

## **Political Philosophy and the Present: Debate within Secondary Literature**

Instructors: Samuel Abrahám (September-October) Egon Gál (November-December)

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Study of political philosophy is basically the reading of primary sources. That was the case with most text the students at BISLA usually study during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year. There is, however, a waste amount of excellent secondary literature and this course will select a few texts to review the status of the discipline from a point of view of a few modern scholars.

Perhaps the most recurrent question remains whether the norms, virtues and ethical standard are timeless (as Plato or Kant would argue and Leo Strauss seconds) or are contingent, constructed as historicists, relativists or existentialism claim. In other words, it is about, as Richard Rorty claims, the key stakes in philosophy asking whether things and concepts are found and discovered or made and invented.

These questions have profound influence on the current political discourse within Western democracies, currently in crisis heading for unknown future. These philosophical questions determine how we understand the political reality and how reason and unreason, common sense and irrationality pervade the current politics. Also, it has an impact on how the uncertainty of liberal democratic model depends on self-evident standards that are generally *accepted* as something either innate or ontological, or as something that is contractual and constructed but still needed for functioning and stability of our societies.

### **Assessment and Evaluation:**

#### ***Class Participation and Exams***

- *In Class Participation (30%)* Classes are mandatory and students are expected to actively participate in debates. No student who will be absent on more than 4 sessions can finish the course.
- *Oral presentations (30 %):* Two student will prepare a presentation from additional readings.
- *Written Essays and quizzes: (30%)* Each student must submit 2 short essays and quizzes might be written regularly.

■ *Final Exam (10 %):* Take-home exam of 2 answers from 5 questions.

**Required Reading (September-October):**

**Harvey C. Mansfield:** A Student Guide to Political Philosophy

**Leo Strauss:** “On Classical Political Philosophy” pp78-94

IN: Strauss: What is Political Philosophy?

**Richard Rorty:** “Relativism: Finding and Making” xvi-xxxii

**Additional Readings to be selected and presented by 2 students for each reading:**

Richard Rorty: “Philosophy as a Transitional Genre”

In: Richard Rorty: Philosophy and Social Hope, Penguin)

Richard Rorty: “The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy”

Bernard Crick: “So Many Machiavellis” p. 24-65 (Introduction In Machiavelli’s The Discourses, Penguin, 1970)

Leo Strauss: “What is Political Philosophy?” Pp. 9-55 ( In Strauss: What is Political Philosophy? (1959)

Isaiah Berlin: “On the Pursuit of the Ideal” (NYRB, 35:4, 1988)

Reaction to Berlin’s article by Leo Strauss: **Relativism** pp13-26 In The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism (1989)

E.H. Carr: “The Historian and His Facts” pp. 7-30 In What is History? (1961)