

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY

Instructor: Miss Sarah Beth Vosburg
Email: svosbu2@tigers.lsu.edu
Office: 216 Stubbs Hall
Office Hours: 9:30-11am, Wednesday and Friday, and by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to introduce undergraduate students to political theory, the practice of asking fundamental questions about human nature and political society. The questions and themes essential to political theory include the following, as Dante Germino sums them: "What is man? What kind of society is required for the full development of his humanity? What are the principles of right order for individuals and society?" (*Beyond Ideology*, p. 38). In this course, we will together survey some of the most significant contributors to political thought in the West. While the activity of political theory finds uncertain answers at best, the pursuit and the insights it yields are valuable. As we learn to think about politics, we are learning to ask and reflect on the question, "what does it mean to live well as human beings?" In short, contemporary questions in politics return us to the fundamental questions of political theory.

ADDITIONAL EDUCATION OBJECTIVES

This course is a general education elective; and, as such, it is designed to contribute to your understanding of self and of culture. In this light, the course is intended to acquaint you with some of the classic narratives and philosophies of western civilization, so as to give you an understanding of other cultures and other times; to acquaint you with some of the moral and ethical issues of politics; and to encourage critical and analytical thinking, as well as a precise and graceful use of language. As a social science general education elective this course is designed to enhance your understanding of the informing factors of global interdependence, including economic forces, political dynamics, and cultural and linguistic difference.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Quizzes = 20%	**10-12 quizzes, unannounced**	Grading Scale A = 90-100% B = 80-89.9% C = 70-79.9% D = 60-69.9% F = <60%
Midterm = 25%	**In class, Wednesday, October 1**	
Essay = 25%	**Due at the start of class, Friday, November 1**	
Final Exam = 30%	**5:30-7:30pm, Wednesday, December 10**	

Your course grade is based on quiz grades (20%), a midterm exam, a 4-6 page essay, and a final exam (25% + 25% + 30%). I will drop your lowest quiz grade. The quizzes will typically be multiple-choice or require short answers. Note well: the quizzes will not be announced in advance, and there will be no make up quizzes. You will be provided with review questions in advance of the exams. You will need a Blue Book and a Scantron for each exam (available at the LSU bookstore). You are encouraged to organize your own group study, as it facilitates your understanding of the material and challenges you to think critically about the major questions and arguments of each text. The final exam for this course will be given 5:30-7:30pm, Wednesday, December 10, 2014. All late material will be penalized. Announcements and readings for **bonus opportunities** will be posted on Moodle or distributed in class. I reserve the right to administer unannounced bonus quizzes.

Required Texts

*Students should purchase the books marked with a single asterisk (available at the LSU bookstore and through online retailers).

**Students should print the selections marked below with a double asterisk from Moodle.

Plato and Aristophanes, *Four Texts on Socrates*, transl. Thomas G. West (Cornell University Press, 1998) [ISBN 978-0801485749] *

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. Martin Ostwald (Prentice Hall 1962) [ISBN 0023895306] *

Augustine, *City of God*, excerpts **

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, transl. Harvey C. Mansfield (University of Chicago Press, 1998) [ISBN 978-0226500447] *

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, transl. Edwin Curley (Hackett 1994) [ISBN 0872201775] *

John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration* (Dover Publications 2002) [ISBN 978-0486424644] *

Publius, *The Federalist*, nos. 1, 9, 10, 51, 55 **

Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Madman," in *The Gay Science***

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, excerpts **

Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness" **

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" **

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Harvard Address" **

Reading, Attendance, and Academic Integrity

Your success in this class depends upon your consistent attendance and participation. Before each class period, you should read the assigned materials and thoughtfully consider their significance for our study. Our task is to read sympathetically in order to read critically – that is, to understand what each theorist is asking and arguing, and then to thoughtfully evaluate his work. Of course, in order to facilitate analysis and ease of reference, you should **bring your copy of the text to class. At the end of each class period, I will announce the readings for the next class period.**

Etiquette and Electronics in Class

Classroom etiquette acknowledges that class time is set apart for a special purpose and requires students to respect others in word and in deed. Make sure you are ready to begin when our class starts and wait until it is over to pack your notes and belongings. Be attentive to what others say, and make an effort to contribute to class discussions. Know that, unless there is an emergency, leaving before class is over is unacceptable. **The use of laptops, tablets, and smart phones is *not* allowed in class**, except for official note-takers. Using pen and paper instead limits the distractions your laptop presents to you and your neighbor. Importantly, studies show, using pen and paper also contributes to better understanding and more effective learning overall. Audio recorders are allowed, but strictly for your personal use.

Moodle

Login to Moodle through your myLSU account to access readings (posted as PDF files or Internet links) and your grades.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY?

"The meaning of political philosophy and its meaningful character is as evident today as it has always been since the time when political philosophy came to light in Athens. All political action aims at either preservation or change. When desiring to preserve, we wish to prevent a change to the worse; when desiring to change, we wish to bring about something better. All political action is then guided by some thought of better and worse..."

- Leo Strauss

Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?"**

PART I: FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL THEORY

"Surely, knowing about excellence or virtue is not enough: we must try to possess it and use it, or find some other way in which we may become good." - Aristotle

Plato, *Apology of Socrates and Crito* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)*

Aristophanes, *Clouds* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)*

Nietzsche, "The Madman," in *The Gay Science***

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics**

Augustine, *City of God***

PART II: POLITICAL THOUGHT IN MODERNITY

"For whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire that is it which he for his part calleth *good*; and the object of his hate and aversion, *evil*; and of his contempt, *vile* and *inconsiderable*." - Thomas Hobbes

"Justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society. It ever has been, and ever will be, pursued, until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit." - James Madison

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince**

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan**

John Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration**

Publius, *The Federalist*, nos. 1, 9, 10, 51, 55**

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, excerpts**

CONCLUSIONS: POLITICAL THEORY AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

"One may well ask, 'How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?' The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: there are *just* and there are *unjust* laws." - Martin Luther King, Jr.

Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness"**

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"**

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Harvard Address"**