

Fall 9-1-2006

# PSC 450E.01: Ancient and Medieval Political Philosophy

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Political Science Department

POLS 450E  
Fall 2006

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Ancient & Medieval Political Philosophy:  
The Classical Tradition

Description of the Course:

Michael Oakeshott finds that the political philosopher usually takes a "somber view of the human situation." For the theorist 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 and the 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 man 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

More, Thomas, Utopian,

\* selected readings on library reserve

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 PSC 300) 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 communitarianism 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.

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 (unless you provide documented evidence that meets criteria before for an excused absence). 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.)

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 discuss that day (10% of course grade.)

Writing Credit: for students taking this course with PSC 400, they will revise & resubmit their essays for a separate writing grade.

*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 it's significance to classical political thought, and will use the appropriate primary & secondary literature to support the paper's thesis.

*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

Course Schedule:

8/29 *Introduction to the Course; Political Theory & the Search for Standards Plato's Version of the Predicament*

Read: Plato, Republic Books I

9/5 *Plato's Indictment: Review of The Republic*

Read: Republic, Books II & III

Essays (**due 9/5 by 2pm**): Is Thrasymachus a political realist? Why, why not?

9/12 *Thrasymachus & Glaucon vs. Socrates*

Read: Republic, Books IV & V

Essays (**due 9/5**): Is Thrasymachus a spokesman for the City?

Essays (**due 9/17**): Plato's view that the just man and the just state are inseparable makes justice a mere dream." Discuss

9/19 *Plato's Ideal State & Ideal Women?*

Read: Republic, Book VI & VII

Essays (**due 9/12**): Examine the male-female roles in Plato's Republic. How "radical" is Plato's utopia with respect to women?

9/24 *The City verses the Philosopher*

Read: Republic, Book VIII

The Apology (on reserve)

Essays (**due 9/19**): The Philosopher— King?

Essays (**due 9/19**): A defense council at Socrates' trial might make the following plea: "Socrates may not have been a democrat, but there is nothing in his position, as presented by Plato, that is inherently opposed to democracy." Do you agree? What do you make of Athens' indictment of Socrates? Would you have sided with Athens or with Socrates?

9/26 *Plato's Critics: Anti-Utopianism; Plato's Apologists*

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

Read: Aristotle, Politics, Books I & II (Chaps. 1-8).

Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*

Essays (**due 9/24**): Socrates may not have been a democrat, but there is nothing in his position, as presented by Plato, that is inherently opposed to democracy.

Essays (**due 9/24**): 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?

\*10/3 *Aristotle's Biological Analysis of Politics*

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

Essays (**due 9/26**): All differences in political thought between Plato & Aristotle can be explained by their distinctive methods of political inquiry. Discuss

Essays (**due 9/26**): The difference between Plato & Aristotle is the eternal difference between the radical and the conservative.

10/10 *Aristotle & the Classifications of Governments*

Read: Politics, Book V (Chaps. 1-4); St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 1, pp. 1-15, pp. 28-43.

Essays (**due 10/3**): What does Aristotle mean by "justice" and "the rule of law?" Are they the same? Why, why not?

10/17 *St. Augustine & City of Man*

Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 2, pp. 44-88; Chap. 3, pp. 118-162.

Essays (due **10/10**): "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

10/24 *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

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\* Last day to drop course w/\$10 charge: October 9<sup>th</sup>.

Essays (due **10/17**): 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 **10/17**): The "Just" War?

10/31      *St. Thomas Aquinas & Political Theology*  
Read: St. Thomas, Treatise on Law  
Essays (due **10/24**): For St. Aquinas 'law is perfectly compatible with the freedom proper to man.' What does he mean? Do you agree? Why, why not?

November 7<sup>th</sup> NO Class: Election Day

11/14      *St. Thomas & the Hierarchy of Law*  
Read: More's *Utopia* Book I (on reserve)  
Essays (due **10/31**): "The seeds of disloyalty to civil rulers are inherent in ST. Thomas' conception of law."

Essays (due **10/31**): "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."

11/21      *Sir Thomas More's Utopia: Heaven on Earth?*  
Recommend: John M. Smith, "Eugenics & Utopia," *Utopias & Utopian Thought*, ed. by Frank Manuel  
Read: Machiavelli, The Prince  
Essays (due **11/14**): More's utopia has courts without lawyers? Possible? Desirable?

Essays (due **11/14**): Compare and contrast Plato and More on the role of marriage & childrearing. Is one utopia superior to another? Why, why not?

11/28      *Machiavelli's World & Contribution*  
Read: Machiavelli, The Prince— finish  
Essays (due **11/21**): The Prince is a very disturbing book. The question is why?

12/5

*Machiavelli's Rules for State's Craft: The Political Realist?*

Essays (due **11/28**): What are the limits of power (ethical or otherwise) for Machiavelli?

Essays (due **11/28**) : "The consummate realist is the way I would describe Machiavelli." Yes? No? Why, why not?

Final Due by XXXX