

GVPT 241 Political Philosophy, Ancient & Modern

Draft, final version to be distributed on First Day of Class

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T,Th 9:00-12:30 am

Office Hour: T, Th 12:30-3:00pm, & by appointment

Course Objectives & Description

This course introduces students to major themes and figures in political philosophy, approaching the history of discourse about politics as an ongoing conversation, where thinkers of the past can teach us about their own times and open up our conceptions of current political problems. We will begin with a discussion of political obligation through the lens of Sophocles' *Antigone*: how can citizens sort out their duties to self, family and state? We will then move to selections from Plato's *Republic*, taking up the questions of citizenship from a different angle, and asking what the limits are or should be on the reach of the state. Is, for example, the state justifying in censoring art or poetry, and why might a state wish to control or ban poetry? How can citizens respond to these demands?

This interest in the relationship between the people and the government is reformulated in Machiavelli's *Prince*, through which we will attempt to tease out the development of constitutional thinking, as well as understand shifts from ancient to modern theorizing. From Machiavelli and his nascent view as the people as check on the state we will take up the social contract theorists, asking how Hobbes & Locke attempt to solve problems of political legitimacy. We will ask, among other things, how well these theories explain our own relationships to each other, society and the nation state. Rousseau will help us in this questioning, providing a radical liberalism with a divergent view of political citizenship & belonging.

Rousseau also ushers in a discussion of the potential for political systems to become totalizing, a problem which will enchant the political theorists of the 19th & 20th century, especially in the wake of mass violence. Tocqueville will help us think about majority tyranny and the potential for democratic systems to eviscerate political life, and Hannah Arendt will ask whether political life is already dead, a concern shared by the work of critical theorists and conservatives alike. After a brief discussion of some of these critics of modernity, we will close the class reflecting on the changing, or enduring, models of citizenship, legitimacy and tyranny explored by all the political theorists we've encountered over the semester.

Required Texts

The Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles' Antigone, Sophocles, trans. Seamus Heaney, ISBN: 0374530076

The Republic Of Plato: Second Edition, Plato, trans. Allen Bloom, ISBN: 0465069347

The Prince, Machiavelli, trans. Harvey Mansfield, ISBN: 0226500446

Leviathan, Hobbes, with C.B Macpherson, ISBN: 0140431950

Second Treatise of Government, Locke, with C.B Macpherson, ISBN: 0915144867

Basic Political Writings, Rousseau, (Hackett), ISBN: 0872200477
The Human Condition, Hannah Arendt, ISBN: 0226025985
All Other Readings will be available via. Electronic Course Reserve

Class Policies

Participation- Speaking with others about political problems is part of a political science education, therefore, attendance and participation are necessary. It is highly unlikely that anyone will be able to pass this class without regular attendance and participation. I expect you to come to seminar having read the material, hopefully twice, prepared to discuss both its content and possible connections to the course themes or other works. If it appears that students are not prepared, I reserve the right to use draconian measures like pop quizzes or shame. Participation grades can also be raised through meeting with me at office hours and occasional group work, so that shy students are not overly disadvantaged.

Presentations- On the first day of class, each student will choose two readings for which he or she is responsible. Each member of the class must still do the reading and come prepared to discuss; the presenter's job is to begin the class with questions of interest to him or her. The goal of this requirement is to develop our ability to speak publicly about complex topics, as well as isolate interesting themes in the text. Feel free to work with me closely on your presentation.

Essays- Writing is an essential part of both a liberal arts education and this course. There will be three short (4-5 pages) essays; I will distribute a list of questions prior to each assignment, and you will need to answer the question of your choice in an argumentative style, utilizing textual evidence. We will also frequently use writing exercises in class to stimulate thinking. I will distribute details and a grading rubric for each assignment as the date nears. Papers will be graded for grammar and style as well as content; I expect writing that is polished, communicative and even beautiful and am happy to work with students on their papers. The Writing Center is also a great on-campus resource.

Please consult university policies on academic integrity, disability services, & religious observation, all of which apply fully to this course.

Grading:

10% Participation/In class exercises

20% Presentations

15% Essay 1

25% Essay 2

30% Essay 3

A+ 98 A 93 A- 90.0 B+ 88 B 83 B- 80.0 C+ 78 C 73 C- 70.0 D+ 68 D 63 D- 60.0

Course Schedule

Week 1- The Limits of Political Obligation

July 14th Sophocles *The Burial at Thebes*

July 16th Plato *The Republic* Books 1-2

Week 2- The Limits of State Action

July 21st Plato *The Republic* Books 3-6

July 23rd Plato *The Republic* Books 7-10

Week 3- Princes & Peoples

July 28th Machiavelli *The Prince*

FIRST PAPER DUE

July 30th Machiavelli *The Prince, Discourses on Livy**

Week 4- Legitimacy & Fear

August 4th Hobbes *Leviathan (selections)*

August 6th Locke *Second Treatise of Government*

Week 5- Legitimacy & Popular Sovereignty

August 11th Rousseau *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*

SECOND PAPER DUE

August 13th Rousseau *On the Social Contract*

Week 6- Tyranny & Totalitarianism

August 18th Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (selections)

August 20th Sheldon Wolin "Inverted Democracy"*

August 21st FINAL PAPER DUE

***to be distributed in class**