

GVPT 100S  
Fall, 2009  
Dr. Glass

## INTRODUCTION TO THEORIES OF POLITICAL LIFE

GVPT 100S is a course specifically designed for College Park Scholars/International Studies students. It is an introduction to basic principles of politics and political life. We study a number of different concepts that are critical in understanding the nature of what is 'political', the structure of power, the foundations of authority, legitimacy, citizenship, action, violence, and revolution. It is a course designed to acquaint students with both the historical and conceptual underpinnings of modern political life, to equip students with the necessary conceptual tools to be conversant in the discourse of politics, and finally, to provide perspectives for understanding the shifting nature of political values and ethics. Politics is a complicated subject matter; it is not only institutions and political mechanics; rather the study of politics involves a complex interplay between the nature of values and the institutional forms necessary to create a stable political order, political governance and political leadership. The concept of politics and political life, and both are quite different, is rooted in an historical understanding of the political tradition. And we will pay some attention to that tradition and its contribution to the development of political ideas. We will not cover the entire historical tradition, but central statements in that tradition that are vital for looking at forms of modern political development. We will always be moving back and forth, from the classical concepts, to their modern forms; from the foundational theories of political life, to ways in which those theories appear in contemporary political contexts. We will also pay close attention to the dynamic between political institutions and the creation of political values. Where do our political values arise from; what are their origins? What is the relationship between the development of political ideas and concepts of human nature? What is the psychological role in the development of political ideas; and how important is psychology in understanding what happens in the political and public realm of human experience? These and other questions will concern us during the course of the semester.

Format:

There will be two lectures a week and a discussion section; attendance at discussion section is mandatory and any absences must be for very good reasons. If you cannot attend discussion section let your discussion leader know the reasons why. You may have two unexcused absences from discussion; any additional absences have to be supported in writing. I do not take attendance at lectures, although it is advisable to attend lectures since the connections between the readings and the broader concepts that I draw from the readings will be presented in the lectures. I will generally leave about ten or fifteen minutes during each lecture for questions. During lecture, all cell phones must of course be turned off; I do not allow laptop computers during lectures or discussion sections. Lectures are also not social occasions; so it is critical, out of respect for students who want to learn, that proper decorum be maintained, which means no talking to friends. Also it is very important that everyone be in lecture when I begin, which is exactly on the hour.

## Exams:

There will be two midterms and a final exam; the midterms will not be cumulative. Nor will the final be cumulative; it will cover only the material subsequent to the second midterm. The grading percentages are as follows: midterm exams 25% each; final exam 35%; discussion participation 15%. Discussion is central to understanding the ideas covered in this course; so students are certainly encouraged to speak up in discussion group. Students must familiarize themselves with the University regulations on plagiarism. All exams will be closed book.

## Required Readings:

Plato, The Last Days of Socrates  
Machiavelli, The Prince  
Machiavelli, Mandragola  
Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality  
Marx, The Communist Manifesto  
Mill, On Liberty  
Browning, Ordinary Men  
Lifton, The Nazi Doctors  
Donnelly, Universal Human Rights  
O'Brien, the Things They Carried

## Schedule of Lectures

### The Foundations:

#### 1. Critical Reason and Political Vengeance

Reading: Plato, The Apology and Crito

- the Platonic notion of public space
- reason versus ignorance
- political embarrassment and retaliation
- Socrates death and the argument of the laws

#### 2. Politics as Action: The Beginnings of Modernity

Reading: Machiavelli: The Prince

- Action and transformation
- the nature of ethics
- the economy of violence
- the establishment of legitimacy

#### 3. Human Nature and Political Life: The Tendency to Corruption

Reading: Machiavelli, Mandragola

- desire and its power
- the eclipse of reason and the rise of self interest
- the disappearance of morality
- absorption of morality into self interest and desire

#### 4. Radical Rejection of the Status Quo: The Beginnings of the Revolutionary Voice

Reading: Rousseau: Discourse on the Origins of Inequality

- revolutionary state of mind
- call to action and rejection
- the evolution of morals and their significance
- the Rousseauian vision

#### 5. The Marxian Intervention: Violence Transforming Self

Reading: Marx, The Communist Manifesto

- Marx as revolutionary
- oppression and history
- the history of the proletariat and the evils of capital
- the future society and the transformation of human nature

#### 6. The Individual and Tolerance: Liberty as the Fundamental Social End

Reading: Mill, On Liberty

- the nature of individualism and tolerance
- the individual versus society
- liberty and a political end
- conformity and social evils

Modern Dilemmas:

#### 7. Human Rights and the Argument of Liberalism

Reading: Donnelly, Universal Human Rights (selections)

- the role of culture and society in political life
- cultural setting and the understanding of rights

- individuality and judgment
- intervention and protection of human rights

8. Ethics and War: The Transformations of Self

Reading: O'Brien: The Things They Carried

- limits and violence
- the transformation of self and extreme situations
- reason, hate and human rights
- narratives and stories as essential to political life

9. The Modern Predicament: Mass Murder and Genocide

Reading: Browning, Ordinary Men

- mass murder and the ordinary person
- the individual and the group as factors
- social science explanations for mass murder
- peer pressure and group action

10: Modernity, Science and the Technological Mind: Their Place in the Genocidal Mentality

Reading: Lifton, The Nazi Doctors (selections)

- medicine and the path to genocide
- the relation of political leadership to scientific leadership
- culture and the myths of medicine
- culture wide mobilization for mass murder