

POLITICAL SCIENCE 6310
POLITICAL THEORY SEMINAR

Fall 2021

Monday: 3:00 - 5:50

MAIN 318

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Office Hours

Monday 8:30 – 10:00, Wednesday 8:30 – 10:00, & by appointment

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Course Summary

This course is a graduate level survey class of political theory. We will examine some of the principal texts and ideas in ancient, modern, and American political thought as carefully and as comprehensively as we can in a single semester.

The course begins with a brief review of early ancient political thought. The focus here is the first discussion of the best regime, which we find in Herodotus, as well as a few speeches from Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC).

The discussion here is important because it sets the stage for the extensive review of later ancient political thought that we will conduct in Part 2 of the class, that of Plato's *Republic*. The *Republic*, an imaginary dialogue set in Athens around the end of the Peloponnesian War, is arguably the most famous and celebrated book on justice. In the *Republic* Socrates and his interlocutors seek to answer such fundamental philosophical questions as what is justice, what is the nature of the soul, and what is the best political regime? These questions will define many of the issues taken up in later political thought, including those texts we read subsequently in the course.

This includes Machiavelli's *The Prince*, which we review in Part 3. If Plato's *Republic* is the most famous book in the history of political thought, Machiavelli's *The Prince* may be the most infamous (as his translator proposes). Why is Machiavelli's name associated with the teaching of evil? And how did he, along with Thomas Hobbes, transform early modern political philosophy? Machiavelli and Hobbes are said to have set the stage for modern political science as well as the classical liberalism of John Locke and Montesquieu. Why? We will address these questions in Parts 3 and 4 of the course.

Locke himself is considered the founder of many of the ideas underlying American constitutionalism: that all individuals are born free and equal, that the only legitimate government is consensual government, and that all government must be limited in its powers. In Part 4 we will inquire into the theoretical basis of Locke's political philosophy and why property, and the value labor adds to property, was so significant to his political teaching. We will also ask how Montesquieu thought people could be united through their common interests and how domestic and international commerce could have a moderating and pacifying influence on human passions—the same sort of assumptions made by globalization theorists today.

Finally, Part 5 of the course examines American political thought. The focus here is *The Federalist*, the 85 papers written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay that many consider to be the most comprehensive and cogent defence of the original Constitution ever written. Did the authors of *The Federalist* think the commercial republic was as moderate and pacific as Montesquieu appeared to assume? What powers over commerce and defence did the founders give to the federal government and why did they provide these? What about the separation of powers, another idea from Locke and Montesquieu the founders would refine? Why are these configured the way they are? These are just some of the questions that we will ask in the last part of the course.

Course Format

Since this is a graduate class it will be conducted as a seminar. Students will be expected to participate extensively in discussion and to comment on the readings. Political theory focuses on texts. Accordingly, we will do a lot of reading in this class. Please make sure you do the readings before class and come to class prepared to discuss them. Simply reading secondary commentary like Wikipedia or SparkNotes will not prepare you sufficiently for this class since we are going to examine the original texts in detail. Please read those texts carefully, think about them, and come to class prepared to discuss them. There are PowerPoint notes that I will distribute for all of the readings. Those notes ask specific questions about the readings. Try to answer the questions before class since they will help get the discussion going. It will be virtually impossible to receive an "A" in this course if you do not keep up with the readings and come to class prepared to discuss them. Mere attendance is insufficient to garner a good grade.

ALSO, PLEASE NOTE THAT IF YOU PLAGIARIZE OR CHEAT ON ANY PAPER OR ASSIGNMENT YOU WILL RECEIVE AN "F" IN THE COURSE. Please consult USU's plagiarism guidelines so you are familiar with these.

Course Goals

From this course you can expect to:

1. Learn fundamental principles and theories.
 - a. The authors we read provide disparate approaches to understanding human nature and politics. It will be essential that you understand the authors' theoretical framework, the principles they start with, and how their principles and theories influence their understanding of politics.
2. Learn how to apply the course material to improve thinking, problem solving, and decision-making.
 - a. The texts we will be reading are old; in some cases very old. We begin with ancient Greek texts going back two and a half millennia. It may not be readily apparent just how these readings can inform contemporary political debate. But they can! Each author provides a unique way of thinking about enduring political questions and the authors offer multiple ways to address political problems. We will endeavor to understand the authors as best we can in an effort to learn from them.

3. Learn how to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.
 - a. You will likely find yourself disagreeing, and perhaps significantly so, with at least one or more of the assigned authors. Rather than simply dismissing their writing as irrelevant or misguided, we will endeavor to engage them in dialogue through fair-minded readings. You cannot critically analyze a text without first understanding the author's argument in its entirety. In turn, this will help you engage more meaningfully with others with whom you disagree.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Texts:

(1) Plato. *The Republic of Plato*. 3rd Edition. Translated by Allan Bloom. Introduction by Adam Kirsch. New York: Basic Books, 2016.

(2) Niccolò Machiavelli. *The Prince*. Second Edition. Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

(3) John Locke. *Two Treatises of Government*. Edited by Peter Laslett. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

(4) Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist: A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States*, edited, with an introduction, by Robert Scigliano. New York: Modern Library, 2001.

There are additional readings referred to in the syllabus as “Handout” that will be emailed to students **registered for the course**. Please make sure you are registered for the course.

You must keep up with all of the readings and attend and participate in all classes. IF YOU MISS MORE THAN ONE CLASS, YOUR GRADE MAY BE REDUCED BY 10 POINTS OUT OF 100. FOR EVERY ADDITIONAL CLASS MISSED, YOUR GRADE MAY BE REDUCED EVEN MORE. PLEASE DON'T MISS CLASSES.

Grade Distribution:

(1) Class Presentations and Participation	= 15%
(2) First Textual Interpretation Paper	= 20%
(3) Second Textual Interpretation Paper	= 20%
(3) Research Paper	= 45%
TOTAL	= 100%

FAILURE TO COMPLETE ANY OF THE ABOVE GRADING COMPONENTS WILL RESULT IN AN F GRADE FOR THE COURSE.

(1) **CLASS PRESENTATIONS AND PARTICIPATION.** You will be assessed for your participation in class discussion. Part—and only part—of that assessment will consist of your presentations in class. For each class I will ask a student to briefly summarize the **key points** they found from the readings for that class. There is **no written requirement** for the presentations and they are to be **no more than three minutes**. For **each class, you must do all of the required readings**. I will call on students to discuss the readings in every class, not just those who do the presentations. **Please be prepared.**

(2) **TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION PAPERS.** The purpose of these two papers is to interpret the texts that we study in the course. How is a text of political theory to be read? How, for instance, are we to read a dialogue like Plato's *Republic*? What arguments are being made by the author or speakers? What assumptions are made in those arguments? Are those assumptions reasonable? What understanding of human nature is at play in a text? Is that understanding of human nature accurate? Is there anything missing from it? How might the questions of political philosophy being addressed in the texts examined be better formulated? Although we always want to take a critical look at an author's work, at the same time we need to be a charitable reader and not simply dismiss the author because we do not agree with their arguments or because they wrote during a different historical and political period from our own. The questions you will be asked to answer for these papers will be handed out two weeks before the papers are due. The first paper is due **MONDAY, OCTOBER 4**. The paper question for this assignment will be handed out Monday, September 20. The second paper is due **MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8**. That paper assignment will be handed out Monday, October 25. **Your answers for both papers cannot exceed 6 PAGES, double-spaced, typed, 12 point font or larger, with page numbers included in the text. This page limit is STRICT.** It is also imperative at this level that your paper be **WELL ORGANIZED, WELL THOUGHT OUT, AND WELL WRITTEN**. If I have to struggle to read your paper answers, you will not receive a good grade.

(3) The **RESEARCH PAPER** will be due **MONDAY, DECEMBER 6**. It can be on any topic related to the political thinkers we examine in the course. You need to provide me a brief, one page prospectus, due no later than **MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1**, of what you propose to write on before writing the paper. The prospectus should include what question or questions you propose to address, what the main points you anticipate making will be, and what sources you propose to use. The principal source needs to be the text or texts of the political philosopher you are examining. Secondary sources can be used but (as their name suggests) they should be just that--secondary. They should be used to highlight questions raised about the political philosopher in scholarship, interpretive disputes over certain issues, and the like. The research paper can be no more than **15 PAGES, double-spaced, typed, 12 point font or larger, with page numbers included in the text. Again, this page limit is STRICT.** Please make sure, again, that the research paper is **WELL ORGANIZED, WELL THOUGHT OUT, AND WELL WRITTEN**.

COURSE OUTLINE (ALL READINGS ARE REQUIRED READINGS)

1. EARLY ANCIENT POLITICAL THOUGHT (Aug. 30)

A. The Nature of Political Regimes in Herodotus

Herodotus, *The Histories*, (Handout):
Book 3.79-84 Otanes, Megabyzos, and Darius on the Best Regime

B. Thucydides on Periclean Athens and Sparta

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (Handout)
Book 1.67-78 Speeches of the Corinthians and Athenians at Sparta
Book 2.34-46 Funeral Oration of Pericles

NO CLASS SEPTEMBER 6—LABOR DAY

2. LATER ANCIENT POLITICAL THOUGHT (September 13 – 27)

A. Plato's *Republic*

Introduction, Preface, Books I-V, and Book VIII

FIRST TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION PAPER DUE MONDAY, OCTOBER 4

3. EARLY MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT (Oct. 4 -- 18)

A. Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Entirety

B. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Handout)

Ch. 13 On the Natural Condition of Mankind

4. LATER MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT (Oct. 25 – Nov. 8)

A. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*

Second Treatise, pgs. 271-285, Chs. I – IV
pgs. 285-302, Ch. V
pgs. 350-380, Chs. IX-XIV

B. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Handout)

Book 20 On the laws and their relation to commerce

SECOND TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION PAPER DUE MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8

5. AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT (Nov. 15 – Dec. 6)

A. Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, *The Federalist*

Nos. 1-8 Union, Security, and the Problem of War

Nos. 9-14 The Improved Science of Politics and the Commercial Republic

Martin Diamond, “*The Federalist*” (Handout)

Michael Chan, Ch. 3, “National Prosperity,” from *Aristotle and Hamilton on Commerce and Statesmanship* (Handout)

Nos. 23-25 & 35-36 National Defence, Energetic Government, and Representation

Karl-Friedrich Walling, Ch. 3, “Fit for War,” from *Republican Empire: Alexander Hamilton on War and Free Government* (Handout)

Nos. 37-39 Introduction to Volume 2 of *The Federalist*

No. 51 Separation of Powers

Nos. 52-58 The House of Representatives

Nos. 70-75 The Presidency

No. 78 The Judiciary

No. 84 Miscellaneous Objections to the Constitution

RESEARCH PAPER DUE MONDAY, DECEMBER 6.