

**POLS (Political Science) 3377-01 (3 credit hours)—Political Theory**

Fall 2017—MWF 11.00-11.50; CHSS 242B

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Office Hours: MW: 2.00-3.00; T: 12.00-2.00; or by appointment

**Course Description**

This course will introduce students to the major outlines of the history of Western political thought. It will trace some of the major theoretical manifestations of and the transitions between three of the four major political experiences of the West: the ancient Greek *polis*, the medieval realm, and the modern (sovereign) state. The course will begin with a discussion of the nature of political thought and the kinds of questions that might be most appropriately addressed to various kinds of political literature.

Special emphasis will be placed on the differences and interconnections between historical and theoretical questions. We will be conducting both historical and philosophical inquiries into the character of these various political experiences, hoping to understand the context as well as the coherence of various thinkers.

We shall, naturally, begin at the beginning with the Greeks, who claimed to have invented politics, and we shall focus on the political thought of Plato and Aristotle. This will be followed by an examination of the attempted synthesis of classical ideas and Christian revelation by St. Augustine and his medieval successor St. Thomas Aquinas. Finally, we shall conclude the semester by investigating the emergence of the modern state and will trace the individual contributions of Locke, Rousseau, and Nietzsche to modern political theory.

**Course Objectives**

Students will develop the facility to think and write critically about the central concepts in the history of political philosophy; understand the distinction between historical explanation, philosophical elucidation, and practical recommendation; and be able to offer accounts of both the context and content of the political ideas of the writers we study. Goals include the development of critical thinking, the development of writing skills, and the cultivation of the study skills requisite for success in undergraduate classes. We will accomplish these objectives in the context of studying:

- different types of evidence and argument (e.g. historical, logical, theological, etc.)
- diverse conceptions of the political community (e.g. a large quasi-biological family, an artificial construct resulting from a contract between citizens, an historical artifact, etc.)

- various conceptions of the origins and character of political authority (wisdom, expertise, divine appointment, noble blood, common consent of the citizenry, squatter's rights, etc.)
- several distinct definitions and scales of political values (e.g. order v liberty, liberty v equality, justice v order, etc.)

## Course Requirements

All members of the class are expected to attend all sessions of the class and to have completed the assigned readings during the week on which they are listed. Attendance is important because it is closely correlated with academic success. Having the readings done ahead of time is the only way you will be able to participate fully in the lectures.

There will be two short paper assignments (3-4 pages) during the term, and there will be a comprehensive take-home final examination. I will hand out both the paper assignments and the final examination at least a week before they are due (they will also be placed on Blackboard). *Late papers will be penalized at one-third of a grade deduction per late day (e.g. a paper due on a Wednesday will receive a deduction of one-third of a grade if turned in on Thursday, and a deduction of two-thirds of a letter grade if turned in on Friday, etc. I don't count weekends.). Late final exam papers will not be accepted without prior permission from the instructor (that is, from me). The final paper will be due by 5.00 pm on Wednesday, 6 December 2017.*

## Make-up policy

See course requirements for make-up policy.

## Evaluation

The course requirements will contribute to the overall course grade in the following proportions:

Papers:	50%
Final:	50%

Plagiarism or unauthorized collaboration will not be tolerated, and will be reported to the appropriate honor board.

## Texts

*Required texts:* using the editions listed below will allow you to follow the specific references to the texts easily

Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992).

Aristotle, *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).

St. Augustine, *Political Writings*, ed. Henry Paolucci (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1962)

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, ed. RW Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002)

John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988).

JJ Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings, Second Edition*, trans. Donald Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011).

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017).

*Recommended texts:*

George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*

Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision*

When reading the texts and preparing your papers, it will be helpful to consider some of the following questions:

1. What is the character of the argument? Is the author concerned to describe and analyze existing political arrangements and social conditions or to recommend changing those arrangements? What sorts of evidence does the author appeal to for answers (history/fact; logic/reason; divine will/revelation)?
2. What understanding of the nature of political community is implicit or explicit in the text? How does the theorist envisage the relationship between the individual and the community? Is the community merely an association of independent individuals or is it a supra-individual organism? Does the political community provide the necessary conditions for achieving the 'good life' or does it merely restrain human nature? Is the political community a good in itself or is it merely a necessary evil?
3. What is the nature of political authority? On what basis does the claim to political authority rest: inheritance, superior knowledge/wisdom, divine will, conquest/power, contract, consent? What is the scope of political authority: are there any spheres of human activity excluded from the ruler's exercise of authority; are there any other restraints on what a ruler might legitimately do; are there any legitimate appeals against authority; is there a right of resistance?
4. What are the political 'values' implicit or explicit in the text? How does the theorist define and rank concepts like justice, freedom, and equality?

## **Tentative Course Outline**

### **I. The Greek Political Experience—a novel experiment?**

Weeks 1-4

Week 1—Introduction

Plato—*The Republic*

Week 2—Books 1-4

Week 3—Books 5-7

Week 4—Books 8-10

#### ***First paper assignment***

Weeks 5-6: Aristotle—*The Politics*

Week 5—*Nicomachean Ethics*; *Politics*, Books 1, 3

Week 6—*Politics*, Books 4, 7

*Recommended reading:*

H.D.F. Kitto, *The Greeks*

A.E. Taylor, *Socrates*

R.L. Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*

W.D. Ross, *Aristotle*

### **II. The Early Medieval Experience—Christianity and Plato**

Weeks 7-8—St. Augustine—*Political Writings*

Week 7—Pp. 1-57, 153-183

Week 8—Pp. 184-240

*Recommended reading:*

Herbert Andrew Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*

Robert Meagher, *An Introduction to Augustine*

### **III. The Culmination of Medievalism?—Christianity and Aristotle**

Weeks 9-10—St. Thomas Aquinas—*Political Writings*

Week 9—Ch. 1, 3, 5

Week 10—Ch. 6

*Recommended reading:*

Walter Ullman, *Medieval Political Thought*

F.C. Copleston, *Aquinas*

#### ***Second paper assignment***

### **IV. The Modern State—A New Kind of Politics**

Weeks 10-11—Locke—*Two Treatises of Government*

Week 10—*The Second Treatise of Government*, Chs. 1-7 (pp. 267-330 in Laslett edition)

Week 11—*The Second Treatise of Government*, Chs. 8-19 (pp. 330-428 in Laslett edition)

Weeks 12-13—Rousseau

- Week 12—*The Basic Political Writings*: “Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts,” (pp. 1-25 in the Cress edition) and “On the Social Contract,” Books 1, 2 (pp. 155-191 in the Cress edition)
- Week 13—*The Basic Political Writings*: “On the Social Contract,” Books 3, 4 (pp. 191-252 in the Cress edition)
- Weeks 13-15—Nietzsche—*On the Genealogy of Morality*
- Week 13—*On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface, First and Second Essays (pp. 3-69 in Ansell-Pearson edition)
- Week 14—Thanksgiving week: no class
- Week 15—*On the Genealogy of Morality*, Third Essay (pp. 69-123 in Ansell-Pearson edition)

*Recommended reading:*

Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke’s Two Treatises of Civil Government*  
John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke*  
Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*  
Jim Miller, *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy*  
Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*  
Tamsin Shaw, *Nietzsche’s Political Skepticism*

***Final Exam—Due by 5.00 pm on Wednesday, 6 December 2017.***

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism or unauthorized collaboration (e.g. copying answers on an exam, using ‘cheat sheets’, gaining access to an exam prior to its administration, using computers or other electronic devices to access answers) will not be tolerated, and will be reported to the appropriate honor board. Such academic dishonesty will result in immediate disciplinary action by the professor, which could involve failing the examination alone or the whole course. Students who are caught cheating are also subject to further disciplinary action from the university which could lead to academic probation, suspension, or expulsion.

For further guidance on what constitutes plagiarism, see  
<http://www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-101/what-is-plagiarism>.

### **Classroom Conduct**

Students are expected to treat each other and the professor with respect and courtesy. Cell phones and other electronic or distracting items should not be visible or audible (keep in pockets, purses, or bags and on silent).

If you are bothered or distracted by other students during class, inform me and I will address the problem.

## **Students with Disabilities Policy**

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired. SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center. *Student requests for accommodations must be initiated by the student. A student seeking accommodations should go to the Counseling Center and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in a timely manner.*

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/disability/>

## **Religious Holidays**

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20....” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

## **Caveat Emptor**

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

[www.shsu.edu/syllabus](http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus)