

RPOS 301: History of Political Theory 1
Fall 2015: Ancient Greeks through Machiavelli
(9084)

Prof. S. McKeever
Political Science Department
smckeever@albany.edu

M/W 4:15-5:35
Humanities 124
Office Hours: W/F 12:35-1:35 (HU 016)

Course Description

This course will give a broad sweep of the “first half” of the history of Western political theory. We will begin with the Greeks by reading important figures from Greek theater (Aeschylus) and philosophy (Plato, and Aristotle). These thinkers will introduce us to a number of the key concepts and ideas that run through the history of Western political theory. In the second unit of the course, we will read three early Christian writers (Boethius, Augustine, and Aquinas). These thinkers engage in a conversation with the Greek thinkers, but they also rely heavily on the Bible to build their theories. As we will see, they use many of the same concepts as the Greeks, but the meanings of those concepts shift and new ideas are formed. In the third and final unit of this course, we will read Machiavelli.

As we read these works throughout the course of the semester, we will encounter many of the enduring questions in political theory. We will be interested in asking questions like: “What is a political community and how should it be governed?” “What is the good toward which a political community should strive?” “What is justice?” “How does power work in a political community?” “What should be the interplay between morality and politics?” and “Does political theory matter for practical politics?”

Course Objectives

- 1) To understand how some of the important political concepts and ideas of the Western tradition were formed and how they evolved
- 2) To understand how different thinkers used and transformed these concepts and ideas
- 3) To connect these concepts and ideas to the contemporary political scene
- 4) To better learn how to read complex texts and to comprehend the nuances within and among these difficult texts
- 5) To better learn how to communicate difficult ideas and how to translate them into political practice

Course Requirements

- Arrive on time to all lectures.
- Complete all readings on time.
- Bring the assigned readings to class.
- Come to class ready to participate. This requires you to not only read the assigned readings but also to think about them in advance of the lecture. Be prepared to answer questions about the text and to ask questions of your own. It may help to

take notes while you are reading, to underline key passages of the text, or to write down questions that you still have about the text.

- Participate in class. This includes diligently listening to and respectfully responding to the instructor and your classmates as well as introducing your own thoughts.
- Complete two midterm exams and one final exam.

Required Readings

The following books are required for this course and are available at Mary Jane Books or online (please be sure to get the correct edition so we are, literally, all on the same page):

- Aeschylus (Edited by David Green, Richmond Lattimore, Mark Griffith, and Glenn W. Most), *Aeschylus II: Oresteia* (University of Chicago Press, 2013)
- Plato (Translated by G.M.A. Grube), *Five Dialogues* 2nd edition (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002)
- Plato (Translated by G.M.A. Grube), *Republic* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992)
- Aristotle (Translated by C.D.C. Reeve), *Politics* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998)
- Boethius (Edited by Douglas C. Langston), *The Consolation of Philosophy* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2010)
- Augustine (Translated by Michael W. Tkacz and Douglas Kries), *Political Writings* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994)
- Machiavelli (Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield), *The Prince* 2nd edition (University of Chicago Press, 1998)

Additional readings will be made available online. They are marked with "*" in the "Schedule of Readings and Assignments" section of this syllabus.

Attendance Policy

Political theory is an activity not a formula. The process is at least as important as the result, which is to say it is impossible to understand the theory without understanding how the theory is put together. To understand how the theory works and moves, we will need to pick it up, mull it over, and try it out. This takes both time and conversation, which is the purpose of the class lectures and the resulting class discussions during our twice weekly meetings. If you miss class time, you will not be able to fully make up what you missed. *As such, missing more than 1 class or repeatedly coming late to class will result in a reduction of your overall grade.* (See below for the excused absences policy.)

Office Hours

Along those same lines, the conversations and musings do not need to stop in the classroom. I am always happy to further the discussion in my office hours, and, in fact, I encourage it. The more you can actively engage with the material, the better you will understand it. If your class schedule makes it impossible for you to meet with me during my regularly scheduled office hours, please send me an e-mail so that we can arrange a mutually convenient time to meet.

Excused Absences:

If you must miss more than one class or if you must miss a class with a scheduled exam, you must have documentation from the dean of undergraduate studies that details the reason for your absence and excuses you from that absence. Absent this proper documentation, your grade will be adversely affected.

In addition, if you know that you will miss class time (for an athletic event, a religious holiday, or the like), please bring these to my attention (with proper and official documentation) within the first 3 class meetings or, if that is not possible, as soon as you become aware of them.

Grading

Midterm 1: 25%

Midterm 2: 25%

Final Exam: 30%

Participation: 20%

This course is graded on a scale of A-E.

Exams:

This class will have two midterm exams and one final exam. All three exams will be essay exams. Each exam will consist of one or two questions. Prior to the exam, I will distribute a sheet of paper that includes all possible exam questions. While the exam will not allow you to choose which question you would like to answer, you will have every possible exam question available to you at least one week before the exam is scheduled.

Since the thinkers in this course often self-consciously build on the work of their predecessors, the exams will be explicitly or implicitly cumulative. In other words, the questions will either ask you to talk about earlier thinkers from the course or they will require you to have knowledge of those earlier thinkers' theories in order to properly contextualize and answer the questions being asked.

As per the "Excused Absence" policy outlined above, make-up examinations, early examinations, or incomplete grades will be given only in the event of serious personal or family illness or other unusual circumstances as they are approved by the dean of undergraduate studies.

Participation:

As I have already tried to make clear, participation is an important element for learning political theory. To emphasize this point, participation is worth 20% of your final grade.

You cannot receive full credit for participation if you do not come to class (see the unexcused and excused absences policies above), but attendance alone is not participation. You must contribute to the class discussion on a regular basis throughout the entirety of the semester. Participation includes asking questions that further the conversation, answering instructor or classmate questions, and offering appropriate comments to

advance the classroom discussion. Though participation must be ongoing, I value quality participation over quantity alone.

Disruptive Behavior:

Participation includes not only actively adding to the academic discourse of the classroom, but it also includes not engaging in activity that is disruptive of that discourse. This behavior includes, but is not limited to, making loud or distracting noises, visually distracting students or the instructor, repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom, persisting in speaking without being recognized, or resorting to physical threats or personal insults.

Laptops and Electronic Devices:

All cell phones, iPods, and other electronic devices must be silenced and stored out of sight for the duration of class time. Usage of laptops, iPads, or the like for any activity other than note taking is prohibited. Please see me after the first class if you anticipate taking notes on a laptop or similar device.

Grade Appeals:

In order to appeal a midterm exam grade, you should see me during office hours within 1 week of the class receiving back the exam and submit a 1-2 page typewritten explanation of your reasons for believing that the grade should be changed. A grade appeal may result in the grade being raised, lowered, or left unaltered. After 1 week, grade complaints will not be considered unless there are mitigating circumstances such as a serious illness.

Cheating and Plagiarism

Under no circumstances should you submit someone else's work as your own. This includes, but is not limited to: copying text from another student on tests or papers, copying text from internet sites (e.g. Wikipedia, Sparknotes) or other sources without quotation marks and full citations, or submitting your own work from another course.

Cheating on an exam or plagiarizing written work will result in course failure and referral of the case to a university committee. For more information, please see the undergraduate bulletin: [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html).

Reasonable Accommodation

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of Disabled Student Services (Business Administration 120, 518-442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations (<http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml>).

If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course, for the above reasons or other cases including religious holidays, inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. Reasonable accommodations are generally established well in advance and are rarely granted retroactively.

Writing Center (Humanities 140)

The writing center provides tutorials on writing essays and improving language skills (ESL). Visit their website at: <http://www.albany.edu/writing/>.

Academic Support Services (Library Room 94)

Academic support services arrange individual and group tutorials as well as study skills workshops on time management, how to improve your concentration, essay exam skills, listening skills, and overcoming procrastination. Visit their website: <http://www.albany.edu/oaae/index.shtml>.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Reading selections not from required books will be made available online.

** This schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class. **

- Aug. 26 Introduction
- I. The Greeks**
- Aug. 31 Aeschylus *Oresteia* (“Agamemnon” and “The Libation Bearers”)
- Sep. 2 Aeschylus *Oresteia* (“The Eumenides”)
- Sep. 7 NO CLASS LABOR DAY**
- Sep. 9 Plato *Apology* and *Crito*
- Sep. 14 NO CLASS ROSH HASHANAH**
- Sep. 16 Plato *Euthyphro* and Plato *Republic* (Book II)
- Sep. 21 Plato *Republic* (Book III, ln. 412b8-417b7; Book IV, ln. 419-421c5, ln. 427d1-445e2; and Book V, ln. 471c2-474c2)
- Sep. 23 NO CLASSES YOM KIPPUR**
- Sep. 28 Plato *Republic* (Book V, ln. 474c3-480a12; Book VI; and Book VII, ln. 514-521c7; 531c9-535a2)
- Sep. 30 Plato *Republic* (Book VIII and IX)
- Oct. 5 Plato *Republic* (Book X, ln. 608c-end) and *Phaedo* (ln. 72e3-82c9 and ln. 107c1-116a1)
- Oct. 7 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book I, sect. 1-9, 13 and Book II, sect. 6-9) * and Aristotle *Politics* (Book VII, ch. 1-4, 8-10, 13, 15 and Book VIII, ch. 1, 3)
- Oct. 12 Aristotle *Politics* (Book III, ch. 1, 3-18)
- Oct. 14 Aristotle *Politics* (Book IV, ch. 1, 4-12; Book V, ch. 9)
- Oct. 19 Greek Thinkers Wrap-up
- Oct. 21 NO CLASS (Use this time to review)**
- Oct. 26 Midterm Exam 1

II. The Christians

- Oct. 28 Boethius *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Book I; the “Prose” sections only)
- Nov. 2 Boethius *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Book II through Book III “Prose 8” (inclusive, the “Prose” sections only)
- Nov. 4 Boethius *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Book III, “Prose 9” through Book IV, the “Prose” sections only)
- Nov. 9 Augustine “Letter 138” and Augustine *The City of God* (“The Reconsiderations” pg. 1-2, Book II, Book IV, Book V, and Book X, ch. 14-15)
- Nov. 11 Augustine *The City of God* (Books XI-XIV)
- Nov. 16 Augustine *The City of God* (Book XVIII, Book XIX, and Book XXII)
- Nov. 18 Aquinas *On Kingship* *
- Nov. 23 Aquinas *Summa Theologica*: Law (*ST* I-II: Quest. 90, Art. 2-4; Quest. 91 Art. 1-5; Quest. 92, Art. 1-2) and Aquinas *Summa Theologica*: Justice (*ST* II-II: Quest. 57, Art. 1-2; Quest. 58, Art. 5, 7, 12; Quest. 61, Art. 1), and War (*ST* II-II: Quest. 40, Art. 1) *
- Nov. 25 NO CLASS THANKSGIVING**
- Nov. 30 Midterm Exam 2
- Dec. 2 Machiavelli “Letter to Vettori,” “Dedicatory Letter,” and *The Prince* (ch. 1-14)
- Dec. 7 Machiavelli *The Prince* (ch. 15-26)
- Dec. 9 Machiavelli Wrap Up

Final Exam: Monday, December 14, 2015 3:30-5:30pm