Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Chapter 1: Why is Machiavelli concerned with the manner in which principalities are acquired?

Chapter 2: Why are hereditary principalities maintained more easily than new ones?

Chapter 3: What difficulties confront the new prince? What is the best way to hold a new principality? What is Machiavelli’s view of acquisitiveness? When does it merit praise and when blame?

Chapter 5: Why is a former republic hard to hold?

Chapter 6: What causes a prince to succeed?

Chapter 7: Why is the murder committed by Cesare Borgia admirable?

Chapter 8: How was Agathocles virtuous? When is cruelty well used?

Chapter 14: Why should a prince study only the art of war?

Chapter 15: What is “the effectual truth” Machiavelli pronounces? Why must a prince learn to be able to be bad?

Chapter 16: To what extent is a reputation for liberality necessary?

Chapter 17: Why is it safer to be feared than loved? What must a prince do in order not to be hated? What does Machiavelli say about Hannibal’s cruelty?

Chapter 18: In what two ways must the prince be able to engage in combat? Should a prince be good or simply appear good?

Chapter 19: How can a prince avoid contempt and hatred? To what lengths must a prince go to satisfy the people?

Chapter 25: To what extent can virtue conquer fortune?

Chapter 26: What brings honor to a new prince?
Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*

1. What is the state of nature? Is it a reasonable place to begin thinking about politics, as Locke says?
2. What does Locke mean by saying that being under law is a precondition of having freedom?
3. Is our consent the true basis of our obligation to obey the government, as Locke says?
4. Locke insists that the legislative power be superior to the executive and federative powers. As a practical matter, however, is it possible to maintain that superiority?
5. Why should we obey the executive in cases of prerogative?
6. Is Locke’s position on the right to resist tyranny sensible?
7. Would society be more or less stable if Locke's teaching on the dissolution of government were widely known?

The following questions can also help to guide your reading and our discussion:

Chapter 1: What is political power?

Chapter 2: What is natural freedom? What is natural equality? What are the two primary teachings of the law of nature? For what reasons may punishment be used? What is the relation between the law of nature and municipal laws? What is the remedy for the “inconveniences” of the state of nature? How does absolute monarchy compare with the state of nature?

Chapter 3: How does an assertion of absolute power lead to a state of war? What is the state of nature? the state of war?

Chapter 4: What is social (political) liberty? Why may a man not enslave himself to another? What is slavery?

Chapter 5: Whose property is man? How is property rightfully acquired in the state of nature, and to what extent? What part of value does labor contribute? How does money arise, and what is its significance?

Chapter 6: What is paternal power? Why can government not be derived from it? In what respect are all men equal? What are the source and extent of parental obligation to children? Why is law a precondition of freedom? How is freedom linked to being rational? When does a parent lose power over his child? What is the extent of a child’s obligation to his parents?

Chapter 7: What is slavery? Why are slaves not part of political society? Why is absolute monarchy inconsistent with political society? What is the end of government?
Chapter 8: What is the beginning of political society? What is Locke’s argument for majority rule? What is a sufficient declaration of consent to obey the government? How long does obligation to the government last for one who has given express consent? tacit consent?

Chapter 9: Why does man leave the state of nature? What natural powers does he surrender and to what extent? What is the legislative power bound to do?

Chapter 10: What are the forms of commonwealth? Upon what does the form depend?

Chapter 11: What is the first and fundamental law of the commonwealth? Why is the legislative the supreme power? Why cannot legislative power be arbitrary? What weight does the law of nature have in society? Why are promulgated, standing laws and known, authorized judges essential? Why cannot the legislative power take property from someone without consent? What is the difference between absolute and arbitrary power, and how far does absolute power extend? Why cannot the legislative power transfer itself?

Chapter 12: What is legislative power? Why is separation of powers a wise practice? What is executive power? What is federative power?

Chapter 13: When may the people remove or alter the legislative power?

Chapter 14: What is prerogative? Who judges as to when prerogative is used rightly?

Chapter 15: What is despotical power? How does it arise? Who is rightly subject to it?

Chapter 16: What power does a conqueror in a just war acquire? Is a promise extorted by force the same as binding consent? With what two rights is every man born?

Chapter 17: What is usurpation?

Chapter 18: What is tyranny? In what forms of government can it be found?

Chapter 19: What is the difference between dissolution of political society and dissolution of government? How are governments dissolved? Why does Locke think that his teaching will not lead to frequent revolutions? Who are the true “rebels” in a political dispute? Why is peace not the sole end of government? Who judges as to when the government has abused its trust?

Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

1. What is “the chief characteristic mark of the true church”?

2. What is the “business of true religion”?

3. What does Locke say about the ceremonies and opinions that zealots try to establish? (Note that this statement provides the ground for Locke’s attack on religious persecution.)
4. How does Locke define the commonwealth? How far does the jurisdiction of the magistrate extend? What three reasons does he give for his position on this matter?

5. What must accompany laws in order for them to have force?

6. How does Locke define a church? How far does its concern extend (see also the second question above)? What are its “arms”?

7. Is Locke’s assertion that no one may “prejudice another person in his civil enjoyments because he is of another church” too strict a limitation on showing personal favor? What support does he give for his position?

8. How far should laws provide for “the goods and health of subjects”?

9. What support does Locke give for saying that “no religion which I believe not to be true can be either true or profitable unto me”?

10. Under what circumstances may the magistrate interfere with rites and ceremonies of a church?

11. Why may the magistrate not impose “speculative” opinions on a church?

12. What is Locke’s advice to someone facing a conflict between conscience and law?

13. To what four groups of people will Locke not grant toleration?

Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*

Preface

1. Is the state of nature hypothetical or historical?

2. What is wrong with prior definitions of natural law?

3. What two principles operate in the soul prior to reason?

Part 1

4. What are the characteristics of savage man?

5. What two properties differentiate humans from other animals?

6. What is the relation between human understanding and the passions?

7. How social are people in the state of nature?
8. Why was Hobbes wrong to say that man is naturally wicked?

9. Besides love of oneself, what natural sentiment is found in humans?

10. With what does Rousseau replace the Golden Rule?

11. Why is inequality not very significant in the state of nature?

Part 2

12. Who is the true founder of civil society?

13. What is “the first source of the evils” in the state of nature (p. 94)?

14. How do sentiments of preference lead to “the first duties of civility” (p. 96)?

15. What does Rousseau say is the happiest stage of human development?

16. How do rules of justice originate?

17. How does property originate?

18. Once property is introduced, what is the inevitable cause of slavery and a “state of war” (p. 101)?

19. How does politics originate?

20. Who makes the social contract?

21. How do citizens come to let themselves be oppressed?

22. What are the four sorts of inequality, and which one is fundamental?

23. How does despotism complete the circle of inequality?

24. When is moral inequality unnatural?

Rousseau, On the Social Contract

Book 1

1. What considerations does Rousseau attempt to reconcile?

2. What question does he claim to answer?

3. What is man’s first law?
4. Why does force not produce right?

5. Why is slavery illegitimate?

6. What is the state of war, and what are the consequences for the right of conquest?

7. What does a person do when he makes a social compact?

8. Why must alienation be total?

9. What do the terms “people,” “citizens,” and “subjects” mean?

10. What is the sovereign?

11. How can a person be “forced to be free”?

12. What change does man undergo upon entering the civil state?

13. What are the respective limits on natural freedom and civil freedom?

14. What is the difference between possession and property?

15. What is moral freedom?

16. What conditions authorize the right of the first occupant?

17. Why is the individual’s right to property subordinate to the community’s right?

Book 2

18. For what end is the state instituted?

19. Why is sovereignty inalienable?

20. Why is sovereignty indivisible?

21. What is the difference between the will of all and the general will?

22. What are the limits on the sovereign power?

23. Why is capital punishment legitimate?

24. What is a republic?

25. What is the role of the lawgiver?
26. Why is a small state stronger than a large one?

Book 3

27. What is government, and what is its relation to state and sovereign?

28. What is the principle that constitutes forms of government?

29. What is wrong with democratic government?

30. What are the kinds of aristocracy, and which is best? What are its advantages? What does aristocracy require in order to work?

31. What is good and bad about monarchy?

32. What is the difference between simple and mixed government, and which is better?

33. How does a government degenerate?

34. How does a “body politic” carry “within itself the causes of its destruction”?

Book 4

35. Does a factious state lack a general will?

36. What is the difference between the religion of man and the religion of the citizen? What is good and bad about each?

37. What is Rousseau’s civil religion, and how dogmatic is it?

38. Why is civil intolerance inseparable from theological intolerance?

Plato, Republic

(Numbers below refer to page numbers found in the margins of Bloom’s translation.)

331a-e How does Polemarchus's definition of justice differ from Cephalus’s definition?

331d-336a How does Polemarchus's view of what it means to harm someone differ from Socrates’s view?

336b-354b Why is Thrasymachus initially angry with Socrates? Is Socrates correct in saying he has not refuted Thrasymachus’s position by the end of book 1?
375d-378b How does Socrates justify the censorship required for the education of the guardians?

389b-d Who is permitted to tell a lie?

414c-415c What is true and what is false in the “noble lie”? 

416d-417b Why are guardians not allowed to have private property?

419a Why does Adeimantus object to the abolition of private property for guardians?

427c-445e What is justice in the city, according to Socrates? Is the analogy between city and soul sound? Is there harmony between the just man and the just city? Would the just man want to be a good citizen in the good city?

449a-462d As Socrates issues one shockwave after another, look to answer this question: how just is “the just city”?

472a-473b If Socrates’s republic were found impossible to create in deeds, would the Republic be a purposeless work?

475b-480a What distinguishes philosophers from others? When Socrates speaks of “an idea of the beautiful itself” (479a) and “the fair itself” (479e), is he speaking of anything that really exists or is truly meaningful?

507b-511c As you read about “the divided line,” note the diagram of it on p. 464 of Bloom’s translation.

514a-540c Is the story of the cave an accurate metaphor of the educational process? Could anyone be as wise as the philosopher needs to be in order to rule?

540a-b In a city built on the premise of one person-one function, could the philosophers perform two functions?

544d-e What does Socrates see at the root of corrupt regimes?

552a What is wrong with oligarchy?

557a-563b What is Socrates’s criticism of democracy? How strong do you consider it?

572b-573c What defines a tyrant?

580d-582a Does Socrates persuade you that only the philosopher is fit to judge among different kinds of pleasures?

595a-608b What is Socrates’s criticism of poetry?