Classical Political Thought: POL-270  
Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*  
Fall 2018  
TuTh, 1:00 pm - 2:15 pm  
Seminar Room, Politics and International Affairs

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**Course Description**

How should I live? And how should we live together? These are questions human beings necessarily ask—for we seem naturally to have a multitude of opinions about what is right and good for us to do. How might we begin to sort through these various opinions?

This course guides us through Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*: a pair of studies from the 4th-century BC that have over the many years remained key texts on these fundamental questions. Aristotle’s work endures in part because it unites astonishing breadth—he combs through the human phenomena in their bewildering intricacy and complexity—and insistent depth, as he systematically leads us to see that to understand how a human being should live requires us to answer the question of what a human being *is*.

What is a human being? How can we come to understand *ourselves*? The method for such an investigation is far from clear. Such an elusive subject requires, at the least, cultivated powers of observation and sustained concentration. The development of such intellectual habits is always difficult, and may be particularly challenging in our current culture of distraction. Reading Aristotle over the course of this semester will therefore be an intentionally counter-cultural exercise in “slow thinking.” The main goal of our work together will to learn to read carefully and listen well so that we might train ourselves in Aristotle’s art of perception.

We will spend most of our time with Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*. In order to see Aristotle’s thought in relief, we will also read excerpts from two of the most important modern critics of Aristotle’s work—Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant—and from some 20th-century authors who argue for a recovery of different aspects of the Aristotelian approach.
Books

Texts are central to this course.
Please buy copies of the assigned editions in which you can take notes.


A depiction of Plato and Aristotle by Giotto di Bondone, 1334

Calendar

August 28: Introduction to the Class


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**Noon on Monday, September 17:**

*First Ethics Paper Due—750-1,000 words (2 pages)*


Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, preface and first section (pages 1-17; available on moodle)


**FALL BREAK**


*Ethics Test in class October 11*


October 18: Alasdair MacIntyre, from *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (available on moodle)

**Noon on Monday, October 22:**

*Midterm Ethics Paper Due—1,000 to 1,500 words (3 pages)*
    Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 13 (pages 74-78; available on moodle)


October 30: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book II, chapters 6-12 (pages 35-61)
    Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 13; part of chapters 14 and 15; chapter 17
    (pages 74-81; 89; 106-110)


November 8: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book IV, chapters 1-7 (pages 97-110)
    Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”
    (pages 41-53; available on moodle)

**Noon on Monday, November 12:**

**First Politics Paper Due—750-1,000 words (2 pages)**


**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

*Politics test in class November 27*


December 4: Aristotle, Book VII, chapters 9-17, Book VIII, entire (pages 201-238)

**Required Lecture:**
Arthur Brooks, President of the American Enterprise Institute
“Bringing America Together”
5 pm, Watkins Room

December 6: Hannah Arendt, from *The Human Condition* (available on moodle)

December 11: reading TBD

**5:00 pm on Friday, December 14:**
Final Paper Due
2,500 words (10 pages, double-spaced)

**Assignments**

There are five main components to the assignments for this class:

1. **Reading.** Furman policy states that students should expect 3-4 hours of prep time per Tuesday/Thursday class, apart from the time required to write papers. You will need the full complement of that time to read these challenging selections well. Often one needs to read these texts twice to understand their meaning and significance. Taking the time to read carefully, make notes on what you’ve read, and think about the questions raised, is essential to learning in this course. To ensure that the class is reading consistently, pop quizzes may be given.

2. **Participation:** This is a seminar, and as such depends upon the preparation and participation of the students involved. Come to class every day prepared with observations and questions about the reading. Please remember that questions about what you have not understood are oftentimes the most valuable contributions.

3. **Question assignments:** On one day of each week, you will be asked to write an email of at least one paragraph detailing something you don’t yet understand about the day’s assigned reading. The class will be divided into two groups corresponding to the two
days of the week on which our class meets. Each group should turn in questions for the day’s reading in the text of an email by 11:00 am on the day of their assignment. Question assignments will be graded on the scale of check-plus (A), check (B), check-minus (C), and incomplete (no credit).

4. **Tests**: There will be a short-answer test for each book to ensure that you acquire basic comprehension of each work.

5. **Writing**: you are required to turn in two short papers over the course of the semester, a midterm paper, and a final, longer paper after the end of classes (4 papers total). Papers will follow a question of your own choosing. Please see the paper guidelines and the citation guidelines for more detailed information about this assignment.

### Breakdown of Final Grade

- Emailed weekly assignments: 15%
- Participation: 8%
- Short Papers (2 papers at 11% each): 22%
- Tests (2 tests at 10% each): 20%
- Midterm Paper: 15%
- Final Paper: 20%

### Policies

**Attendance:**

*After three absences of any kind, every further absence results in the loss of 5% of your final grade.* You are required to be in attendance for the entire class hour, so as not to disrupt the discussion. Please plan to arrive on time and be prepared to stay without break through the session. **If you do not bring your book to class, you cannot participate fully; failure to bring your book therefore will be marked as half an absence.** Drinks are permitted in the classroom, but not food.
**Electronics:**

The use of electronic devices in the classroom is not permitted, as it inhibits discussion and has a demonstrably negative impact on the performance of the student using the device. Classes are not to be recorded without permission.

**Papers:**

Please see the separate guidelines for paper instructions. You should note that (per the guidelines) more than three **sloppy mistakes**—misspellings, mistakes in conjugation, missing words or missing marks of punctuation—**will result in a downgrade of 5% for the paper.**

**Academic Integrity:** If you consult any source beyond the assigned reading for an assignment, you must cite that source. This includes electronic resources. Quotations or paraphrases from any source that are not accompanied by proper citations constitute plagiarism and will be treated as academic integrity violations. The instructor may use “Turn-it-in” or other aids to determine violations. **The penalty for such a violation may be failure of the course.**

Please note that “secondary sources” such as sparknotes, novelguide, gradesaver, etc. are not permitted for this class. Evidence of use of this type of secondary source in preparing a paper will result in failure of the paper.

Detail from *The School of Athens*  
Raphael, 1509-1511

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