

Introduction to Political Philosophy: From Ancient to Modern Times

GVPT 241 Online – Summer 2007

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One thing is necessary above all if one is to practice reading as an *art*...something which has been unlearned most thoroughly these days...something for which one must almost be a cow and in any case *not* a “modern man”: rumination.

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*

Course Description and Objectives

The format of this course consists of threaded discussions of the assigned texts on the course website. This course is a very brief introduction to the history of moral and political philosophy. But what is “political philosophy”? Simply put, political philosophy is the activity of philosophers thinking through recurring trans-historical and trans-cultural questions of human life and presenting these reflections to their contemporaries and future generations. Our guiding motif for this course is the relationship between “morality” and “politics.” We are going to engage with questions of the following kind: How does morality relate to politics? Are morality and politics autonomous spheres of human life? Is politics essentially amoral or immoral? Why does politics have a bad name? For instance, what does it mean to “politicize” an issue? Why does someone’s being “politically motivated” imply blame? We will seek answers to these questions by getting into conversation with past thinkers who reflected on the relationship between morality and politics. We will have five guests of honor for this course and a few supplementary readings: Plato and Cicero from antiquity, Machiavelli from early modern times, Kant and Nietzsche from late modernity.

Our objective in this course is to (1) gain an understanding of the persisting questions of politics and morality, and the varying responses given by philosophers; (2) think independently about the nature of political life; (3) be able to read philosophical texts critically (see the opening quote from Nietzsche); and (4) be able to express and defend our thoughts coherently in writing.

Please remember that this course is only an *introduction* to the history of political philosophy. For this reason, the reading list does not include all the important authors or texts in the Western tradition of political philosophy. If your intellectual appetite is whetted by the end of the semester, you should not hesitate to further explore the philosophers and texts excluded from the reading list. Harvey Mansfield’s *A Student’s Guide to Political Philosophy* provides a basic reading list at the end.

Required Texts

To benefit from this course, you need to do the readings in a timely and careful manner. If you find some passages hard-going, refer to the study questions that are provided on the course website. These questions can help you think through the critical aspects of the text. You will be at an advantage if you use the editions listed below which are ordered through the campus bookstore.

Harvey Mansfield, *A Student's Guide to Political Philosophy* (ISI Books)

David M. Johnson, *Socrates and Alcibiades: Four Texts* (Focus Publishing)

Cicero, *On Duties* (Cambridge University Press)

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (The University of Chicago Press)

Kant, *Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press)

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings* (Cambridge University Press)

Václav Havel, "Politics, Morality & Civility" (Available on the course website)

Recommended Websites for Writing Skills:

The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing: <http://nutsandbolts.washcoll.edu/>

University of Texas Writing Center: <http://projects.uwc.utexas.edu/virgil/>

Assignments and Grade Distribution

- Five Briefs (25%): Students will respond to the study questions posted on the course website in 400-500 words. There is more than one question to choose from for each class day. To get full credit for this requirement, you need to submit five briefs in total. Each one must be written on a different author (Plato, Cicero, Machiavelli, Kant, and Nietzsche). You may submit one extra in which case I will count your highest five grades towards the final course grade. Students must submit their brief on the day of the course reading that the study question is assigned for. No late briefs (after 11:59pm EST) will be accepted.
- One Short Analysis Paper (20%): This paper (1000-1250 words) must include a brief summary of a specific argument or passage from Plato's *Alcibiades* or Cicero's *On Duties* followed by student commentary. The commentary can take one of the following form: (1) analysis of a passage or an argument to enhance understanding of the whole text or a considerable part of it; (2) interpretation of an initially puzzling passage to render it more intelligible; (3) criticism or defense of the author's argument through a new argument of your own. The analysis papers are intended to encourage students to carefully examine and understand the underlying logic of separate arguments presented in the text.
- One medium-length paper (30%): This paper (1500-1750 words) will be written in response to an essay question on one of the following authors: Machiavelli, Kant, or Nietzsche. The questions will be available on the course website beforehand. Both writing assignments will be due by midnight EST on the announced due date (see the Course Schedule below).

- Discussion Thread Postings (25%): Your participation score will be determined according to your general level of preparation and the quality of your postings to the discussion board. You need to post your comments/questions between 9am-9pm on each class day. Specific instructions on this requirement will be available on the course website.
- Writing assignments will be evaluated with respect to content (coherent arguments & accuracy in representation of the texts), style (clarity of expression & concision), grammar, spelling, and format. More details will be available on the course website. Secondary sources can be consulted to clarify readings but should not be used directly in any assignment. Please note that all assignments including the Briefs must be submitted *both* through the Digital Dropbox on the course website and the website's internal email system as a backup. You are responsible for all material covered and all assignments given, regardless of personal illness, family emergency, or computer system failures. **Late penalties** for short and medium length papers will be applied as follows: 5 points will be deducted for each day past the due date and time. No assignments will be accepted if submitted more than three days past the announced deadline.
- Office Hours: I will be available every class day between 1-3pm for one-to-one synchronous online chatting, should you have questions concerning the reading material. This function is accessible through the *Communication* area in the Course menu (under the *Collaboration* tab). I will not be online unless you make an appointment beforehand.

Other Course Issues and Policies

- You will have access to the course through the university website at <https://elms.umd.edu/>. Please consult the Blackboard Student Guide on the course website beforehand to familiarize yourself with the software. Minimal computer and internet skills should be adequate to get by in this course. If you need technical assistance before or during the semester, contact university's Office of Information Technology (OIT) at elms@umd.edu or 301-405-1400.
- You must have a working e-mail account and you must check your e-mail account regularly throughout the semester. Official announcements will be made on the course website in the "Announcements" section as well as through e-mails. Please remember that this is an *extremely* fast-paced course due to the shortness of the Summer term. If you realize that you need assistance on any aspect of the course, do not hesitate to bring them to my attention in a timely manner (preferably by email). If you have questions about any of the requirements in this syllabus, it is best to ask them sooner than later.
- 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.shc.umd.edu>. To further exhibit your commitment to academic integrity, remember to sign the Honor Pledge on all examinations and assignments: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination (assignment)."

Course Outline

- July 16** Course Introduction & Mansfield (pp. 1-8)
- July 18** Plato, *Alcibiades* (103-124b)
- July 20** Plato, *Alcibiades* (124c-135e) & Mansfield (pp. 9-16)
- July 23** Cicero, *On Duties* Book I.1-60
- July 25** Cicero, *On Duties* Book I.61-161
- July 27** Cicero, *On Duties* Book II & Mansfield (pp. 16-22)
“The Melian Dialogue” (excerpt from Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*)
- July 30** Cicero, *On Duties* Book III.1-39 & Mansfield (pp. 22-29)
“The Ring of Gyges” (excerpt from Plato’s *Republic*, Book II.358d-361d)
- August 1** Cicero, *On Duties* Book III.40-121
- August 3** **First Paper Due**
- August 6** Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Dedicatory Letter & Chapters 1-14)
- August 8** Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Chapters 15-26) & Mansfield (pp. 29-42)
- August 10** Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (First and Second Sections) & Mansfield (pp. 43-45)
- August 13** Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (First and Second Supplements, and the Appendix)
- August 15** Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Preface) & Mansfield (pp. 46-54)
- August 17** Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (First Essay)

August 20 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Second Essay)

August 22 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Third Essay)

August 24 Václav Havel, "Politics, Morality & Civility"

August 26 **Second Paper Due**