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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 2000
MWF 2:10-3pm

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Office Hrs: MW3-4;F 1-2
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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 and/or human nature 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

* 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) a series of interpretive, analytical essays which examine a thinker's ideas on human nature, justice, social obligation, political legitimacy, and his/her standards for judging various political regimes.
3. Orally critique an essay in terms of analytical clarity, logic, accuracy in interpretation of the readings, and ethical reasoning.
4. Develop a coherent position with regards to idealism and political realism, elitism and democratic doctrine, individualism and communitarianism etc.
5. 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 essay topics, see below.) If you are absent the day we are scheduled to discuss your essay, you will not get credit for it. At least one essay will be revised

and resubmitted. 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.

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:

- | | | |
|----------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 9/5 | Introduction to the Course | |
| 9/8 | Political Theory & the Search for Standards | |
| 9/11 | Plato's Version of the Predicament
Read: Plato, <u>Republic</u> Books I & II | |
| 9/13-
City? | Essays (due 9/11 by 5pm): Is Thrasymachus a spokesman for 9/15 | the |
| 9/18-
9/20 | Read: <u>Republic</u> , Book III
Essays (due 9/15): Is Thrasymachus a political realist? Why,
why not? | |
| 9/22-
9/25* | Glaucon v. Plato's Prescriptions: The Ideal Polis
Read: <u>Republic</u> , Books IV & V | |
| 9/27 | Essays (due 9/18): Why is it important to Plato that the
education of the Guardians be so strict and so long? | |
| 9/29 | The City verses the Philosopher
Read: <u>Republic</u> , Books VI & VII
<u>The Apology</u> (on reserve) | |
| 10/2-
10/4 | Essays (due 9/29): The Philosopher— King? | |
| 10/4- | Essays (due 10/2): Socrates may not have been a democratic, 10/6 | but there |
| | is nothing in his position, as presented by Plato, | that is inherently opposed to |
| | democracy. Discuss | |
| 10/9 | Read: <u>Republic</u> , Book VIII
Essays (due 10/6): "Why is there no system of law in Plato's ideal
state?" | |
| 10/11 | Essays (due 10/9): Plato, a fascist?
Recommend: Popper, <i>The Open Society & Its Enemies</i> | |

* Last day to add/drop course by dial bear.

- 10/13 The Decline of the Ideal State: Plato's Apologists
Read: Aristotle, Politics, Books I & II (Chaps. 1-8).
- 10/16- Aristotle's Biological Analysis of Politics
10/18 Read: Aristotle, Politics, Book III (Chaps. 6-18)
- 10/20- Read: Politics, Book IV (Chaps. 1-8; 11-12)
10/23 Essays (due 10/18): The difference between Plato & Aristotle is the eternal difference between the radical and the conservative.
- 10/25- Aristotle & the Classifications of Governments
10/27 Read: Politics, Book V (Chaps. 1-4).
Essays (due 10/23): What does Aristotle mean by "justice" and "the rule of law?" Are they the same? Why, why not?
- 10/30 St. Augustine & City of Man
Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 1, pp. 1-15, pp. 28-43.
- 11/1- St. Augustine cont.
11/3 Read: St. Augustine, The Political Writings, Chap. 2, pp. 44-88;
Chap. 3, pp. 118-162.
Essays (due 10/30): "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
- 11/6 St. Augustine & the Two Cities
Read: The Political Writings, Chap. 3, pp. 162-183;
Essays (due 11/3): 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?
- 11/8 ST. Augustine's Idea of the "Just" War
Read: The Political Writings, Appendix.
Essays (due 11/6): The "Just" War?
- 11/10 No class: Veterans Day
- 11/13- St. Thomas Aquinas & Political Theology
11/15 Read: St. Thomas, Treatise on Law
- 11/17- ST. Thomas' & the Hierarchy of Law

11/20 Essays (due 11/15): "The higher we climb on Aquinas' natural law
latter, 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."

******* Thanksgiving Break November 22-24th *******

11/27 St. Thomas cont.

Essays (due 11/20): "The seeds of disloyalty to civil rulers are
inherent in ST. Thomas' conception of law."

11/29 Renaissance Reaction to Medieval Thought

Read: Machiavelli, The Prince

12/1 Machiavelli's World & Contribution

Read: Machiavelli, The Prince— finish

12/4 Machiavelli's Concept of Human Nature, Society, & Power

12/6 Machiavelli cont.

Essays (due 12/2): The Prince is a very disturbing book. The
question is why?

12/8 Machiavelli's Power & Virtue

Essays (due 12/6): What are the limits of power (ethical or
otherwise) for Machiavelli?

12/11 Machiavelli's Rules for State's Craft: The Political Realist?

12/13 Machiavelli's Realism cont.

Essays (due 12/11) : "The consummate realist is the way I would
describe Machiavelli." Yes? No? Why, why not?

12/15 Machiavelli & Our World

Essays (due 12/13): "The age of Machiavelli was something like
ours, in being one of religious eclipse, attended by failure of the traditional
foundation of morality. A domination of self-interest without regard for moral
restriction was the result." Discuss

Final Due by 5pm on Wednesday, December 20th.