

Introduction to Political Theory and Analysis: Nature, Society, Politics
Political Science 0600

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I. Course Goals

This course is intended to introduce students to a range of the major authors, concepts, and debates in the history of western political theory. We will pursue four goals in this course. 1) We will carefully read, try to understand, and critique (in that order) each authors writings. As best as we can, we will attempt to leave our prejudices and preconceived notions behind and approach the readings on their own terms, thereby allowing them to unsettle our own often unnoticed assumptions. 2) After analyzing the work of each author, we will attempt to synthesize - compare and contrast - the readings from week to week, across the course. Hopefully, we will never lose sight of “the big picture.” 3) While necessary, understanding and evaluating the readings is not sufficient to meet the goals of the course. The ultimate purpose is to bring the insights gleaned from the readings to bear on the world in which we live. At its best, political theory illuminates and helps us interpret and critique our own ideas, beliefs, values and experiences. 4) Everything in this course is geared toward persuasive argumentation. We want to leave this course able to recognize, develop, and communicate (both orally and in our writings) persuasive arguments.

II. Course Description

The central topic of the course is that of *human association*: Why do we and how should we live in society? What are the purposes and functions of living together with others? What benefits and problems arise from living together with others? And in light of our thoughts on these questions, what is the proper form and place of government in human association?

In an effort to think through these broad questions, we will structure the course as a debate between *ancient* and *modern* political theory. Like all simple dichotomies, this one misses as much as it captures, and we will want to critique it as much as we use it.

Throughout the course, we will explore five distinct but interrelated questions that come to light in the ancient / modern distinction. 1) What do we, and what do each of our authors, consider “*natural*” as opposed to “*conventional*” - that is, what is thought to be given and inevitable in the world independent of human intervention and intention, and what is a product or artifact of human will and action? What, if any, is the normative significance of saying something is natural or a matter of human nature? Should our actions be guided by nature? What happens if we go against nature? Is society natural? 2) What are the causes of *peace* or social harmony and what are the causes of *war* or conflict? 3) What in our lives is or should be subject to our *choice* and what do we *inherit*? What is the normative significance of something being chosen as opposed to inherited? Are our “identities” chosen or inherited? 4) What is and what should be the relationship between “the *individual*” and “*society*”? 5) What is and what should be the relationship between the spheres of *religion*, *economics*, and *politics*?

We will also carefully track six key concepts, both in the readings and in our own usage (keeping in mind that the *absence* of these concepts from any particular work should also be noted and considered). These concepts are *Freedom & Liberty*, *Equality*, *Authority & Power*, *Virtue*, *Rights* and *Justice*. What is meant when any of these concepts are employed? What is their relationship and relative priority within each work? How have their meanings shifted over time?

Finally, as mentioned at the outset, we will want to reflect upon our lives and our world from the broader perspectives afforded us by our readings. While this will be largely shaped by your own interests and concerns, I would like to suggest that the course will help us understand and evaluate a number of the central features of the present. We will consider the ubiquitous notions of *globalization* (is globalization inevitable? how does this phenomenon transform our society and our politics?), the *free-market* (what is the relationship between this capitalist economic formation and democratic politics? is market competition good? is it natural?), *evolution* (how, if at all, does this biological factor influence the way we think about society, politics, and morality? what is the connection between the ideas of evolution and the free-market?), and *human rights* (how is it that we, as humans, come to have rights? what is a right? how does one exercise one's rights?). We will also consider the possibility of and the problems facing *democratic self-government* in the modern world. And we will assess the status - whether wholly objective, purely subjective, or somewhere in between - of the *normative claims* that we put forward.

Readings are, on average, about 100 pages a week. I will send out a reading guide with discussion questions each week for the subsequent week's readings.

III. Assignments and Grading

Two separate take-home midterm papers of 4 to 5 pages each (typed, 12pt font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins).

One take-home final paper of 7 to 8 pages (typed, 12pt font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins).

Outside research is neither expected nor encouraged for any of these papers. Topics can either be drawn from questions I distribute, or generated on your own in consultation with me.

Midterm Paper 1 (25%) (**October 10th**)
Midterm Paper 2 (25%) (**November 21st**)
Final Paper (40%) (**due the day of the final**)
Class Participation (%10)

IV. Texts

The Republic of Plato
Aristotle, The Politics
Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan
John Locke, Second Treatise of Government
Jean-Jacque Rousseau, The Basic Political Writings
J.S. Mill, On Liberty
Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents
I will send out links to the remainder of the readings, or distribute them in class.

V. Course Policies

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, please contact me and the Office of Disability Resources and Services as soon as possible. Their web page is <http://www.drs.pitt.edu/>. DRS is in 216 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890/(412) 383-7355 (TTY). They will verify your disability and set reasonable accommodations. See the complete policy at <http://www.drs.pitt.edu/policies.html#academic>.

Papers will be marked down one full letter grade for each day late. The only exception is for documented medical emergencies. You are expected to contact me by phone in advance of paper due-dates to discuss any other possible exceptions.

Don't cheat. If you are unsure of what constitutes academic dishonesty please ask me. You can also consult the Pitt website for more information:
<http://www.fcas.pitt.edu/academicintegrity.html>

You may appeal your grade by submitting a written statement explaining why the grade is inappropriate. You have one week after the paper is returned to submit your statement to me.

Please bring the relevant book to class

VI. Course Reading & Assignment Schedule

Week 1: August 25 - 29

- a. Benjamin Constant, *The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns*
(<http://www.uark.edu/depts/comminfo/cambridge/ancients.html>)
- b. Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'*
(<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/kant.html>)
- c. *The Declaration of Independence*
(<http://www.ushistory.org/Declaration/document/index.htm>)
- d. Max Weber, excerpt on "disenchantment."
- e. Thucydides, *Pericles' Funeral Oration*
(<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/GREECE/PERICLES.HTM>)

Section I: The Ancients

Week 2: Sept 3 - 5 (No Class Monday, Sept 1)

- a. Plato's *Republic*, Books 1-3

Week 3: Sept 8 - 12

- a. Plato's *Republic*, Books 4-7

Week 4: Sept 15 - 19

- a: Plato's *Republic*, Books 8-9
- b: Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 1 and 2

Week 5: Sept 22 - 26

- a: Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book 1, Book 3, Book 4 (chs. 1-11), Book 7 (chs. 1-13)

Section II: The Transition to Modernity

Week 6: Sept 29 - Oct 3

- a. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I (excerpts TBA)

Week 7: Oct 6 - 10

- a. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part II (excerpts TBA)

1ST PAPER DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10

Week 8: Oct 14 - 17 (No Class Monday, Oct 13; Meets Instead on Tuesday, Oct 14)

- a. Locke's Second Treatise of Government (excerpts TBA)

Week 9: Oct 20 - 24

- a. Rousseau, Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts
- b. Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality

Week 10: Oct 27 - 31

- a. Rousseau, The Social Contract

Section III: Modernity

Week 11: Nov 3 - 7

- a. Max Weber, Politics as a Vocation (excerpts TBA)

Week 12: Nov 10 - 14

- a. Karl Marx, On the Jewish Question (excerpts TBA)
- b. Marx & Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, parts I and II

Week 13: Nov 17 - 21

- a. J.S. Mill, On Liberty

2ND PAPER DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21

Week 14: Nov 24 (Thanksgiving)

- a. J.S. Mill, On Liberty (continued)

Week 15: Dec 1 - 5

- a. Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents (excerpts TBA)