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PSC 350E.01: Ancient and Medieval Political Philosophy

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University of Montana
Political Science Department

POLS 350E
Fall 2004
MWF 1:10-2pm

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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
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 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 four critical essays (40% of course grade), 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 (45% of course grade.) Finally, each student will be graded on class *participation* and attendance (15% of course grade.)

It does not honor a writer to read him/her without seeking to challenge him/her.

Writing Credit: for students taking this course with PSC300, they will revise & resubmit their essays for a separate writing 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, military service. Instructor will also excuse absences for reasons of mandatory public service.

Course Schedule:

8/30	Introduction to the Course
9/1	Political Theory & the Search for Standards Plato's Version of the Predicament Read: Plato, <u>Republic</u> Books I & II
9/3	Plato's Indictment: Review of <i>The Republic</i> Read: <u>Republic</u> , Book III
9/6	***** Labor Day Holiday *****
9/8	Plato's Republic cont.
9/10	Plato's Apology, the Life & Teachings of Socrates

- 9/15** **Read: Republic, Book IV**
Essays (due 9/13): Is Thrasymachus a political realist? Why, why not?
- Essays (due 9/13):** Is Thrasymachus a spokesman for the City?
- 9/17** **Glaucon v. Plato's Prescriptions: The Ideal Polis**
Read: Republic, Books V & VI
- 9/20*** **Essays (due 9/17):** Plato's view that the just man and the just state are inseparable makes justice a mere dream." Discuss
- 9/22** **Plato's Ideal Woman?**
Read: Republic, Book VI
Essays (due 9/20): Examine the male-female roles in Plato's Republic. How "radical" is Plato's utopia with respect to women?
- 9/24** **Plato's Ideal State & Statesman/woman**
Read: Republic, Book VII
Essays (due 9/22): The Philosopher— King?
- 9/27-9/29** **The City verses the Philosopher**
Read: Republic, Book VIII
The Apology (on reserve)
Essays (due 9/24): 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?
- 10/1** **Plato's Critics: Anti-Utopianism**
Recommend: Popper, *The Open Society & Its Enemies*
Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*
- 10/4** **The Decline of the Ideal State: Plato's Apologists**
Read: Aristotle, Politics, Books I & II (Chaps. 1-8).
- 10/6-10/8** **Aristotle's Biological Analysis of Politics**
Read: Aristotle, Politics, Book III (Chaps. 6-18)
Essays (due 10/4): All differences in political thought between Plato & Aristotle can be explained by their distinctive methods of political inquiry. Discuss

* September 20th is last add/drop day by cyberbear.

- 10/11** **Read: Politics, Book IV (Chaps. 1-8; 11-12)**
Essays (due 10/8): The difference between Plato & Aristotle is the eternal difference between the radical and the conservative.
- 10/13-10/15** **Aristotle & the Classifications of Governments**
Read: Politics, Book IV (Chaps. 1-4).
Essays (due 10/11): What does Aristotle mean by "justice" and "the rule of law?" Are they the same? Why, why not?
- 10/18** **St. Augustine & City of Man**
Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 1, pp. 1-15, pp. 28-43.
- 10/20-10/22** **St. Augustine cont.**
Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 2, pp. 44-88; Chap. 3, pp. 118-162.
Essays (due 10/20): "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
- 10/25** **St. Augustine & the Two Cities**
Read: The Political Writings, Chap. 3, pp. 162-183;
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?
- 10/27** **St. Augustine's Idea of the "Just" War**
Read: The Political Writings, Appendix.
Essays (due 10/25): The "Just" War?
- 10/29-11/1** **St. Thomas Aquinas & Political Theology**
Read: St. Thomas, Treatise on Law
- 11/3** **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?

- 11/5 **St. Thomas cont.**
Read: More's *Utopia* Book I (on reserve)
Essays (due 11/3): "The seeds of disloyalty to civil rulers are inherent in St. Thomas' conception of law."
- 11/8 **St. Thomas' & the Hierarchy of Law**
Read: Thomas More, *Utopia* (on reserve),
Essays (due 11/5): "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."
- 11/10 **Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*: Heaven on Earth?**
Read: More's *Utopia* Book I (on reserve)
- 11/12 **More's Legal System: Justice on Earth**
Read: More's *Utopia* Book II (on reserve)
Essays (due 11/10): More's utopia has courts without lawyers? Possible? Desirable?
- 11/15 **Plato & More: Eugenics**
Recommend: John M. Smith, "Eugenics & Utopia," *Utopias & Utopian Thought*, ed. by Frank Manuel
Essays (due 11/12): Compare and contrast Plato and More on the role of marriage & childrearing. Is one utopia superior to another? Why, why not?
- 11/17 **Renaissance Reaction to Medieval Thought**
Read: Machiavelli, *The Prince*
- 11/19 **Machiavelli's World & Contribution**
Read: Machiavelli, *The Prince*— finish
- 11/22 **Machiavelli's Concept of Human Nature, Society, & Power**
- 11/24-11/28 ******* Thanksgiving Break *******
- 11/29 **Machiavelli cont. Slack Day *****Machiavelli essays due**
- 12/1 **Machiavelli's Prince Revisited**
Essays (due 11/29): The Prince is a very disturbing book. The question is why?

12/3 **Machiavelli's Power & Virtue**
Essays (due 12/1): What are the limits of power (ethical or otherwise) for Machiavelli?

12/6 **Machiavelli's Rules for State's Craft: The Political Realist?**

12/8- **Machiavelli's Realism cont.**
12/10 **Essays (due 12/8):** "The consummate realist is the way I would describe Machiavelli." Yes? No? Why, why not?

Or

'Machiavelli's political thought may or may not be realistic; but it is certainly not scientific. Indeed, where Machiavelli thinks himself most scientific, he is least so.'

Or

The more pessimistic the thinker, the more elitist the thought.
Discuss

Final Due by Thursday, December 16th at 3:10pm.