

POLI 2060.001
INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY
Professor Dustin Howes
T TH 9:00am-10:30am
116 Stubbs

Office Hours in 133 Stubbs
Noon to 1:15pm on Tuesday
and Thursday or by appointment.
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Edmund Burke, Malcolm X, Dipylyon Gate, Emma Goldman, Socrates

General Education Competency and Requirement

This course is an introduction to basic concepts in political thought and fulfills the general education requirement for the social sciences at LSU, which reads as follows: *LSU graduates will demonstrate an understanding of the informing factors of global interdependence, including economic forces, political dynamics, and cultural and linguistic difference.* Most of the thinkers we read come from the Western tradition of political thought, but the cultural and linguistic differences within that tradition will be highlighted. Moreover, all of the ideas presented here have had global reach, affecting economic and political dynamics around the world.

Course Description

We begin by jumping directly into controversial arguments about politics. The first section of the course explores the work of **thinkers who are particularly concerned with encouraging stability and order** in human affairs. In Thomas Hobbes, Edmund Burke and Martin Luther we find deference to established order and authority, convincing arguments for the value of custom and habit, and a preference for unrestrained government power. Plato's *Republic* also recommends deference to authority – in this case, the philosopher-rulers of his city in words. However, Plato is relatively less concerned with stability and more concerned with describing what a *just* city might look like.

In this way, Plato provides a nice bridge to the second section of the course. Here, we examine **thinkers who are profoundly dissatisfied with the status quo**. In Karl Marx, Simone de Beauvoir, Malcolm X and Emma Goldman we find the order of the day diagnosed as corrupt, unjust or oppressive. Instead of fretting about the difficulties or dangers of change, each attempts to describe how we can revolutionize the way we live and interact with one another in order to improve our condition.

Halfway through the course, we will begin the course again by stepping back and asking a fundamental question: What have we been talking about? That is, **what exactly is politics?** We read Aristotle's founding conceptualization of politics, Hannah Arendt's attempt to build on it and then turn to John Locke and the Federalist papers to get a sense of what the meaning of politics has traditionally meant in the American context.

This will lead us to the final and most practically relevant stage in our exploration of key concepts in politics. In this section we will examine some texts that are examples of, or suggest **methods for the conduct of politics**. Max Weber, Socrates, Niccolo Machiavelli, Mahatma Gandhi and Pericles each give us a distinctive understanding of what the conduct of effective and ethical politics looks like and their prescriptions are profoundly at odds with one another. The class will discuss what the methods of politics look like today in the United States and around the globe and what methods you would like pursue.

Required Texts

Princeton Readings in Political Thought, edited by Mitchell Cohen and Nicole Fermon.

On Moodle:

Mahatma Gandhi, *For Pacifists*

Hannah Arendt, "Labor, Work, Action" in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*

Aristotle, *The Ethics*, Book 6

Course Assignments and Policies

4 Reading Summaries (%20)

On four separate occasions, you will turn in a typed, one-page, single-spaced summary of the reading for that day. Each summary will be worth %5 of your grade.

Each reading summary should contain the following three components:

- 1) a summary of the important ideas and themes in each of the major divisions/components of the reading (i.e. a summary of each section, chapter, etc.). That is, for each section of the reading you should ask yourself and then answer the question: "What is the main point the thinker is trying to make here?"
- 2) You must include page numbers at the end of every three sentences or so in your summary. These will indicate where I can find the textual evidence supporting your claims as to the meaning of this part of the text. You might also want to include brief quotations of particularly important or outstanding passages.
- 3) The summaries should read clearly and consist of complete sentences and carefully constructed short paragraphs. The point here is for you to give a concise and plausible interpretation of the main point of the reading.

4 Reading Questions (%20)

On four separate occasions (and **not on the days you do reading summaries**), you will come up with 10 questions about the reading for that day. All of the questions must be directly and specifically related to the readings. Most will consist of at least one explanatory sentence that sets up the question and includes citations (i.e. a reference to a page number in the text or a brief quote from the text). The questions should also relate to different parts of the reading to demonstrate that you have read the entire text assigned for that day.

Here are two examples:

1. Aristotle says that “man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all” [citation]. Why does Aristotle think that justice and law makes us better than other animals? Is it true that people who separate themselves from community are necessarily bad?

2. Hobbes seems to be arguing that an all-powerful king is the best way to ensure peace and stability [citation]. However, does not experience show that all-powerful kings often abuse their power and create instability?

You might also encounter words, concepts or passages that are difficult to understand. If you have trouble deciphering the meaning of a part of the reading, think about it, cite it and then ask a question about it. The idea is for you to come up with questions that will help you clarify the main issues of the reading and facilitate class discussion.

The reading questions and summaries will be graded as follows:

- ✓ + **excellent (5%)**
Follows all of the above instructions for summaries or questions and meets criteria of accuracy, comprehensiveness and balance, clear sentence structure and grammar. It is clear that you understand the text and can explain its main points well to a reader who has not read it (or in the case of the reading questions, that you can raise important issues on the basis of the text).
- ✓ **good (4%)**
Follows all of the above instructions for summaries or questions and meets some of the criteria of accuracy, comprehensiveness and balance, clear sentence structure and grammar. It reveals a generally accurate understanding of the reading with a clear sense of the main points but is either noticeably weaker on one criterion or somewhat weaker on two criteria.
- ✓ – **sub-standard (2%)**
Does not fully abide by the above instructions and does not contain two or more of the criteria of accuracy, comprehensiveness and balance, clear sentence structure and grammar. For instance, if a summary does not offer a clear analysis of the main arguments and/or has problems with sentence structure or if readings questions are unclear, non-specific or unrelated to the main themes of the text.
- 0 **unsatisfactory (0%)**
Substandard reading summaries or questions do not serve to explain the text to an unfamiliar reader, are inaccurate, or severely disorganized.

All reading questions and summaries are to be turned in on Moodle before class begins. Late questions and summaries will be marked down a grade.

Two Exams

The exams are designed to hone your thinking about and ensure that you have a solid grasp of the course texts and class discussions. You will be allowed to bring two single-sided sheets of paper with notes to each exam.

Grading Summary

4 Summaries	%20
4 Reading Questions	%20
Midterm	%25
Final	%35

Other Notes

Do not cheat. The summaries and reading questions should be based on your own interpretation and questions about the readings. That is, they must be in your own words, not in the words of others.

There is no participation grade, but you will not succeed if you do not attend class. On eight occasions you will need to come to class in order to turn in your reading responses. Moreover, the exams will test not only your knowledge of the texts (which is challenging enough), but also what was discussed in class.

The use of laptops, cell phones and other electronic devices is prohibited during class.

Class Schedule

1. Politics from the top down: Advocates of order and stability.

Week 1

January 16th Introduction to the Course

Week 2

January 21st Hobbes: Leviathan Part I, 205-219

January 23rd Hobbes: Leviathan Part II, 219-242

Week 3

January 28th Burke: Reflections on the Revolution in France, 349-355

January 30th Martin Luther: The Christian in Society, 194-199

February 4th Plato: The Republic Part I, 50-65

February 6th Plato: The Republic Part II, 94-106

2. Politics from the bottom up: Advocates of revolution and change.

Week 4

February 11th Karl Marx: A Contribution to the Critique ..., Estranged Labour, 435-447

February 13th Karl Marx: The Communist Manifesto, 448-463

Week 5

February 18th Simone de Beauvoir: The Second Sex 601-614

February 20th Malcolm X: The Ballot or the Bullet, 636-642

Week 6

February 25th Emma Goldman: Victims of Morality, 566-570

February 27th Midterm Exam review

Week 7

March 4th

[Mardi Gras]

March 6th

MIDTERM EXAM

3. The study of politics: What have we been talking about?

Week 8

March 11th

Aristotle: The Politics Part I, 107-117

March 13th

Aristotle: The Politics Part II, 117-123 **AND** Aristotle: The Ethics, Book 6 (on Moodle)

Week 9

March 18th

Locke: Second Treatise of Government Part I, 243-258

March 20th

Locke: Second Treatise of Government Part II, 258-279

Week 10

March 25th

Publius: The Federalist Papers, 335-346

March 27th

Hannah Arendt: Labor, Work, Action, (on Moodle)

4. The methods of politics: How can we change things or keep them the same?

Week 11

April 1st

Weber: Politics as a Vocation, 499-511

April 3rd

Niccolo Machiavelli: The Prince, Part I, 167-179

Week 12

April 8th

Niccolo Machiavelli: The Prince, Part II, 179-188

April 10th

Plato: The Apology, 19-39

Week 13

April 15th

[Spring Break]

April 17th

Week 14

April 22nd

Mahatma Gandhi: For Pacifists, (on Moodle) 1-33

April 24th

Gandhi (continued, no additional reading)

Week 15

April 29th

Thucydides: Pericles' Funeral Oration, 13-18

May 1st

Final Exam Review

FINAL EXAM TIME: Friday May 9th, 7:30am – 9:30am