

Poli 2060: Introduction to Political Theory

MWF 1230-120, Tureaud 225

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Content and Objectives

This course provides an introduction to the history of political thought, from ancient into modern times. It focuses on five of the most representative political philosophers: Machiavelli, Locke, Tocqueville, Plato, and Aristotle. As a social science general education elective this course is designed to acquaint students with various views of human nature, as well as how human beings organize themselves into political societies, real and imagined. Students will be expected to achieve an understanding of the informing factors of global interdependence, including economic forces, political dynamics, and cultural and linguistic difference. All general education courses are designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that facilitate the improvement of the civic life of communities.

We will attempt to approach these questions from the point of view of political philosophy. By beginning with Machiavelli and Locke, we will examine the origins of modern thought, including such notions as capitalism, divided government, religious toleration, and the conquest of nature. In proceeding to Tocqueville, we will consider how this thought has played out in the United States. We will then turn back to the entirely different outlook of ancient Greek thought. Through Plato, we will consider the highest claims raised on behalf of justice and wisdom; with Aristotle, we will investigate the participatory politics of the small, ancient city in contrast to Machiavelli and Locke's justification of larger, more dynamic societies.

This course is based on the belief that university education should aspire to more than merely professional training. Some people are professionally successful, yet utterly miserable. Why? We aim here at a more holistic understanding of human well-being and happiness, as something that requires not just worldly success, but wisdom and insight concerning both personal and political motives. In keeping with this outlook, marks remain important, but perhaps they are not the be-all and end-all of the course. Did you become a more thoughtful person in taking this course? Regardless of your final mark (and my goal is for everyone to get at least a C), this is how I want my teaching, and your learning, to be judged.

Bibliography

Please use the assigned editions, available for purchase at the LSU bookstore. Aside from providing accurate translations, they will allow you to follow the references I make in class, and allow me to check the references you make in your papers.

Aristotle. *Politics*. Trans. Carnes Lord. Second Edition. University of Chicago Press: 2013.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *Prince*. Trans. Harvey C. Mansfield. Second Edition. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Locke. John. *Second Treatise on Government*. Ed. Richard Cox. Harlan Davidson Inc., 1982.

Plato. *Republic*. Trans. Allan Bloom. Second Edition. Basic Books: 1991.

Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Syllabus

Readings are mandatory: I recommend two hours of preparation for each class. Short questions about the text will be distributed before each assignment to help you prepare for class. If you are having trouble preparing for class, let me know sooner rather than later: it is better to withdraw than to fail, and better still to resolve the problem together so that you can succeed in the class.

Aug. 20: Introduction

Aug. 22: Machiavelli, *Prince*, pp. 107-11, 3-16

Aug. 24: Machiavelli, pp. 16-33

Aug 27: Machiavelli, pp. 34-48

Aug. 29-31: **Class is cancelled**

Sep. 3: Labour Day

Sep. 5: Machiavelli, pp. 48-71

Sep. 7: Machiavelli, pp. 71-87

Sep. 10: Machiavelli, pp. 87-105

Sep. 12: Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, pp. 1-16

Sep. 14: Locke, pp. 20-46

Sep. 17: Locke, pp. 47-74

Sep. 19: Locke, pp. 75-98

Sep. 21: Locke, pp. 99-120

Sep. 24: Locke, 121-48, Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*

Sep. 26: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 3-15, 172-80

Sep. 28: Tocqueville, pp. 235-64

Oct. 3: Tocqueville, pp. 326-48

Oct. 8: Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, Lincoln, *Letter to Henry L. Pierce*, *Second Inaugural* (I will provide these handouts)

Oct. 10: Tocqueville, pp. 403-24,

Oct. 12: Tocqueville, pp. 599-604, 606-17

Oct. 15: Plato, *Republic*, pp. 3-22

Oct. 17: Plato, pp. 22-45

Oct. 19: Plato, pp. 45-61

Oct. 22: Plato, pp. 63-91

Oct. 24: Plato, pp. 91-113

Oct. 26: Plato, pp. 113-141

Oct. 29: Plato, pp. 141-67

Oct. 31: Plato, pp. 167-192

Nov. 2: Plato, pp. 193-220

Nov. 5: Plato, pp. 220-240

Nov. 7: Plato, pp. 240-56

Nov. 9: Plato, pp. 256-75

Nov. 12: Plato, pp. 277-304

Nov. 14: Aristotle, *Politics*, pp. 1-18

Nov. 16: Aristotle, pp. 19-34

Nov. 19: Aristotle, pp. 38-45, 62-71

Nov 26: Aristotle, pp. 71-87

Nov. 28: Aristotle, pp. 87-96, 187-94

Nov. 30: Aristotle, pp. 194-222

Dec. 6, 830am: Final Exam

Grading

15%: Attendance and Participation

Attendance is essential to overall success in the course, so all enrolled students are expected to sign in every class. **Attendance will become mandatory after the final drop date has passed.** Only one unexcused absence is permitted for each student. Every additional absence will cost one attendance mark, and entail the added risk of missing a pop quiz. Participation is highly recommended though not mandatory. Strong participation might make up for marks lost due to unexcused absences. **A failing attendance grade (i.e. more than eight unexplained absences) will automatically result in a failing course grade.**

15%: Three in-class pop quizzes on the readings

The purpose of the quizzes is to ensure that everyone attends and completes the readings. They will be based on the study questions. Quizzes missed due to unexcused absences cannot be made up.

30%: Mid-term exam:

A five-page paper on topics TBD will be due in early October.

40%: Final exam

This will consist of two take-home essays, four pages each, comparing two authors from the course. The exam questions will be assigned five days before the exam, but study questions anticipating the exam will be distributed by mid-November. Further details about the grading of exams will be discussed, in writing and in speech, as the time approaches.

Grading scale:

90-100: A 97-100: A+ 93-96: A 90-92: A-

80-89: B 87-90: B+ 83-86: B 80-82: B-

70-79: C 77-80: C+ 73-76: C 70-72: C-

60-69: D 67-70: D+ 63-66: D 60-62: D-

Under 60: F

Class Rules

For attendance, see the official policy at <https://sites01.lsu.edu/wp/policiesprocedures/policies-procedures/22/>

Bring your books to class. They will be the primary focus of the lectures, which might be difficult to follow without them.

Both neuroscience and common sense teach that the growing array of electronic devices can be distracting. **Please turn off all such devices in class. Those who refuse to comply may be asked to leave.** Exceptions will be granted only for medically-confirmed disabilities.

Please do not eat during class: however, drinking non-alcoholic beverages is permitted. Do not leave in the middle of class except for an emergency.

I cannot monitor every aspect of your attentiveness in class. However, dozing or talking to classmates is forbidden.

Violation of class rules might cost you attendance and participation marks.