

21:790:371  
Mon 2:30 – 3:50  
Wed 1:00 – 2:20

**EARLY POLITICAL THEORY**

Fall 2021  
Dr. Segers

Mark Twain defined a classic as “a book everyone wants to have read but no one wants to read.” This course is designed to prove him wrong. Here at Rutgers Newark, we believe that an essential requirement of a liberal arts education is basic familiarity with the classical writings of the Western political tradition.

The course surveys the history of political thought from ancient Greece and Rome, through medieval Christianity, to the Italian Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. We are reading some of the most important writings of the Western political tradition. In lectures and class discussions, we will situate the authors in their historical context and consider the applicability of their ideas to our own times. Through the theorists, we will reflect on such questions as: What do human beings want, what makes them happy? What is a good life? What is freedom? How is freedom related to law, order, and security? Are all men and women equal or should they be? Why do we have government? What should government do? What is democracy, is it a good form of government, and is it possible everywhere? Can democracy lead to tyranny? Why are people religious believers, and what should be the relationship between religion and politics, church and state? Is there such a thing as just war or a just use of violence? Is imperialism ever justified? Can democracies be imperial powers and remain democracies? Does life, does history have meaning or purpose?

Since this is a course in the history of political theory, we seek to understand how these questions have been addressed and answered at different times, and how this tradition of political thought has shaped our own ideas, attitudes and expectations. We shall pay particular attention this semester to (1) conceptions of political leadership; and (2) each theorist’s comments---or silence---about the role of women in politics and society.

**REQUIRED READINGS** (available Rutgers Bookstore, Hahnes Bldg). All are paperbacks.

Plato, The Republic, F. Cornford trans., Oxford University Press.

Aristotle, Politics, Ernest Barker trans., Oxford University Press.

Herbert A. Deane, The Political & Social Ideas of St. Augustine, Columbia Univ. Press.

St. Thomas Aquinas, On Politics and Ethics, Paul Sigmund ed., Norton Critical Editions.

Machiavelli, Selected Political Writings, David Wooten ed., Hackett Publishing Co.

**Note: Required texts in this course (classics of political thought) are in the public domain and are available free online. See <http://www.swan.ac.uk/poli/texts> These classics are also available in the RU library system and in many local public libraries. Also the Rutgers Bookstore has used copies available (less costly).**

### **Course Requirements:**

#### **Midterm and Final Examinations.**

**Two Short Papers (one on Thucydides' Melian Dialogue, the second on Martin Luther King's use of natural law arguments). Papers will be graded on content and on writing style so we will pay special attention to grammar, punctuation, and spelling.**

**Participation: Students should complete all assigned readings before each class. You are expected to attend class regularly, to keep pace with the readings, and to participate knowledgeably in class discussions. Participation can take several forms, such as questions and comments on the readings directly or comments on current events that reflect some aspect of the readings. The class will be conducted via discussion as much as possible. We are a community of learning, teaching, and listening to one another. Participation will therefore count for 20% of the grade.**

**Grades will be based on class participation and knowledge of the readings, on the two short essays, and on the examinations. Class attendance is very important; no more than two unexcused absences are permissible.**

#### **Grading:**

<b>Midterm &amp; Final Exams</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Two Short Papers</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Class Participation</b>	<b>20%</b>

#### **Course Goals and Objectives:**

- (1) Students will read some of the most important books ever written---classic works of Western political thought in the modern period.
- (2) They will acquire skills in textual analysis and contextual interpretation---how to situate a thinker in historical context (the events of his time, the audience she was addressing, the writer's goals and objectives).
- (3) They will learn how to analyze and evaluate arguments about major political traditions (e.g., liberalism, conservatism, socialism)---as a step towards forming their own political identities. They will learn to think critically about political ideas, doctrines, and ideologies.
- (4) They will be introduced to feminist interpretations of major political thinkers. The course will consider what gender analysis has added to the study of political theory in our time.

**Course schedule will be distributed the first day of classes, Wednesday, Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> at 1:00 pm.**

**Important Note during the Pandemic from Rutgers President Holloway and Chancellor Cantor.**

In order to protect the health and wellbeing of all members of the Rutgers-Newark community, masks must be worn by all persons inside campus buildings when in the presence of others, and in buildings in non-private enclosed settings (e.g., common workspaces, workstations, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.). Masks should securely cover the nose and mouth. Masks must be worn during class meetings. Each day before you arrive on campus or leave your residence hall, you must complete the brief survey on the My Campus Pass symptom checker self-screening app found at: **myRutgers Portal.**