecessary problems, students are required to use the editions specified below.

- Plato, Symposium, trans. Nehamas & Woodruff (Hackett 1989)
- Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord, (Chicago 1984, preferably the first edition which is still available in paperback and has been ordered by the University Bookstore)

Requirements:
- Regular attendance and participation in class
  - Since this is a text-based course, all students are required to bring the text under discussion to class on a daily basis
  - No computers are to be used during class-time, unless there is an extenuating circumstance, which must be cleared with me ahead of time
- Attendance at three public lectures in the discipline of political thought, all of which address the relationship between “Christianity and Politics.” All lectures take place @ 5:00 in the Watkins Room of the Trone Student Center. All events carry CLP credit.
  - Feb 19: Dr. John T. Scott, “God and Man in Rousseau”
  - March 5: Drs. Robert P. George & Cornel R. West, “A Conversation about Christianity and Politics”
  - April 9: Dr. Daniel J. Mahoney, “Christianity and the Religion of Humanity”
- Four assigned short papers (2-3 pages), one of which is optional. All students will write the first and the fourth assigned paper. Students have the option to omit *either* the second or third paper. Every student is required to write at least one paper on each author.
- Quizzes as needed

Attendance Policy and Class participation:
- More than two *unexcused* cuts adversely affects the participation grade. Beginning with the third *unexcused* absence, each missed class is penalized one-third of a letter grade. Participation grades begin with a C (for being there), and are raised in accordance with the quality of a student’s active engagement with course materials. All students are graded weekly (check, plus) on the quality and quantity of their active engagement with course materials for that week. Participation grades can be seen at any time, based on student request.
- If you arrive after attendance is taken, you are likely to have been marked absent. It is *your* responsibility to let me know at the end of class that you were in fact present.
Grading:
- The final grade is a composite of four or five equally weighted grades (20% or 25% each, depending on whether you choose to write the optional paper). The composite grade is based on class Participation and three or four Papers.
- The core grade resulting from the average of these four or five grades may be raised on the basis of steady improvement.

Office Hours:
Officially: MTWR: 3:00-4:00. However, I am in my office a lot and students are encouraged to see me with any questions or concerns they may have. The best way to set up a meeting is to send me an email, although students are also welcome to drop by.

Disabilities:
Students with disabilities who need academic accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Disability Services (294-2320), located behind (and below) Earl Infirmary in Room 002. After this meeting, please set up a meeting with me. It is in your interest to attend to this EARLY in the term.

Academic Integrity:
Honesty, respect, and personal responsibility are principles that guide academic life at Furman, in and out of the classroom. Academic misconduct in any form (plagiarism, cheating, inappropriate collaboration, and other efforts to gain an unfair academic advantage) threatens the values of the campus community and will have severe consequences, such as failure in the course, and/or suspension or dismissal from the University.

If you have any question about what constitutes plagiarism or any other form of academic misconduct, it is your responsibility to speak with me so that we can dispel any and all ambiguity. Given the severity of the consequences, it is crucial that you fully understand what is expected of you in this regard. If you have any doubts, just ask! You should also be familiar with the information available at www.furman.edu/main/integrity.htm. A copy of Furman’s policy on academic dishonesty can also be found at this site.

SOMETHAT TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

- Course Introduction

I. PLATO ON SOCRATIC POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

- Plato, Apology of Socrates (Two Weeks)
- FIRST PAPER DUE: FRIDAY, JANUARY 30 BY 5 P.M.
II. ARISTOTLE ON THE NATURE OF THE GOOD LIFE

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (abridged) (Four Weeks)
- SECOND PAPER DUE: FRIDAY, MARCH 6 BY 5 P.M.

III. EROS AND THE GOOD LIFE

- Plato, *Symposium* (selected speeches) (Two Weeks)
- THIRD PAPER DUE: THURSDAY, APRIL 2 BY 5 P.M.

IV. ARISTOTLE ON THE NATURE OF POLITICS

- Aristotle, *Politics* (abridged) (Four Weeks)
- FINAL PAPER DUE: THURSDAY, MAY 30 BY NOON (This is the time scheduled for our final exam)