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Fall 9-1-2011

PSCI 451E.01: Ancient and Medieval Political Philosophy

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University of Montana
Political Science Department

POLS 451E

Fall 2011

T 4-6:30

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Ancient & Medieval Political Philosophy:
The Classical Tradition of Theory

Description of the Course:

Michael Oakeshott finds that the political philosopher usually takes a "somber view of the human situation." For the political thinker human life "appears generally as a predicament." Oakeshott also finds that "every great masterpiece of political philosophy" provides us with "the glimpse of a deliverance or the suggestion of a remedy." Beginning with the Greeks, we will explore both the nature of this predicament, how different thinkers interpret it differently, and their remedies for way out of it. To do this we need to ask: 1) What ails the political philosopher (or us); 2) does his diagnosis of what is wrong with society or human beings make sense; 3) is his diagnosis relevant to our situation; 4) how does he propose to improve the human situation; and 5) will his prescription(s) make his world (let alone, ours) better?

Required Readings:

Plato, The Republic

* The Apology

Aristotle, Politics & Constitution of Athens

St. Augustine, The Political Writings

Aquinas, Treatise on Law

Machiavelli, The Prince

* selected reading see

<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/apology.html>

Course Objectives: upon successfully completing the course work, the student should be able to:

1. Identify and assess the various tests or criteria (such as relevance, significance, or ethical considerations) that can be use to establish the value of a theoretical argument or theorist.
2. Present and orally defend (and revise if taken with PSCI 400) a series of interpretive, analytical essays which examine a thinker's ideas about human nature, justice, social obligation, and political legitimacy.

3. Orally critique an essay in terms of its analytical clarity, accuracy in its interpretation of the readings, and the logic of its conclusion.

4. Develop a coherent position with regards to ethical idealism and political realism, elitism and democratic doctrine, individualism and classical republicanism etc. The goal of the course work, overall, is to encourage students not only to learn about Ancient and Medieval thinkers, but also to learn how to think theoretically about politics.

Political philosophy. . . “is a complex, imprecise, psychologically demanding, imagination-requiring field of enquiry, in which nothing like certainty can ever be obtained, only, at the most, a high degree of plausibility and coherence and evidence of intellectual power and originality and effectiveness.”

--Isaiah Berlin

To achieve the above objectives— Course Grading:

This course will be taught as a seminar. Each student will submit and orally defend in class **three critical essays (45%** of course grade or 15 pts each), not to exceed 4 double-spaced pages. The essays will be assigned weekly and are due *no later* than the class period before you are scheduled to orally defend it. (For topics, see below.) If you are absent the day we are scheduled to discuss your essay, you will not get credit for it. In addition, each student will complete a **take-home final (35%** of course grade.) Each student will be graded on class **participation** and attendance (**10%** of course grade.) (** Students who attend class, but seldom raise questions or participate in discussion usually receive between 7-5pts out of 10. See below regarding absences.)

Finally since *it does not honor a writer to read him/her without seeking to challenge him/her*, students will be required to submit **two written questions** for each of the **essays discussed** that day (**10%** of course grade.)

Cautionary note: if you are absent more than 3xs, three attendance points will be deducted for every absence thereafter. Excused absences require a medical note for illness, injury, family emergency, or letter from instructor for field trips, ASUM service, music/drama performances, intercollegiate athletics, and military service. Instructor will also excuse absences for reasons of mandatory public service.

- Plus/Minus Grades will be used based on the following:
100-93 = A; 92-90 = A-; 89-87 = B+; 86-83 = B; 82-80 = B-; 79-77 = C+; 76-73 = C; 72-70 = C-; 69-67 = D+; 66-63 = D; 62-60 = D-; 59 < = F

Students taking this course to **fulfill the 400 writing requirement** will be required to revise and *expand their essay into 10-12 pages*. Substantive and grammatical revisions will be expected. The writing grade will be based upon the following writing guidelines and expectations:

- The critical, interpretive essay must provide a **clear thesis** (preferably at the end of the introductory paragraph), indicating the author's main points with regard to the essay question.
- The essay must support the thesis statement with **specific references** to the primary texts, **providing footnotes** for all quoted material and **a bibliography** at the end. Please use Chicago style.
- Students should pay close attention to their **choice of words** in summarizing and clarifying the substance of a political theory (i.e. *the* good state and *a* good state are *not* the same). They must demonstrate awareness of how words can clarify and/or obscure a theorist's principles, illustrations, and, in general, the nature of their political inquiry.
- The first essay draft will be returned with editorial comments. Students are encouraged to talk with me about their essays before revising them.
- Student must include **original essay draft with revised, extended draft**.
- Revised essay will be **graded based upon:** grammar, spelling, appropriate choice of words, transitions between paragraphs, use of quoted material to support their interpretation, accuracy in paraphrasing, logical organization of ideas and points, and clarity.
- Only **one revision** is allowed. Please proof read the final drafts for any grammatical, spelling, or typos before turning it in.

Graduate Students, in addition to completing the above assignments, will submit a 10-15 page research paper that incorporates the secondary literature on a particular thinker &/or theoretical issue in consultation with the professor. This paper will include an introduction that clearly identifies a question or issue and its significance to American political thought, and will use the appropriate primary & secondary literature to support the paper's thesis.

Course Schedule:

8/30 *Introduction to the Course; Political Theory & the Search for Standards Plato's Version of the Predicament*
Read: Plato, Republic Books I

- 9/1 *Plato's Indictment: Review of The Republic*
Read: Republic, Books II & III
- 9/6 *Thrasymachus v. Socrates*
Read: Republic, Books IV & V
Essays (**due 9/1**): Is Thrasymachus a political realist? Why, why not? If so, then how do we explain his anger?
- 9/8-9/13 *Thrasymachus v Glaucon cont.*
Read: Republic, Book VI
Essays (**due 9/6**): Is Thrasymachus a spokesman for the City? Do most all city-states, in other words, embrace Thrasymachus definition of justice?
- Essays (**due 9/6**): How does Glaucon's definition of justice differ from Thrasymachus, or does it? Is Glaucon more of a political realist than Thrasymachus? If so, why?
- 9/15-9/20 *Plato's Ideal State & Ideal Women?*
Read: Republic, Book VII
Recommend: Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*
Essays (**due 9/13**): Plato's view that the just man and the just state are inseparable makes justice a mere dream." Why, why not? Discuss
- Essays (**due 9/13**): Examine the male-female roles in Plato's Republic. How "radical" is Plato's utopia with respect to women?
- 9/22 *The City verses the Philosopher*
Read: Republic, Book VIII
The Apology (see on-line)
Essays (**due 9/20**): The Philosopher— King? Desirable? Discuss
- Essays: (**due 9/20**): Are Plato's Guardians best described as a caste, a class, or an elite?

9/27-
9/29

Plato's Critics & Defense: The Trial of Socrates

Recommend: Popper, *The Open Society & Its Enemies*

Read: Aristotle, Politics, Book I

Essays (**due 9/22**): As a prosecuting council on behalf of Athens, please write a brief laying out why Socrates is guilty and should be punished accordingly. You may also recommend what punishment he should receive for his crimes.

Essays (**due 9/27**): As a defense council at Socrates' trial, please write a brief defending the old philosopher & his vocation. Be sure you address the specific charges against him.

10/4-
10/6

Plato's Critics & Defense: The Trial of Socrates- final verdict

Read: Aristotle, Politics, Book II (Chaps. 1-8).

Essay (**due 9/29**): Socrates may not have been a democrat, but there is nothing in his position that is inherently opposed to democracy. Do you agree? What you have sided with Athens or with Socrates?

Essays (**due 9/29**): Assuming for the sake of argument that Socrates was a political thinker, what does this tell us about the *nature and purpose* of political theory?

10/11

Slack Day: if we are on schedule with essays, there will be no class. Use this time to get ahead in readings & preparing essays.

10/13

Aristotle's Biological Analysis of Politics

Read: Aristotle, Politics, Book III (Chaps. 6-18); Book IV (Chaps. 1-8; 11-12)

Essays (**due 10/6**): All differences in political thought between Plato & Aristotle can be explained by their distinctive methods of political inquiry. In contrast to Plato, what for Aristotle is the purpose of political theory? Discuss

Essays (**due 10/6**): The difference between Plato & Aristotle is the eternal difference between the radical and the conservative.

10/18

Aristotle & the Classifications of Governments

Read: Politics, Book V (Chaps. 1-4)

Essays (**due 10/13**): What does Aristotle mean by "justice" and "the rule of law?" Are they the same? Why, why not?

10/20

Aristotle & Democracy & Constitutions

Essays (**due 10/18**): What does Aristotle mean by a constitution? Can a government be both constitutional and tyrannical? Explain

Essays (**due 10/18**): What does Aristotle mean by democracy? Does he understand democracy? Are his insights into what makes a polity democratic still valuable?

10/25

Aristotle & Political Life

Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 1, pp. 1-15, pp. 28-43.

Essays: (**due 10/20**): The key to the difference between Plato's and Aristotle's theories of the best state is their respective theories of justice. Discuss

Essays: (**due 10/20**): Aristotle could not possibly accept the utilitarian principle of the greatest good for the greatest number as a proper definition of the purpose of a polis. Why not?

10/27

Aristotle & Political Life

Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 2, pp. 44-88

Essays: (**due 10/25**): In saying that man is a 'political' animal Aristotle meant much more than we mean by political. What all of what he suggests being 'political' means, and how it contrasts with our meaning of 'political' today. Could we benefit from his notion?

- 11/1 *St. Augustine & City of Man*
 Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 3, pp. 118-162.
 Essays (due **10/27**): "What is lacking in Plato's *ethics* is present in that of Christianity: the Day of Judgment." Is this Judgment important to ethical theory? Why, why not? Discuss
- 11/3-11/8 *St. Augustine & the Two Cities; the Idea of "Just War"*
 Read: The Political Writings, Chap. 3, pp. 162-183; Appendix; St. Thomas, Treatise on Law
 Essays (due **11/1**): How does St Augustine's conception of the *Two Cities* posed in acute form the problem of separation between church and state? Or does it?
- Essays (due **11/1**): The "Just" War? What are Augustine's criteria for a just war? Is this ethically or practically criteria useful? Why, why not?
- 11/10 *St. Thomas Aquinas & Political Theology*
 Read: St. Thomas, Treatise on Law
 Essays (**due 11/8**): For St. Aquinas 'law is perfectly compatible with the freedom proper to man.' What does he mean? Do you agree? Why, why not?
- Essays (**due 11/8**): Aquinas' theory of civil authority marks a return to Aristotelianism. How so?
- 11/15-11/17 *St. Thomas & the Hierarchy of Law*
 Read: Machiavelli, The Prince
 Essays (due **11/10**): "The seeds of disloyalty to civil rulers are inherent in ST. Thomas' conception of law."
- Essays (due **11/10**): "The higher we climb on Aquinas' natural law ladder, the further away from the human condition we get; but, as we climb down, the further away we get from God. Either way, something precious is lost."

11/22 *Machiavelli's World & Contribution*
Read: Machiavelli, The Prince

*** * * * *** **Thanksgiving Break November 23-27th** *** * * * ***

11/29 *Machiavelli's World & Contribution cont.*
Read: Machiavelli, The Prince— finish
Essays (due **11/22**): The Prince is a very disturbing book.
The question is why?

12/1 *Machiavelli's Rules for State's Craft: The Political Realist?*
Essays (due **11/29**): What are the limits of power (ethical or otherwise) for Machiavelli?

12/6-
12/8 *Machiavelli's Realism?*
Essays (due **12/1**): "The consummate realist is the way I would describe Machiavelli." Yes? No? Why, why not?

Essays (due **12/1**): What is that makes Machiavelli a political scientist? (Most people refer to him as a political realist, but this is not the same as a 'scientist' who give us testable propositions.) Can you isolate any statements that may be 'testable' propositions or verifiable?

Essays (due **12/6**): For Machiavelli what appears to be the purpose of studying politics? Does his method of inquiry leave anything out?

" Final Due by 12pm on Wednesday, December 14th.