Politics and Imitation

As popular culture shows us everyday, people imitate each other in their dress, their music, their lifestyles, and their beliefs and values. This course is interested in all these forms of imitation, in the ways individuals and groups in society and politics imitate each other, and in the significance of imitation for politics and society. It is important to realize that at the beginning of Western political thought, especially in the work of Plato, those who engaged in imitation, such as poets and other sorts of artists, and who recommended that citizens imitate one another in certain ways, were banished from society! Imitation was believed to be harmful to a society ordered according to a concept of the good and that sought to realize the good.

Our course will explore various ways in which political theorists have thought about imitation and the implications of the relationship between politics and imitation. We will read such political theorists as Plato and Aristotle, Rousseau and Schiller, Tocqueville, Emerson, and Whitman, and also contemporary political theorists, to try to decide if imitation is politically problematic or if it contributes to a healthy political order.

Here are just a few of the questions we will be interested in: What do we mean by "imitation" in social and political life? How do citizens imitate one another? Which political theorists have thought seriously about imitation and what are their views? If citizens and political leaders do imitate one another, why do they do so? Is imitation a force for political and social cooperation and progress or rather for conflict and divisiveness? All of our readings will be placed in Dropbox – its link is included below. Take-home midterm and take-home final examination.

Course and Learning Objectives

The goal of this course is to teach students how to carefully read and interpret texts, identify key concepts on which theoretical arguments are based, and how to use these arguments and concepts to develop critical analyses and understandings of democratic societies and their politics. Students will be taught to think about the complex matter of what counts as politics in modern democratic societies. These objectives will contribute to teaching students how to formulate concepts and arguments of their own in their written work (examinations) and in oral presentations (class participation). In addition, students will be guided through the debates about imitation in politics and society that have occurred throughout the history of political thought.
Classroom Etiquette

Students are permitted to bring beverages to class. Food is not permitted. **Cell phones are to be turned off upon entering class. Students who use computers for note taking are not permitted to use their computers for any other application during class time.** Each time students violate these rules 5 points will be subtracted from their final grade. Students must arrive to class on time and be seated by 9:20. Students unable to arrive at class on time should consider another course, as the material missed in lecture cannot be made up and late arrivals disturb the class.

Course Requirements and Grading

A student’s grade for POS 310, *Contemporary Political Theory*, will be based on a take-home midterm and take-home final examination (each 40% of the final grade) and class participation (20% of the final grade). Examinations will be based entirely on the readings and the in-class discussions of class readings, on the basis of which the class will formulate the questions students will be asked to write on in their examinations. Moreover, students should prepare for each class by using the questions the class formulates together to guide their analysis of the reading assignments. Each take-home examination will be the length of a single bluebook.

Students are expected to attend class and to participate on an on-going basis by posing questions, answering questions, contestsing or arguing on behalf of their views and the views of other students in the course and, certainly, challenging the views of the instructor. Each week Friday’s class time will be set-aside for students to participate in group discussions about readings and lectures. Students should make every effort to make these Friday discussions as they will help to keep students up-to-date on class readings and class discussions.

Course Readings

*All readings will be available in a class Dropbox, the link for which is below.* At the time of the printing of this syllabus all class readings have been included in the Dropbox except for the final two weeks of classes. These will be added in September as soon as copies of the articles have been made.

**DROPBOX LINK:** [https://www.dropbox.com/home/310%20Fall17](https://www.dropbox.com/home/310%20Fall17)

Adorno, Popular Music and Imitation

Plato, *Republic*, Books 1, 2, 3

Aristotle, *Poetics*, Sections 1, 2, 3


Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (all)

Emerson, “Self-Reliance”


Schoolman, “Democratic Vistas: Democratic Enlightenment and Aesthetic Education”

“Whitman’s Discovery: Aesthetic Education through the Visual Image”
Weekly Reading Assignments

8/28 Course Introduction

8/30 Adorno, Popular Music and Imitation

9/1 No Class, Professor Schoolman at Conference

9/4 Labor Day, No Class

9/6 Plato, Republic, Bk. 2.

9/8 Group Discussions on Plato Bks. 2.

9/11 Plato, Republic, Bk. 3.

9/13 Plato, Republic, Bk. 10.

9/15 Group Discussions on Plato Bk. 3 and Bk. 10.

9/18 Aristotle, Poetics, Section 1.

9/20 Group Discussion, Aristotle, Poetics, Section 1.

9/22 No Class, Rosh Hashanah (classes resume at 12:35)

9/25 Aristotle, Poetics, Section 2.

9/27 Aristotle, Poetics, Section 3.

9/29 Group Discussions on Aristotle Section 2 and 3.


10/13 Group Discussions on Spivak, chs. 2 and 9.


   Take-home Midterm Handed out.

10/30 Emerson, “Self-Reliance”
   Take-Home Midterm *Due in Class at 9:20*.
   No Late Papers Accepted


11/3 Group Discussions of Emerson and Whitman.

11/6 Schoolman, “Democratic Vistas: Democratic Enlightenment and Aesthetic Education”


11/10 Group Discussions on Emerson, Whitman, Schoolman

11/13 Schoolman, “Whitman’s Discovery”

11/15 Schoolman, “Whitman’s Discovery” continued.

11/17 Group Discussions on Schoolman

11/20 assignment to be announced & placed in Dropbox

11/22 No Class, Thanksgiving Break

11/24 No Class, Thanksgiving Break

11/27 assignment to be announced & placed in Dropbox

11/29 assignment to be announced & placed in Dropbox

12/1 Group Discussions

12/4 assignment to be announced & placed in Dropbox

12/6 assignment to be announced & placed in Dropbox

12/8 Course review, Take-Home Final Examination Handed out.

Final Exam NOTE: *Take-Home Final Examinations are Due on the Day the Final Examination is Scheduled (Wed., 12/13) by the University.* Students will meet that day in (HU 0132) to hand in their final exams at the time the examination is *scheduled to conclude (5:30 pm).* NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED!