

21:790:371

EARLY POLITICAL THEORY

Fall 2019

Tuesdays 6:00 to 9:00 pm.

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? 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) issues of truth and politics.

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.

Luther and Calvin, Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority, Harro Hopfl ed., Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Course Requirements:

Midterm and Final Examinations.

Three short quizzes on the readings during the semester.

One short paper on Thucydides' The Melian Dialogue. Paper will be graded on content and on writing style so we will pay special attention to grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Oral Presentation: Each student will make one short presentation showing how the assigned reading for the day casts light on some political event or issue described in a current newspaper or news magazine.

Participation: Students 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 15% of the grade---participation includes the oral presentation.

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

N.B. According to University policy, absences are excused only in the case of illness, death in the family, religious observance, or official college business. These instances must be documented and also approved in advance when the instance was foreseeable. Note: having an airline ticket to travel (unless it is for one of the documented reasons listed above) is not grounds for an excused absence.

Please note:

Grades will be lowered for papers submitted late.

Makeup examinations will not be given.

Grades of Absent or Incomplete will not be given.

Grading:

Midterm & Final Exams 50%

Short Paper 15%

Quizzes 20%

Class Participation and Oral Presentation 15%

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.

Oral Presentations: Each student will make one short presentation to the class (5 to 10 minutes max), showing how the assigned reading for the day casts light on some political event or issue described in:

An article or column in one of the following newspapers: *Nre York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall St. Journal*, *Star-Ledger*, OR

An article in one of the following magazines: *New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *National Review*, *Economist*, *New York Review of Books*.

I will distribute a schedule giving each student a date for the presentation.

Guide for Presentations: Hand out copy of the newspaper article to each student in class.

Describe the current event or issue.

Discuss how the assigned reading is applicable to the event.

Prepare 2-3 questions to lead class discussion.

Some Examples: According to a recent article, the President of Iran said that the purpose of the state was virtue not freedom; how would Plato respond to this? Would Saddam Hussein have benefited from reading Aristotle's advice on how dictators retain power? Does Plato's view on founding new states or reforming old ones tell us anything about American efforts in Iraq or Afghanistan? In current debate about restoring the military draft, what would Machiavelli's position be?

Make-Ups for Presentations: Students who miss class on the date they were scheduled to make their presentation will NOT be able to make it up on another date, unless the absence was documented and excused in accordance with the university policy outlined above. However, if a student cannot make the date assigned for the presentation for good reason, I will assign them an alternate date if I receive notice at least 2 weeks in advance.

Note: Required texts in this course (classics of political thought) are in the public domain and are available free online. You need to go to the websites and print them out. See <http://www.swan.ac.uk/poli/texts> Also these classics are available in the RU library system and in many local public libraries.

Course Outline**I. INTRODUCTION**

Blueprint for the Study of Political Theory (xerox). Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War (The Melian Dialogue) on line www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/melian.htm. What is political theory, and how and why should we study it?

II. PLATO

Plato, The Republic (entire).

Susan Okin, "Philosopher Queens and Private Wives: Plato on Women & the Family." (library reserve online).

III. ARISTOTLE

Aristotle, The Politics (selections)

Christine Pierce, "Natural Law Language and Women." (library reserve online).

IV. ROME AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Scriptural passages relevant to politics & government (xerox)

H.A. Deane, The Political & Social Ideas of St. Augustine

Garry Wills, "What Is a Just War?" **NYRB, Nov. 18, 2004.** www.nybooks.com

VI. MEDIEVAL POLITICAL THOUGHT

Sigmund ed., St. Thomas Aquinas on Ethics & Politics (selections)

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Online at www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/mlkbirm.htm.

VII. RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

Machiavelli, The Prince (all), and The Discourses (selections)

Martin Luther, "On Secular Authority," Harro Hopfl, ed.

John Calvin, "On Civil Government," Harro Hopfl, ed.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Summary and Review

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Early Political Theory

Course Schedule

Fall 2019

- Sept 3: Introduction. Background on the Ancient Greeks and Political Theory. Blueprint for Political Theory. Thucydides: Melian Dialogue from the History of Peloponnesian War.
- Sept.10: PLATO: Cornford Introduction and Book I of The Republic. Consider: How would you define justice? Books II-IV (pp. 41-174).
- Sept.17: PLATO'S Republic, Books V-VII (pp. 175-263). Books VIII-IX (pp. 264-320, 341-348). Discussion of Thucydides' Melian Dialogue (essay due). Film, The Trial of Socrates
- Sept.24: **QUIZ** on Plato's Republic. Complete discussion of the Republic. Susan Okin on Plato, "Philosopher Queens & Private Wives." Introduction to Aristotle (life and context).
- Oct. 1: ARISTOTLE Politics, Bks I and II (pp. 1-56). How define equality? Politics, Bks. III (all) and Book IV, chs. 11-12 (pp. 179-186).
- Oct. 8: ARISTOTLE. Continued discussion of Books III and part of IV (pp. 179-186). Christine Pierce, "Natural Law Language & Women."
- Oct.15: **MIDTERM EXAM**
- Oct. 22: ROME AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY
Hellenism and Rome - Cicero On the Republic (handout). *the genius of Rome*
Early Christianity: excerpts from Scriptures (handout). *the advent & spread of Christianity*
H.A. Deane, ch. 1 of book on Augustine, pp. 1-12.
Film: "Peter, Paul, and the Christian Revolution."
- Oct. 29: ST. AUGUSTINE on The City of God and The City of Man
H.A. Deane, The Political & Social Ideas of Augustine, chs. 2 to 6.
(on govt, church & state, law, political order, toleration of heresy).
- Nov. 5: **QUIZ** on Augustine's political thought. Justifiable war and theories of Just War in Augustine's thought. Garry Wills, "What Is a Just War?" in NYRB, Nov. 18, 2004. Accessible at www.nybooks.com. Film on Islam and its impact after the decline of the Roman Empire.

- Nov. 12: AQUINAS AND MEDIEVAL POLITICAL THOUGHT
Sigmund, Introduction & pp. 37-38. Consider how you would define law.
Sigmund, pp. 44-59. Aquinas' Treatise on Law.
Sigmund, pp. 14-28; pp. 61-68 (heresy, war).
- Nov. 19: **QUIZ** on Aquinas. Aquinas on just war theory.
Aquinas on politics and law: legislating morality, obeying an unjust law).
M.L. King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail.* Available online (see above).
- Nov. 26: **NO CLASS.** Thanksgiving week – Tuesday classes follow Thursday schedule.
- Dec. 3: MACHIAVELLI, THE RENAISSANCE, & THE REFORMATION
The Prince (entire). Consider how would you define power.
Machiavelli's The Discourses (selections). The precarious nature of politics between competing Italian city-states during the Renaissance. Film, "Martin Luther: The Idea That Changed the World."
- Dec.10: Reformation Political Thought: How does the State cope with pluralism?
Martin Luther, "On Secular Authority." Lutheran resistance to Nazi Germany.
John Calvin, "On Civil Government"
Last Class: Review and Summation prior to final exam.
- FINAL EXAM:** We follow the Rutgers University Newark schedule of final examinations.

Some Recommended Readings (Secondary Sources):

- Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War.
Natalie Harris Bluestone, Women and the Ideal Society.
Thomas Cahill, Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter.
Mary L. Shanley & Carole Pateman, eds., Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory.
Garry Wills, Augustine.
St. Augustine, Confessions.
Henry Paolucci, ed., The Political Writings of St. Augustine.
Margaret Farley, "Sources of Sexual Inequality in the History of Christian Thought,"
Journal of Religion 56:2 (1976), 162-176.
Wendy Brown, Manhood and Politics
Hannah Pitkin, Fortune Is a Woman: Gender & Politics in the Thought of Machiavelli
Joan Kelly, "Did Woman Have a Renaissance?" in Women, History, and Theory.
Sheldon Wolin, Politics and Vision.
George Klosko, History of Political Theory, Vol. I.