Political theory in the age of Hellenism and in Rome in the early imperial period

(lecture)

The lectures aim at giving a guidance through the political theories in the post-classical age. They face a specific challenge. The most prominent philosophers of the era all emphatically insist that individuals can achieve perfect happiness, the highest goal, completely on their own and under any kinds of inhospitable political conditions. This being emphasized, however, most of them did engage in genuine political philosophy. Even if one can subscribe to Isaiah Berlin's claim that the radically depoliticized outlook of Hellenistic philosophers signalled one of the most revolutionary and crucial breaks in the history of Western political thought, some of the central theses expounded in the period, such as the Stoic natural law and the Epicurean social contract, are still with us in one way or another.

Requirement: an essay of 10.000 characters on some of issues discussed in the class, and to be presented at the end of the term.

The course:

1. Preliminaries I: Aristotle’s political naturalism
2. Preliminaries II: Aristotle on justice in the polis and natural slavery
3. Preliminaries III: The Cynics
4. The Stoics I: Early theories of the state
5. The Stoics II: Natural justice / natural rights
6. The Stoics III: Polybius
7. The Stoics IV: The social self and the wise in the city of fools
8. Epicureans I: Happiness and communal life
9. Epicureans II: Early contractualism and justice
10. Cicero on the forms of government. The state as an organic unity
11. Cicero on the ideal state based on natural rights.
12. Authority, clemency and tyrannocyde

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Venue:

Time: Monday

Literature:

Atkins, J. and T. Bénatouïl (eds.), 2022, The Cambridge Companion to Cicero’s Philosophy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Balot, Ryan K., (ed.), 2010, A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Brouwer, R., 2021, Law and Philosophy in the Late Roman Republic, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Laurand, V., 2005, La politique stoïcienne, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Rowe, C., & M. Schofield, (eds.), 2000, The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.