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Fall 9-1-2012

### PSCI 451.01: Ancient and Medieval Political Philosophy

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University of Montana  
Political Science Department

POLS 451

Fall 2012

TTh 9:40am-11am

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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 adds 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 how different thinkers interpret the human predicament, and their distinctive 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 (Reeve or Sterling eds)

The Apology (<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/apology.html> or

a better translation is Reeve's in *Five Dialogues* Hackett edition)

Aristotle, Politics & Constitution of Athens

St. Augustine, The Political Writings

Aquinas, Treatise on Law

Machiavelli, The Prince

\* selected reading see

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 assess the value of a theoretical argument or theorist.
2. Present and orally defend (and revise if taken with PSC 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 the **essays discussed** (10% of course grade.) They should plan on writing questions for all essays distributed in class, and except to periodically to turn their questions for credit.

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 writing the 400 requirements** will be required to revise and *expand one of their essays 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:

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|------|---|
| 8/28 | <i>Introduction to the Course; Political Theory &amp; the Search for Standards Plato's Version of the Predicament</i><br>Read: Plato, <u>Republic</u> Books I |
| 8/30 | <i>Plato's Indictment: Review of The Republic</i><br>Read: <u>Republic</u> , Books II & III   |

- 9/4                      *Thrasymachus v. Socrates*  
 Read: Republic, Books IV & V  
 Essays (**due 8/30**): Is Thrasymachus a political realist? Why, why not? If so, then how do we explain his anger?
- 9/6-9/11              Thrasymachus v Glaucon  
 Read: Republic, Book VI  
 Essays (**due 9/4**): Is Thrasymachus a spokesman for the City? Do all city-states or governments, in other words, define justice in the way that Thrasymachus does?
- 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? If not, why not?
- 9/13-9/20              *Plato's Ideal Justice & Utopia?*  
 Read: Republic, Book VII  
 Recommend: Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*  
 Essays (**due 9/11**): Does Plato's ideal of justice take human beings as they are, or positively demand them to stop being human? Please discuss both possibilities with regard to his guardians & citizens before coming to your own conclusion.
- Essays (**due 9/13**): Plato may not have been fond of democracy; and yet, some of his recommendations for achieving a just society might actually make our modern democracy stronger. Discuss
- Essays (**due 9/18**): In her reading of Plato's *Republic*, Julia Annas complains that Plato wants it both ways: justice to be good for the individual *and also* good in a way that has no reference to anybody or anything in particular. In short, he fails to answer the question: "Why *should* I be just?" Is this a problem particular to Plato, or all justice-seekers? What are the problems of favoring one side of this dilemma or the other?

- 9/25      *The City verses the Philosopher*  
 Read: Republic, Book VIII  
The Apology (prepare for mock trial)  
 Essays (**due 9/20**): According to Plato, why are philosophers or those with wisdom not ruling us? Are they to blame or are we? Does Plato's view of 'human predicament' still have relevance for us today? If so, why so? If not, why not?
- Essays: (**due 9/20**): Although Plato refers to his Guardians as a "class," are they best described as a caste, a class, or an elite?
- 9/27-10/2      *Plato's Critics & Defense: The Trial of Socrates*  
 Recommend: Popper, *The Open Society & Its Enemies*  
 Read: Aristotle, Politics, Book I  
 Essays (**due 9/25**): As a prosecuting council on behalf of Athens, please write a brief laying out Socrates' crimes, why he is guilty and should be punished accordingly (based upon the *Apology*). 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 (in the *Apology*).
- 10/4      *Plato's Critics & Defense: The Trial of Socrates- final verdict*  
 Read: Aristotle, Politics, Book II (Chaps. 1-8).  
 Essay (**due 10/2**): *Socrates* may not have been a democrat, but there is nothing in his position that is inherently opposed to democracy. Do you agree? Would you have sided with Athens or with Socrates?
- Essays (**due 10/2**): 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?

- 10/9 *Aristotle's Biological Analysis of Politics*  
 Read: Aristotle, Politics, Book III (Chaps. 6-18); Book IV (Chaps. 1-8; 11-12)  
 Essays (**due 10/4**): 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 10/4**): The difference between Plato & Aristotle is the eternal difference between the radical and the conservative.
- 10/11 *Aristotle & the Classifications of Governments*  
 Read: Politics, Book V (Chaps. 1-4)  
 Essays (**due 10/9**): What does Aristotle mean by "justice" and "the rule of law?" Are they the same? Why, why not?
- 10/16 *Aristotle & Democracy & Constitutions*  
 Essays (**due 10/11**): What does Aristotle mean by a constitution? Can a government be both constitutional and tyrannical? Explain
- Essays (**due 10/11**): What does Aristotle mean by a constitutional democracy (or mixed polity) as opposed to a tyrannical democracy? Are his insights into what makes a polity a constitutional democracy versus a tyrannical democracy still valuable?
- 10/18 *Aristotle & Political Life*  
 Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 1, pp. 1-15, pp. 28-43.  
 Essays: (**due 10/16**): What do you find to be the major difference between Plato's and Aristotle's respective views of human nature and their theories of justice. Discuss

- 10/23      *Aristotle & Political Life*  
 Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 2, pp. 44-88  
 Essays: (**due 10/18**): In saying that man is a 'political' animal Aristotle meant much more than we mean by political. What all does he suggests being 'political' mean, and how does it contrasts with our meaning of being 'political' today. Could we benefit from his notion?
- 10/25      *St. Augustine & City of Man*  
 Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 3, pp. 118-162.  
 Essays (due **10/23**): "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
- 10/30-11/1      *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 **10/25**): 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 **10/30**): The "Just" War? What are Augustine's criteria for a just war? Is this an ethically or practically criteria useful? Why, why not?
- \* \* \* \* \* Tuesday November 6<sup>th</sup> Election Day: No Class \* \* \* \* \***
- 11/8      *St. Thomas Aquinas & Political Theology*  
 Read: St. Thomas, Treatise on Law  
 Essays (**due 11/1**): For St. Aquinas 'law is perfectly compatible with the freedom proper to man.' What does he mean? Do you agree? Why, why not?
- 11/13-11/15      *St. Thomas & the Hierarchy of Law*  
 Read: Machiavelli, The Prince  
 Essays (due **11/8**): "The seeds of disloyalty to civil rulers are inherent in ST. Thomas' conception of law."



Essays (due **11/13**): "The higher we climb on Aquinas' ladder of laws, 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."

11/20      *Machiavelli's World & Contribution*  
Read: Machiavelli, The Prince

**\* \* \* \* \* Thanksgiving Break November 21-25<sup>th</sup> \* \* \* \* \***

11/27      *Machiavelli's World & Contribution cont.*  
Read: Machiavelli, The Prince— finish  
Essays (due **11/20**): The Prince is a very disturbing book.  
The question is why?

11/29      *Machiavelli's Rules for State's Craft: The Political Realist?*  
Essays (due **11/27**): What are the limits of power (ethical or otherwise) for Machiavelli?

12/4-      *Machiavelli's Realism?*  
12/6      Essays (due **11/29**): "The consummate realist is the way I would describe Machiavelli." Why, why not?

Essays (due **12/29**): "The consummate utopian is the way I would describe Machiavelli." Why, why not?

Essays (due **12/4**): For Machiavelli what appears to be the purpose of studying politics? Does his method of inquiry leave anything out?

**Essay Writing & Grading Guidelines:**  
**Fall 2012**

1<sup>st</sup>: Please: put the [essay question/statement](#) on the top of your paper. . .

**Thesis & Transitions – 20%**

- Clear, thoughtful, and coherent thesis statement that addresses essay question/statement
- Thesis placed at end of 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph
- Stays focused on essay topic

**Analysis – 65%**

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- Strong supporting evidence, drawn from reading material for the **thesis**
- Provides relevant information, clearly presented
- Fully developed, *interesting* arguments and points
- Analysis and conclusions are logical and precise
- Shows that the writer understands the author's argument, logic, and moral reasoning before critiquing or defending his/her argument
- Credit is given to outside sources, where appropriate

#### **Format, Word Choice, Mechanics & Quotations 15%**

- Format: 3 typed, double-spaced pages, 10-12 point font
- Grammar: Neatness, spelling, grammar, punctuation, good transition sentences between paragraphs and tight topic organization
- Quotations: Inserted in body with page number, relevant to point, not taken out of context, best summary of thinker's view

**Don't editorialize!** Give us nothing but your opinion w/no reference to our reading.

**Don't give us a book review!** No rehashing of lecture notes or quote for the sake of quoting. # (Too much narration/description.)

**Don't quote Wikipedia or Dictionary for definitions!** Instead provide your own ideas and criteria for the meaning of key political terms.

#### Some General tips for Good Writing:

1. Good writing stems from good thinking. Clarify your intent & major ideas before you start. Don't expect that your design will materialize during writing. A good outline can help organize your ideas. Sketch out your major points and their logical relationship.
2. Be a master builder. Your building blocks are sentences and paragraphs. Each essay should have a specific theme; each paragraph should have a specific purpose regarding that theme; and each sentence should have a specific purpose in its paragraph.
3. Good writing results from revision. First drafts are almost always lousy writing. Samuel Johnson said, "What is written in haste is read without pleasure." Please note!
4. Become your own best editor. If you are committed to your ideas, you will be willing to revise and revise until they are expressed clearly.
5. "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity," Henry David Thoreau admonished. His advice applies to composition as well as to life. Use clear-cut syntax and active voice (passive voice tends to distract & obscure.) Avoid unnecessary verbiage, such as "first and foremost" instead of "first." A good writer, said Thomas Jefferson, can use one word instead of three.

6. Be precise in your diction. Avoid a \$100 word when a \$5 word will do. “Never,” said George Orwell, “use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.”
7. And “if it is possible to cut a word out,” Orwell added, “cut it out.” Carefully selected nouns and verbs rarely require adjectives and adverbs.
8. Don’t be a hedger. If you believe in your purpose and conclusions, be positive and bold. Tentativeness undercuts your credibility. Avoid, for example, “it seems,” “perhaps,” “somewhat,” “it appears,” etc. I call these ‘chicken words.’
9. Keep your reader in mind. Guide the reader through your train of thought. Keep the reader awake by varying the length and beginning of sentences. Keep the reader involved by providing interesting examples, transitions, and conclusions. Use short and apt quotations and paraphrase the rest.
10. Be technically correct. Grammar and spelling errors tell the reader that you are careless. Read your writing aloud to catch your mistakes.

**Final Due by 5pm on Monday, December 10th.**