

## **Classical Political Thought**

This course will consist of a close reading of two works by two of the most influential and penetrating political thinkers of the ancient world. Plato and Aristotle both had a major role in the founding of political philosophy or political science.

Our study is made especially urgent by the challenge raised by leading thinkers of our time against the very possibility of science or philosophy, including and perhaps above all against political science. The works we will study can help us to understand and assess that challenge, since their authors did not take for granted the possibility or desirability of science. In fact, a recognition of the need to justify the philosophic or scientific life may even have moved Socrates, the founder of political science, to become the first philosopher to turn from physics—the study of the natural world—to “the human things” or politics.

We aim to uncover the reasons for and the results of this turn in the *Republic* and the *Politics*. At the end of the course students should be able to speak and write thoughtfully and clearly about the following themes: the human good, justice, virtue, and human nobility; the roots of political idealism; what makes human beings political; the aims of political life and the tensions among these aims; the various political regimes and their respective strengths and weaknesses; the tension between philosophy and political life; the limits of political life.