POLITICAL SCIENCE 2060:
INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY

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Office Hours: MW 10:45 – 12:15 and by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW: The study of political philosophy involves asking the most important questions about human nature and political society. Most of these questions do not have obvious answers. However, the pursuit of wisdom has value, even when wisdom cannot be attained. The ancient Greeks understood philosophy as a quest for wisdom. True philosophers often succeeded in nothing more than asking the right questions. One of the most important problems for students of political philosophy is determining the best relationship between philosophy and political society. What is a philosopher? What is philosophy? What is politics and political society? What is the role of wisdom? Does wisdom arise from law or science or both? Can philosophy judge between the two?

This course will examine texts from some of the most prominent political philosophers throughout history. Students of these texts should not presume that contemporary knowledge has surpassed ancient knowledge. One should always begin a study of these works with the assumption that the thinkers are extraordinarily intelligent, and they know what they are doing. Our task is to read sympathetically, in order to ultimately become capable of reading critically. Students should attempt to understand the thinkers as they understood themselves. If a text appears contradictory, think about why that thinker chose to write as he did. The most important aspect of the course (and the key to a good grade) is engagement with the texts.

GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENT: This course can be applied towards completion of the General Education requirement for courses in the Social Sciences. As such, we will incorporate the learning goals of general education courses in the social sciences. LSU describes these goals as such:

The social sciences inquire systematically into the nature of human association, the bonds and interactions among human beings. The goal of the general education requirement in the social sciences is to introduce students to this systematic inquiry, so that they better appreciate the complexity of the social world and act as free and responsible citizens, able to make informed choices in governing their own lives and participating in their communities. As there is a diversity of associations – both in that everyone associates with others in various ways (for example, as members of families and as citizens of states), and that these associations take a variety of forms (for
example, the different forms of government) - so there is a diversity of method and approach to the study of human society.

I encourage all students to keep these goals in mind throughout the course. Many of these thoughts form the basis for the study of political philosophy, and they are essential to a well-rounded education.

**GRADES:**  
20% = Class Participation  
25% = Weekly Quizzes  
5% = Paper Proposal  
30% = Analytical Paper  
20% = Final Exam

**ASSIGNMENTS:**  
1) **Class Participation:** Student participation is an essential part of a successful political philosophy class. Each student will be expected to attend and participate in class regularly. Thoughtful comments that add to the discussion will greatly benefit your participation grade. In addition, each student will be required to submit at least one discussion question to me via email each week. One question per week is the minimum; fulfilling the minimum requirement will result in a C for your participation grade. Students must go beyond the minimum to receive an A for their participation grade. The questions should relate to either previous class lectures/discussions or the day’s readings. These questions will form the basis of our discussion each class period.

2) **Weekly quizzes:** A quiz will be given to the class each Friday (or the last class period of the week). These quizzes will draw directly on the previous week’s readings. The quizzes will include material covered in both the readings and course discussions. Therefore, it is essential for each student to do ALL of the assigned readings. Quizzes may include vocabulary, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions. Each student will be allowed one notebook page of notes to use during the quizzes.

3) **Paper Proposal:** Each student must submit a proposal for his or her analytical paper. The proposal should be no more than a page in length. I will review each proposal and offer suggestions and criticisms. The proposal should be taken very seriously. If you offer a good, thoughtful proposal, then I will be able to better help you with your final paper. PAPER PROPOSALS ARE DUE OCTOBER 20!! Note: If you would like to write about a reading that will be covered after Oct. 20, you may do so. However, you must inform me of your intention by Oct. 17, so that I can determine a due date for your proposal.

4) **Analytical Paper:** Each student must submit a 4-5 page paper on a topic of his or her choosing. This paper should further develop a theme or a passage covered in the course’s readings. Broad themes cannot be adequately addressed in the space of 4-5 pages; therefore, students should pay close attention to the texts and focus on specific problems in the readings. The ability to write clearly and concisely is extremely valuable. In order to encourage students to develop this skill, I will not accept papers
longer than the assigned length. Papers must be 4-5 pages, with 12-point
font and standard margins, character spacing, etc. Students will be expected
to use proper grammar, spelling, and formatting. THE ANALYTICAL PAPER
WILL BE DUE ON NOVEMBER 24!!!!
5) Final Exam: The final exam will be an opportunity for each student to
demonstrate his or her knowledge of the course’s readings. 50% of the final
exam will consist of questions taken from the weekly quizzes. The other
50% of the final exam will consist of an essay question of my choosing.
Students will be expected to use proper grammar and spelling during the
final exam. Students will not be allowed the use of notes during the final
exam.

A Note on Grading: I will be following the traditional definitions of letter
grades: A = Excellent; B = Good; C = Average; D = Poor; F = Fail. If you
hope to receive an A in this course, you must present truly excellent work.
Excellence is not limited to immediate understanding or vast prior
knowledge. Students who show a sincere commitment to the course and
struggle with the problems in the text also demonstrate aspects of
excellence. Merely fulfilling all of the requirements will result in a C.

READINGS: The following books are required and may be purchased at
the LSU Bookstore:

Prentice Hall.

Plato and Aristophasies. *Four Texts on Socrates*. Translated by Thomas
Press.

Francis Bacon. *New Atlantis and The Great Instauration*. Edited by Jerry

John Locke. *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning


Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Translated by Harvey C.

Cambridge University Press.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS:


September 1: Note: NO CLASS MONDAY (Labor Day Holiday). Plato,
*Apology of Socrates*.

September 8: Plato, *Crito and Euthyphro*

September 15: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

September 22: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
September 29: Francis Bacon. *Great Instauration* and *New Atlantis*.

October 8: Note: NO CLASS FRIDAY (Fall Holiday) Francis Bacon. *New Atlantis*.


November 3: Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*.


November 24: Note: NO CLASS FRIDAY (Thanksgiving Holiday) Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science*. ANALYTICAL PAPER DUE MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24!!!


I will give daily assignments based on our progress through the readings. Students will be informed of the next assignment at the end of each class. Students who miss class meetings without informing me beforehand will not receive the next assignment.