

**Lecture One :**  
**Political Philosophy**  
**and The American**  
**Constitution**

It is said that The Americans have developed a system of government that for a long time inspired other people for the the attribution of power for every branch and the citizens' rights and duties that are constitutionally protected, yet as a nation it is not so ancient.

The Americans have exploited all political thoughts so far discussed by philosophers and avoided all sorts of totalitarian exclusive deeds.

Let' s discover those Western political thoughts and how they influenced in framing American political life and institutions.

# Should Humans Rule themselves?

- ❑ If so, what makes them qualified?
- ❑ If not, why are they not qualified?
- ❑ What system of government does the U.S. have?
- ❑ What are the benefits and limits of this type of government?
- ❑ How does the U.S. balance the needs of freedom, peace, security, and individuality?
- ❑ What is power?
- ❑ How does power influence the political process?

Plato

(428 b.c.–347 b.c.)

## Background:

- ▶ Witnessed the end of the Athenian Republic and the hostile takeover by Sparta
- ▶ Was a student and disciple of Socrates who influenced his idealistic view of people
- ▶ Considered **Education** to be the fundamental influence in creating **good citizens**

**Book: *The Republic***

## **Views on Society:**

- ❖ **Considered all war to be fought over money**
- ❖ **Believed that all humans are essentially Good, but are inherently different-- everyone has different strengths which only education fully develops**
- ❖ **Social roles, including leadership, must be based on strengths of the individual**
- ❖ **Education instills virtue, integrity, and citizenship**

# Plato's Views on Government:

- ▶ Believed in a self-sufficient community, led by a Philosopher-king
  - Educated to lead
  - instilled with the virtues of philosophy
  - Unpaid, so uncorrupt-able
- ▶ Social roles dependent on talent
- ▶ Responsibility for survival dependent on community collaboration
- ▶ The “Masses” can be trusted because they are governed by reason, but shouldn't lead because they have other strengths

# Plato Quotes

- ▶ “Democracy... is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder; and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike.”
- ▶ “One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.”
- ▶ “He was a wise man who invented beer.”

# Aristotle (384 b.c.–324 B.C.)

## **Background:**

- ▶ Student of Plato and leader of The Academy, the first Western “University”
- ▶ Witnessed the end of Athens and the victory of Alexander the Great
- ▶ Hired to be Alexander the Great’s teacher during his conquest for world domination
- ▶ Forced to flee Macedonia after Alexander’s death

**Books:** *On Kingship, Politics*



# Aristotle

## Views on Society:

- ▶ Thought that humans are **unique animals** because of their ability for **reason** and complex **speech**
- ▶ Humans are not born good or bad, but are a born blank slate, a “*tabula rasa*”
- ▶ Society and **education** instills the ability to “reason” good choices
- ▶ Society is defined as the unification of people for the **common good** and **mutual benefit**

# ARISTOTLE'S VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT

**These governments change through revolution and constitute a never-ending cycle.**

	<b>Good</b>	<b>Bad</b>
<b>Rule of One</b>	<b>King (rises up from the people to lead)</b>	<b>Tyrant (dynasty turns corrupt with power after several generations)</b>
<b>Rule by Few</b>	<b>Aristocracy (group of nobles assassinate tyrant and lead)</b>	<b>Oligarchy (powerful nobles turn corrupt)</b>
<b>Rule by Many</b>	<b>Democracy (the people rise up to lead all people)</b>	<b>Mobocracy (people seek self interest, tyranny of the majority, too many voices heard)</b>

# Aristotle's Views on Government:

- ▶ Believed that **Education** would develop innate rational abilities
- ▶ Considered that government would provide for **common benefit**
  - Individuals alone can not provide for all their needs
  - Families collaborate to divide work
  - Communities divide labor
  - Based on individual ability and extent of education
- ▶ Best form of government would be a **Constitutional Democracy**, with equal participation
- ▶ Believed that “**the Masses**” could be **trusted** if they recognized their differences and were properly educated
- ▶ Stated that the **absence of law and order** would result in **greed, selfishness**, and evil--the destruction of the human organism

# Aristotle Quotes

- “All human actions have one or more of these seven causes: chance, nature, compulsion, habit, reason, passion, and desire.”
- “It is not always the same thing to be a good man and a good citizen.”
- “All paid jobs absorb and degrade the mind.”

# Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603)

## Background:

- ▶ Daughter of Henry VIII of England
- ▶ Reunited the English throne after the death of Henry and the War of the Roses
- ▶ Refused to marry, considered herself the wife of the People of England
- ▶ Responsible for the English Renaissance—a rebirth of science, education, literature, and the arts

## Views on Society:

- ▶ Believed that all royalty were given **power by God**
- ▶ Perpetuated the myth “the Great Chain of Being”
  - All humans must play their **social roles**
  - All humans are **locked** into their social roles (Monarch<--Nobility<--Lords<--Tradesmen<--Laborers<--Indentured Servants)
  - Based on **wealth** and **property**

# Views on Government:

- ▶ Believed in **Divine Right** of Monarchs--**Absolute Monarchy**
- ▶ Tolerated the existence of **bicameral representative Parliament**, but with the power to overrule parliamentary decisions
- ▶ “The Masses” are expected **serve** the Queen out of love and obedience
- ▶ The **People can't govern** themselves because God didn't tell them they could

# Queen Elizabeth Quotes

- ▶ I have already joined myself in marriage to a husband, namely the kingdom of England. (Elizabeth to Parliament)
- ▶ I shall desire you all, my lords, (chiefly you of the nobility, everyone in his degree and power) to be assistant to me that I, with my ruling, and you with your service, may make a good account to Almighty God and leave some comfort to our posterity on earth. (Elizabeth at the beginning of her reign)



# Thomas Hobbes(1588–1679)

## Background:

- ▶ Born during the English Civil War--a time of great social and political uncertainty
- ▶ Fled to Paris as a youth

**Book: *The Leviathan***

# Views on Society:

- ▶ Considered all humans to be **naturally wicked** and **evil**
  - Competing for **survival** and resources
  - Based on **greed** and **self-interest**
  - Can not be trusted
  - **Might makes right**
- ▶ Believed that humans are in a **constant state of war** due to selfishness and scarcity
- ▶ Social stability only occurs through a **social contract**-an agreement to stop killing each other

# Views on Government:

- ▶ Because humans can't be trusted, believed that the best government is an **absolute monarchy**
- ▶ Absolute Monarchy=Leviathan
  - A Gross, ugly sea monster with the power to devour everything
  - Metaphor for government and the **absolute authority** it should wield to protect life
  - Based on Biblical Jonah
- ▶ The Masses agree to give up freedom for **peace and security** (social contract)

# Hobbes Quotes

- ▶ "The condition of man . . . is a condition of war of everyone against everyone."
- ▶ "No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"
- ▶ "In the state of nature profit is the measure of right."

# John Locke (1632–1704)

## Background:

- ▶ Born after the English Civil war peacefully concluded
- ▶ Believed in **religious freedom**, especially Protestantism
- ▶ Fled to Holland because of revolutionary ideas
- ▶ Returned to England and forced the king to accept the **English Bill of Rights**

**Book: *Two Treatises on government***

# John Locke

## Views on Society:

- ▶ All humans are naturally capable of rational thought
  - All humans use **reason** to settle differences and **compromise**
  - The “State of Nature” is one of **total liberty** and **freedom**
- ▶ Natural reason results in **natural equality** between all humans
- ▶ Humans all depend on **property** to satisfy their survival needs

# Views on Government:

- ▶ Humans are naturally **rational**
- ▶ Humans use **reason** to govern themselves **independently**
- ▶ Rejected Divine Right, focused on the **individual**
- ▶ Important to protect “**life, Liberty, and Property**”
- ▶ Limit power of the government by a **separation of power** to check and balance
- ▶ People enter into a “**Social Contract**” to allow peaceful government, but always have the **right to rebel** if life, liberty, and property are threatened

# John Locke Quotes

- ▶ Every man has a property in his own person. This nobody has a right to, but himself.”
- ▶ “All mankind... being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions.”
- ▶ “The reason why men enter into society is the preservation of their property.”
- ▶ “Where there is no property there is no injustice.”



# Louis XIV

## Background:

- ▶ Diminutive king of France
- ▶ After gaining the throne at age 5, lived a very lavish life in his newly constructed Palace of Versailles
- ▶ Nearly bankrupted France because of his lifestyle
- ▶ Really enjoyed high heels and women with birds in their hairdos

# Views on Society:

- ▶ What Society???
- ▶ Considered the middle class the most trustworthy
  - Didn't have anything to gain by intrigue
  - Were scared and hungry, so would do whatever the king wanted
  - Were numerous, a renewable employment source
- ▶ “The People” live only to serve the monarch

# Views on Government:

- ▶ Believed in the **Divine Right** of Kings
  - God destined him to be King
  - All people exist to serve him
  - King answers only to God, is not responsible to “The Masses”
- ▶ **Banned The *Estates Generale*** (the French Congress) from convening
- ▶ Revolution never permitted

- ▶ "It is legal because I wish it."
- ▶ "Ah, if I were not king, I should lose my temper."
- ▶ "I am the State."

# Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755)

## Background:

- ▶ Denied wealth as a child, inherited power and title from a rich uncle
- ▶ Used position at French Academy of Sciences to study and criticize governments

**Book:** *The Persian Letters*

# Views on Society:

- ▶ Considered the French government to be too lavish
- ▶ Believed that religion corrupted governments, especially Christianity
- ▶ Considered women to be weak, but valuable participants in political process
- ▶ Approved of slavery and the natural inequality of the races

# Views on Government:

- ▶ Believed in **secular**, but **ethical**, governments
- ▶ Considered **limited monarchy** to be the most stable government
- ▶ **Separation of powers** essential to stop abuse and corruption=**Checks and Balances**
- ▶ Participation based on educated

# Montesquieu Quotes

- ▶ “I can assure you that no kingdom has ever had as many evil wars as the kingdom of Christ.”
- ▶ “When the (lawmaking) and law–enforcing powers are united in the same person...there can be no liberty.”
- ▶ "In republican governments, men are all equal; equal they are also in despotic governments: in the former, because they are everything; in the latter, because they are nothing."



# Jean-Jacques Rousseau(1712-1778)

## Background:

- ▶ Born in Switzerland, but fled to Paris to avoid a duel
- ▶ Spent most his time in the salons in Paris, philosophizing
- ▶ Spent most of his life very poor, but earned some money as a...”houseboy”
- ▶ Was supposed to send his money to Geneva (to his wife and kids) but didn’t
- ▶ Got chased out of Paris, and into a cave where he died of a respiratory disease, by his wife.

**Book: *The Social Contract***

# Views on Society:

- ▶ All humans are born free, independent and good
- ▶ People would naturally live happily
- ▶ Modern society corrupts people
  - Focus on industry (dehumanized labor)
  - Focus on money making
  - Focus on technology
- ▶ Society makes people unhappy

# Views on Government:

- ▶ Best political unit is **small**
- ▶ Best government is a **direct democracy**, with decisions made by **simple majority** (of men)
- ▶ All decisions made **locally**, according to the needs of the community
- ▶ Considered **elected executives** necessary
- ▶ Believed that government should **protect freedom**

# Rousseau Quote

**“Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.”**

# SO WHAT???

- ▶ What the U.S. Gets out of all this:
- ▶ Humans are born pretty **smart**, but need help to be smarter
  - **Education** helps
  - **Good choices** and **experience** also helps
- ▶ Whether humans are “good” or “bad” doesn’t matter, people still have to **live, love, and work together**
- ▶ Government is an **agreement** to work together, by a set of **guidelines/rules**
- ▶ Government must be divided to **avoid abuse** and **corruption**
- ▶ These agreements=**constitutions** and laws
- ▶ People stick close to their **socio-economic class**
- ▶ All people make decisions based on **self-interest**
- ▶ The U.S. has the first EVER constitution