

## GVPT 441, Ancient Political Theory, Spring 2010

Professor Alford, 1151 Tydings. Office Hrs, Tu. and Thur., 5:15-6:30, and by appointment. Call x54169 and leave a message. Email works even better: [falford@gvpt.umd.edu](mailto:falford@gvpt.umd.edu). **Note: please make an appointment if you can, even during regular office hours.** Sometimes these are the only hours I can schedule appointments with graduate students, hold comprehensive exams, etc. Of course, I will see you any time during my office hours when I am free. With an appointment (!), I can often see you before class. Come visit; too few students do.

E-mail me with comments, questions, suggestions, and gripes. During the semester I read and respond to my e-mail 4-5 days per week. I'd love to hear from you.

This is a course in ancient political theory. We read the ancients not because they are just like us, but because they are different. Maybe smarter. Science and technology progress, but some things remain the same, or even go backwards. We are, I think, distracted by scientific and technological progress, convinced that it can solve basic problems of human nature faced by the ancients. It can't.

Political theory is the study the best possible way for humans to live, given humans as they truly are. Thus, political theory is intensely concerned with human nature, and has been for over 2,500 years. Once people believed in human nature. Today few academics do. But that doesn't mean human nature doesn't exist. Partly it depends on how we define the term.

With ancient texts we read slowly and carefully. To make sure you do that, I will give you a number of **pop quizzes**. They are not difficult, but they require careful reading. Please be aware of this policy, including how heavily the pop-quizzes are weighted (see below for details). There is nothing more important in this class than reading the books carefully. Please bring your text to class every day. I won't give quizzes on official religious holidays. If you celebrate other religious holidays, I will work hard to make an arrangement with you, but this must be done well in advance. Don't come to me for the first time after you miss the quiz.

**BECAUSE OF THE FLU OUTBREAK THIS YEAR, I WILL BE MORE LENIENT ABOUT MISSED QUIZZES; THEY CAN BE MADE UP DUE TO ILLNESS, AND YOU DON'T NEED A DOCTOR'S NOTE. I DON'T WANT YOU COMING TO CLASS SICK. BUT, PLEASE EMAIL ME WHEN YOU ARE SICK. THIS IS IMPORTANT.**

Since this will be a relatively small class, I will learn your names, and be aware if you miss a number of classes over the course of the semester. If you have a pattern of unexplained absences over the course of the semester, this will result in the loss of up to 5 points in your final grade. See participation and attendance grading below.

**Class policy on laptop computers:** Since this class will be conducted largely in seminar style (but with some lecturing), I would prefer that you not use laptop computers. Talk with me if you must use one, and please use it only to take notes for this class.

**Class policy on panel discussion and debates:** each student is expected to participate in one panel discussion or debate. There are enough opportunities for each student to participate.

**Note on class schedule:** I will tell you every day where you should be in the readings, and over exactly what you are responsible should you have a quiz. I do it this way in order to let the class

discussion set the pace. Since I have never done this class with presentations, I don't have a good sense of the time it will take. We will likely fall behind.

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**Weeks 1-4: Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War [Woodruff, On Justice, Power and Human Nature, is the abridged version]**

**Class activity (25 points):**

Mytilene Debate—2 students on each side

Melian Dialogue—2 students on each side

Decision to Invade Sicily-2 students on each side

Lessons of the War for Today-3 students in panel discussion

**[If you should miss a class activity due to illness, you may write a 4-7 page paper on the topic. Try to notify me in advance. This holds for all the class activities. It is due one week after you return to class.]**

**Weeks 5 and 6: Oedipus the King (video clips will be shown)**

**Class activity (25 points):**

Was it character or fate that led to Oedipus' doom? –Debate, 2 students on each side

**Week 7: Epictetus, The Handbook (note that he is not a Greek but a Roman)**

**Class activity (25 points):**

Does Epictetus set out a good guideline for living your life—panel, 3 students

**Class paper due at this point: What have you learned about life, including your own, from reading Thucydides, Oedipus, and Epictetus? What seems most right in the books you read, what seems most wrong? (25 points)**

**Weeks 8-9: Plato, The Symposium**

**Class activity: (25 points):**

So what's love? Are there different types—panel, 3 students

**Weeks 10-13: Plato, The Republic (I will give you a handout with the reading assignment for each day; I might include some commentaries)**

**Class activity (25 points):**

Is Plato is a good guide to living a just life?—debate, 2 students on each side

**Week 14: Euripides, Alcestis.**

Class activity (25 points)—What’s the lesson of Alcestis? What makes it a tragedy, if anything?—panel, 2 students.

**Week 15 (1 class):** So what have you learned from the works of these wise men? Do you think these founders of Western civilization are so wise after all? Are they still relevant? We will take this question work by work, author by author.

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The **final** will be scheduled during the final exam period. I will give you the question in advance. It will focus on Plato’s Republic and what you would do with a magic ring.

Course requirements and standards

I will give **5 pop-quizzes** (that is, surprised, unannounced quizzes) throughout the course of the semester. I will record the best 4. You may miss one quiz with impunity. Each quiz is worth 5% of your final grade, for a total of 20%. The pop quizzes are to see if you have read the material carefully. They are about what happened, what did the author say, and so forth. They do not require much interpretation. “How does Oedipus the King end?” would be a good pop-quiz question. I will tell you every class day what reading you will be responsible for should you have a pop quiz the next class. Each pop quiz will take about 15-20 minutes of class time.

**AGAIN, BECAUSE OF THE FLU THIS YEAR, IF YOU MISS A QUIZ DUE TO ILLNESS, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE IT UP.** However, a pattern of missed quizzes will be noted, and is not acceptable.

The class paper is worth 25% of your final grade, as is your **final** exam.

Since the course is limited to 25 students, I will be able to learn your names (it will take a while), and evaluate your attendance and participation in class discussion. Regular attendance and informed participation are worth 5% of your final grade. **AGAIN, I WILL TAKE ILLNESS INTO ACCOUNT. JUST BE SURE AND E-MAIL ME, PREFERABLY BEFORE CLASS.**

Thus, your assignments will count as follows:

- Class activity 25 maximum. pts
- Quizzes 20 maximum pts (total of 4)
- Class paper 25 maximum pts
- Final 25 maximum pts
- Participation and attendance 5 maximum pts

The grading structure of this class is designed to persuade you to come to class regularly and read thoroughly. If you do this, you should do well.

My grade computing formula is simple: an “A” on a quiz is worth 5 points toward your final grade, a “B” is worth 4 points, a “C” 3 points, a “D” 2 points. F = 0. The same goes for your attendance/participation grade.

An “A” on your class activity, paper or final is worth 25-23 points (depending upon whether it is an A+, A, or A-), A “B” is worth 22-20 points, and so forth, A C is worth 19.5-17 pts, etc. To get your final grade, convert letters into numbers and add them up. A “F” receives no credit, and no points.

I will provide you with a list of my grading standards on your class activity. In general, I will grade it more generously than your paper or final. Outside work with your group is expected

**Required books**

Thucydides, *On Justice, Power and Human Nature*, ed. Woodruff (Hackett)  
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (Oxford)  
Plato, *Symposium*, ed. Gill (Penguin)  
Plato, *The Republic*, ed. Lee (Penguin)  
Epictetus, *The Handbook* (Hackett)  
Euripides, *Alcestis* (Oxford)

You may use other editions of the tragedies, but I highly recommend the editions of Thucydides and Plato that I have chosen.

If you have a learning disability or other problem that needs my attention, let me know and I will make every effort to accommodate you.

The Student Honor Council has asked that I place the following statement on this syllabus. I think that it's a good idea.

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html>.