

Understanding Politics

Suggested Readings on Understanding the Nature of Political Order as this exists in Human Life

To read parts of the classics of political philosophy (Plato, the *Republic*; Aristotle, the *Politics*; Augustine, parts of the *City of God*; Aquinas, the *Prince* etc. - just to mention the old ones) would take much time in order adequately to digest them. Given the possibilities of our working from a limited horizon, let us attend to looking for a kind of balance that would exist between the possibilities of readability and the gaining of insights, understanding:

- Mansfield, *A Student's Guide to Political Philosophy*

A primer to political philosophy making clear the difference between the philosophy of politics and the science of politics.

- Eric Voegelin, *New Political Science*

Quite readable, a classic, revealing the deeper currents of political life.

- Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*

Giving insights into the shift from ancient, medieval political philosophy to the current modern one (the so-called theo-political problem).

- Pierre Manent or Mansfield on de Tocqueville

Giving deep insights into the structure of modern democracy.

- J. V. Schall SJ, the chapter: "What Is "Politics?" (from his *The Modern Age*)

It deals with the problem of politics from a Catholic view. There are also good articles on the issue of politics by J.V. Schall on the Internet.

- M. D. Guerra, *Christians as Political Animals*

A Catholic viewpoint appreciating and slightly correcting Schall.

Two articles give an initial insight into the work of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss:

- Hannah Arendt, *Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government* (a short and interesting article despite her nominalist tendencies).

- Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?" (it is a famous article; Strauss's *The City of Man* is a classic as well but it is not very readable; Pierre Manent's *City of Man* appears, proximately, to allude to Strauss's book and, remotely, to allude to Augustine's *City of God*. It gives a more balanced insight into political philosophy than Strauss's *City of Man*).

Additional literature:

The agent of politics is man as a person having a nature. Here the following works are recommendable:

Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something'*

One cannot understand the shift from ancient/medieval to modern political philosophy without grasping the shift in an understanding of nature. To understand this shift, look at:

- H. Zabrowski, *Robert Spaemann's Philosophy of the Human Person* (chapter 3 and chapter 5)
- B. Lonergan, *Analytical Concept of History* (a good short article; see also the chapter on decline in Lonergan's *Method in Theology*).

For a classic text in terms of our modern discourse, one can take a look at:

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Social Justice*

However, it would not make much sense to read it before knowing about the distinction between a deontological and a consequentialist ethics. He is a representative of deontological ethics with consequences thus for his understanding of politics. Despite this, interestingly, he is against the notion of a world government -- as Kant was as well.

For a work that is informed by an historical understanding of human developments as this relates to the emergence of different forms of political organization, see:

- Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution and Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*

For a work that explains the origin of the rule of law as this has emerged in the West with consequences that have had a global impact, see

- Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition*

For a work that compares a Soviet style political order with liberal democracy (both stemming from the same historical roots in early modernity and accepting similar presuppositions about history, society, religion, politics, culture, and human nature), see

- Ryszard Legutko, *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies?*

In addition:

Plato knew about the problem of choosing the best people in politics; one would have to be a philosopher-king in order to vote for a philosopher-king. One main problem in modern politics is the issue of information versus propaganda. With respect to this problem, the classic text (despite its being written before the Internet-age) is still worth reading: Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda, The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (in opposition to the formation of human attitudes through the cultivation of human virtues)

If our object is a deeper understanding of things in terms of understanding the kind of human world that we live within now (i.e., politics in a wider sense), see below a book list that comes to us from Fr. James Schall's book, *The Modern Age*:

1. Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern Age*
2. Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*
3. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*
4. Josef Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*
5. Christopher Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations*
6. G. K. Chesterton, *Everlasting Man*
7. Remi Brague, *The Legend of the Middle Ages*
8. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*
9. E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*
10. Robert Sokolowski, *The Phenomenology of the Human Person*
11. Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien*
12. Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*
13. Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest*
14. Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?*
15. David Walsh, *The Modern Philosophical Revolution*
16. Joseph Owens, *Human Destiny*
17. Josef Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*
18. Hadley Arkes, *First Things*
19. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*
20. Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*

The link below will open up a homepage with many other book recommendations by Schall in different fields such as economics, politics etc.

<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/schallj/>

See the section below:

19) ESSAYS: PHILOSOPHICAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC.

This section will include various essays that did not easily fit in an earlier category.

Here I will include fourteen essays: 1) "Truth as a Democratic Project"; 2) "Democracy and Religion: On the Existence and Non-Existence of Nations"; 3) "Friendship and Political Philosophy"; 4) Entitlements: Unexpected Paradoxes of the Generous State"; 5) "Self-Discipline"; 6) "The State that Justifies"; 7) "Solzhenitsyn at College"; 8) "The Student before St. Thomas"; 9) "The Origins of Conservative Thought: The Christian Tradition"; 10) "Contemplata Tradere"; 11) "'Destined to Eternal Happiness: The Social Teachings of the General Catechism"; 12) "Liberation Theology: Afterthoughts"; 13) "The Full Catholic Message"; 14) "On the Pleasure of Walking about Derby."

“New Series” (which series will come first): I will include the following essays which will appear immediately below; the previous series will follow the New Series: 1) “Philosophy: Why What Is Useless Is the Best Thing About Us,” 2) “What Do Philosophers Know?” 3) “On the Paradoxical

Place of Political Philosophy in the Structure of Reality,” 4) “Modernity: What Is It?” 5) “On the Problem of Philosophic Learning,” 6) “On the Academic Discipline of Political Science,” 7) “On the Measure and Conservation of Human Things,” 8) “Why Is Political Philosophy Different?” 9) “Worship and Political Philosophy,” 10) “Fides et Ratio: Approaches to a Roman Catholic Political Philosophy.”