

**How to Rule the World:  
Politics, War and Empire**  
CC.116  
Spring 2019

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**Office Hours: Thursday 4:00-6:30; or, by appointment**

This is a course in political theory devoted to exploring the powerful allure and the enormous challenges of political rule, as well as to investigating how great leaders do, and should, confront both to rule well. We will ask questions such as: What makes great leaders successful? What does it mean to rule well? Should we be guided above all by the demands for justice, or, rather, by the difficult demands of what is often politely called “national security”? “What is the nature of justice and does it differ in domestic and foreign affairs?” “What are the passions that lead individuals to aspire to political power?” “What are the charms and the pitfalls of love of honor?” With these and related questions in mind, we will read and reflect on a handful of foundational texts that all address, in different ways, the theme of what it means to be a great leader.

We begin with selections from Thucydides’ monumental work on the Peloponnesian War, which brilliantly describes the compulsion of empire, its peaks and its terrible costs. We then turn to one of the most famous, or infamous, books about politics ever written, Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. We will follow its indications of what a great leader must know and do. Next, we will consider on their own terms two works that Machiavelli cites as models of political action but which at least present themselves as depicting leaders whose ambition is deeply tethered to a concern for justice: King David in *I and II Samuel* and Xenophon’s depiction of the founder of the Persian Empire in *The Education of Cyrus*. We will engage in a careful study of these works with a view to assessing what these deeply influential and fundamentally contrasting traditions – the Bible and the Greeks – teach about great leadership and political crises in general. Throughout, we will discuss contemporary leaders and crises and consider the extent to which the texts can help us gain more insight into them.

**I. REQUIRED TEXTS (all available at the MIT coop; be sure to get these translations. It’s important, since we will be reading from the text in class!):**

- Thucydides. *The Peloponnesian War*. (Selections.) In *The Landmark Thucydides*. Ed. and trans. Strassler and Crowley. The Free Press. 1998.
- Robert Alter, ed. *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. W. W. Norton. 2000.
- Niccolo Machiavelli. *The Prince*. Ed. and trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. 2nd Edition. University of Chicago Press. 1998.

Xenophon. *The Education of Cyrus*. (Selections.) Trans. Wayne H. Ambler. Cornell/Agora Paperbacks. 2001.

Additional recommended reading:

The New York Times. Available online at nytimes.com (free registration required).

## II. COURSE REQUIRMENTS:

Grades are calculated as follows:

Participation	40%
Paper 1	10%
Revision	10%
Paper 2	20%
Response Papers	10%
Question sets	10%

### **Class Attendance/Participation:**

Regular class attendance is MANDATORY. Absences from class without a legitimate reason (e.g., illness) can lead to a failing grade.

Your presence in class alone, however, does NOT constitute participation. Your most important task for this course is to do each week's reading with care. This means that you should come to class ready to reflect on the portion of the text assigned for that week. Daily exploration, analysis and class discussion of the materials we will read is crucial. You do not learn something well by hearing someone else explain it; active thinking, questioning and discussing are necessary.

Engaging in class discussion does not mean that you have to know the answers before you speak; often – or even usually – the most useful kind of discussion involves a question rather than an answer. The quality of your experience in class, and that of everyone else's in it, depends to a large extent on *YOU*. Your participation grade will be based on the extent to which you are a responsible and active discussant. Being a discussant means taking responsibility for helping the class as a whole investigate and explore whatever question is on the table. For some of you, this may mean learning to speak up more than you have before; for others, this may mean learning to be more judicious and patient.

### **Papers:**

**Paper 1:** The first paper will be interpretative/analytical. You will write a paper on a question that emerges from the reading for that week. You may choose the week for which you will write your first paper. The paper must be handed in at the beginning of the class on that reading. You will also have an opportunity to revise and resubmit their first papers based on the instructor's comments and a conference discussing them.

**2<sup>rd</sup> Paper/case study:** You have two options for your second paper. It can be either a theoretical paper devised in concert with the instructor, or, it can be a case study of one of the following issues: a current conflict or a major political challenge facing some country in the world (you might, for example, choose countries currently facing conflicts or crises, such as Syria, Egypt, India, China, Israel, North Korea,) or the moral and political implications of new technology, such as the use of drones or cyber warfare. The case study should involve analyzing the conflict and presenting a policy option, taking into consideration the analyses, arguments, lessons and prescriptions we have studied.

You must submit both an online and paper version. Papers should follow standard formatting (typed, page-numbered and double-spaced, etc.).

Please familiarize yourself with MIT's policy on academic integrity, which you can find here: <https://integrity.mit.edu>. If you have any questions at all about what constitutes plagiarism (a most serious academic offence), please do not hesitate to speak with me about it.

You will find a document with advice about how to write a paper for this class on our stellar site. Please consult this BEFORE beginning to work on your papers.

### **Weekly responses:**

You must do 5 of these over the course of the term, which you will hand in at the beginning of the Tuesday (or when we meet only on Thursday, on the Thursday) class. The weekly responses are designed to help facilitate our class discussion. Each week, you must hand in a page (you should aim for 1 typed, double-spaced page) at the beginning of the class in which write on an interesting aspect of the reading for that week that you would like to discuss in class. Thus, a good response should do more than **pose** a question; it can, among other things: a) explain how or why something in the reading interests you b) discuss a difficulty or objection that this interesting issue prompts or c) offer a suggestion or theory that attempts to address the issue raised, perhaps even raising another possibility not addressed in the text.

### **Question sets:**

You must do 5 of these over the course of the term, which you will hand in at the beginning of the Tuesday (or when we meet only on Thursday, on the Thursday) class. You should come up with 2 questions, the development and articulation of which should not exceed one typed double-spaced page. Please consider the following guidelines when writing them:

- Questions should be connected explicitly to a quoted or cited section of text.
- Questions should be able to be discussed on the basis of the text or arguments within the text.
- Questions should be trying to get to something important for a thoughtful interpretation of the text. One should be able to explain why the question is

important and have an idea about how the answer to it might influence our interpretation of the work.

- Be honest. If there is an obvious answer to the question, find another question.

**Due Dates:**

- 5 Question sets and/or response papers by March 22
- 5 Question sets and/or response papers by May 9
- Paper 1(1000 words): By March 15, if you would like a chance to revise and resubmit; otherwise by March 22
- Revision (1250 words): April 5
- Paper 2 (2000-2500 words): May 16

**Miscellaneous:**

Laptops, iPads or any such devices are not permitted in class (this should go without saying, but neither are cell phones – they must be stored away and turned off). Please see me directly if you have a special request for using a device.

You are welcome to bring coffee or water with you to class. If you must eat, please try to do it discreetly so as not to bother (or distract) your classmates. And do please resist as much as possible the temptation to get up during class — to fill a bottle of water, send a text, or perform your daily ablutions.

**III. READING SCHEDULE (The reading listed is for the week [i.e., both Tuesday and Thursday classes unless otherwise noted])**

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICAL CRISES

**Feb. 5**

Introduction

**Feb. 7 (Thursday)**

Lincoln, *The Lyceum Address*

**Feb 12**

Thucydides: I.1, 20-22, 44, 66-88, 139-146; II.34-47, 59-65

**Feb 21 (Thursday; no Tuesday class [Monday schedule])**

Thucydides: III.1-14, 26-50

**Feb 26**

Thucydides: V.84-116

**March 5**

Thucydides: VI.1, 6-32, 52-53, 60-1; VII.1-15; 42-51; 72-87

WEEKS IV-VII: MACHIAVELLI AND THE REALIST APPROACH TO RULE: IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

**March 12**

*The Prince*: Dedicatory Letter, chs 1-15

**March 19**

*The Prince*: chs 16-26

**March 26 – Spring break; No class**

WEEKS VIII-XIII: BIBLICAL AND ANCIENT RULE: A NORMATIVE APPROACH

**April 2**

I Samuel: chs. 1-31

**April 9**

II Samuel: chs. 1-24

**April 18 (Thursday; no class Tuesday, April 16)**

*Education of Cyrus*: Bk I

**April 23**

*Education of Cyrus*: Bks II-III

**April 30**

*Education of Cyrus*: Bks III-IV

**May 7**

*Education of Cyrus*: Bks V-VI

**May 14**

*Education of Cyrus*: Bks VII-VIII