

**Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology**  
**PH-4235: Human Nature and Political Philosophy**

**Spring 2020**

Instructor: John Thomas Mellein, O.P.

Office: East 207

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**Course Description**

This course covers selections from Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Machiavelli, and others to explore the links between their philosophy of human nature and their political philosophy. Students will be required to give two class presentations, and to write a research paper on one of the thinkers covered in the course. Format: seminar. Evaluation: In-class presentations; 15-20 page paper. Intended Audience: Phil MA students. [Faculty Consent required; 12 max enrollment; Auditors Excluded; Prerequisite of PH-2040 Philosophical Anthropology completed or concurrent, or equivalent]. 3 Units.

This course meets on Tuesdays, 4:30 p.m.–6:30 p.m. in DSPT Room 3.

**Required Texts:**

Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Edited by Richard McKeon. New York:

Modern Library, 2001.

ISBN-13: 978-0375757990.

Paperback. \$21.95.

OR

Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle (2 Volumes)*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

ISBN: 9780691016504      \$62.50

ISBN: 9780691016511      \$62.50

Plato. *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997.

ISBN: 978-0-87220-349-5

MSRP: \$60.00

Thomas Aquinas. *Aquinas: Political Writings*. Translated by R. W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. ISBN: 978-0521375955. Street price: \$35.00.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Discourses*. Translated by Leslie J. Walker. Edited by Bernard Crick. New York: Penguin, 1998 (reprint). ISBN: 978-0140444285. MSRP: \$14.00

Hobbes, Thomas. *Man and Citizen (De Homine and De Cive)*. Edited by Bernard Gert.

Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991. ISBN: 978-0872201118.

Street price: \$15.00

Other course materials will be available online, or will be posted on Moodle during the week of

the assigned reading.

**Grade:**

Class Presentation 1: 25%

Class Presentation 2: 25%

Paper: 50%

Students are to abide by the the DSPT's policies regarding academic honesty as found in the *DSPT Student Handbook*. The grading policy as found in the student handbook, as well as the institutional assessment rubrics, will serve as the guideline for grading. We will review the policies at the beginning of the course.

**Course Requirements**

This seminar course will focus on close reading and in-class discussion of primary text passages. Students will take turns presenting on course readings and secondary sources. Each student will be required to give two in-class presentations. The student, in consultation with the professor, will select materials and make them available to the class the week before the presentation is to be given. Grading for the course will be based on in-class presentations and the research paper. Class participation should give evidence of careful reading of primary and secondary sources. During discussion, students will be expected to use the assigned readings support their interpretation. Students are to listen attentively to fellow students and to engage in genuine conversation. Papers will be evaluated based on support of a clear thesis statement, coherence of argument, and on effective use of primary and secondary sources.

**Course and Institutional Learning Goals**

The main goal of this course is to lay out the basic philosophical anthropology and political theory of each author, and to locate the connection between the philosophical anthropology and political theory. A secondary goal is to assess each theory for its coherence, completeness, and correspondence with reality. A tertiary goal is to improve critical skills in the reading and and discussion of philosophical texts and secondary literature. Students are encouraged to relate the topics to contemporary issues, especially in their papers.

The format of the course, especially the in-class discussions, will give students the opportunity to work toward the institutional learning goals: integrative thinking, intellectual humility, self-direction, and ability to collaborate. We will have a brief in-class discussion regarding the institutional learning goals, available here: <https://www.dspt.edu/our-mission>

**Outcomes**

By the end of the course, students should have familiarity with the main philosophical issues concerning the philosophical anthropology and political principles of five authors, and some of the contemporary scholarly discussion regarding the the same. Students should be able to speak and write intelligently about some aspect of the topics covered. Students will demonstrate subject-appropriate critical thinking skills by comparing passages within the writings of each author, and by assessing contemporary scholarship on their work. Students will demonstrate mastery of the material in class discussion and presentations, and in the 15-20 page research paper.

## **Class Outline**

- 2/4 Introduction to the Course  
Methodology of the Investigation  
“Sokolowski: What is Natural Law? Human Purposes and Natural Ends” (on Moodle)
- 2/11 Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature (selected passages)
- 2/18 Thomas Aquinas, *De regno*
- 2/25 Aristotle, passages on human nature
- 3/3 Aristotle, *Politics*
- 3/10 Aristotle, *Politics*
- 3/17 Machiavelli, *Discourses*, selected passages on human nature
- 3/24 Spring Recess
- 3/31 Machiavelli, *Discourses* and *The Prince*, selected passages on political philosophy
- 4/7 Hobbes, *De homine*
- 4/14 Hobbes, *De cive*
- 4/21 Hobbes, *De cive*
- 4/28 Plato, selected passages on human nature
- 5/5 Plato, *Republic* and *Laws*
- 5/12 Plato, *Laws*