Introduction: Political Philosophy and Interpretation  
(October 21)

Reading Assignments:

**Jürgen Habermas, "Public Space and Political Public Sphere – the Biographical Roots of Two Motifs in My Thought" http://homepage.mac.com/gedavis/JH/Kyoto_lecture_Nov_2004.pdf
**Isaiah Berlin, "The Hedgehog and the Fox," Excerpt (http://www.cc.gatech.edu/people/home/idris/Essays/Hedge_n_Fox.htm)

Interpretation and The Classical Perspective  
(October 28 & February 4)

A man thought the gods deigned not to punish mortals who trampled down the delicacy of things inviolable. That man was wicked.

Aeschylus

Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting anyone whom I meet after my manner, and convincing him, saying: O my friend, why do you who are a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens, care so much about laying up the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation, and so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all? Are you not ashamed of this?

Plato

Reading Assignments:

*Aeschylus, Orestesia
*Plato, The Republic. (Trans. By Allan Bloom)
*Plato, Phaedrus
Interpretation and The Modern Perspective
(February 11)

"But, it being my intention to write a thing which shall be useful to him who apprehends it, it appears to me more appropriate to follow up the real truth of a matter than the imagination of it; for many have pictured republics and principalities which in fact have never been known or seen, because how one lives is so far distant from how one ought to live, that he who neglects what is done for what ought to be done, sooner effects his ruin than his preservation; for a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil."

Machiavelli

Reading Assignments:


The Hegelian Response to the Modern Project
(February 18 & March 4)

"[The Spirit] . . . not only has lost its essential life; it is also conscious of this loss and of the finitude that is its contents."

Hegel

Reading Assignments:

*G. W. F. Hegel, Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit (Trans. Y. Yovel)

**Steven B. Smith, "Hegel’s Idea of a Critical Theory," Political Theory, Volume 15, Issue 1 (February 1987), 99-126. JSTOR

*G. W. F. Hegel, The Philosophy of Right. Translated by A. Knox.

The Nietzschean Response to the Modern Project
(March 11 & 18)

"We need a critique of moral values, the value of these values themselves must first be called into question—and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed... a knowledge of a kind that has never yet existed or even been desired. One has taken the value of these "values" as given, as factual, as beyond all question."

F. Nietzsche

Reading Assignment:

*F. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil. Translated by Walter Kaufmann.
*F. Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality. Translated by Clark and Swenson.

The Kantian Roots of the Analytical Tradition: Liberty & Justice
(March 25 & April 1)

The rational awareness of an objective principle which constrains will is a command of reason; and the expression of this command is called an imperative.

I. Kant

I shall maintain... that the persons in the initial situation would choose two rather different: the first requires equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties, while the second holds that social and economic inequalities, for example inequalities of wealth and authority, are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society.

John Rawls

Reading Assignment:

*I. Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals
*J. Rawls, Justice as Fairness: A Restatement
Classical, Modern & Postmodern: Foundations without Foundationalism
(April 15 & 22)

A philosophy with problematic foundations, with paradoxes which arise from the obscurity of the fundamental concepts, is no philosophy, it contradicts its very meaning as philosophy.

Edmund Husserl

What is probable, gentlemen, is that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant than human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man Socrates, he is using my name as an example, as if he said: 'This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless.'

Socrates

Reading Assignments:

**M. Heidegger, "Introduction" to Being and Time - and - "Letter on Humanism"
**E. Levinas, "The Contemporary Criticism of the Idea of Value and the Prospects for Humanism" and "God and Philosophy"

Narrative and Interpretation
(April 29)

"Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'

A. MacIntyre

Reading Assignments:

*A. Camus, The Plague
Course Requirements & Objectives

Political theory proseminars are a bit different from regular theory seminars. They are broader in nature; and they have multiple objectives: a comprehensive introduction to political theory; some serious attention to the manner in which political theory is expressed and studied; and considerable practice in the verbal and written analysis of texts. Those texts (books) specifically ordered for the course may be purchased at the LSU and area bookstores. They are marked with an asterisk (*). In addition, the items on the reading list (essays and excerpts) that are designated with a double asterisk (**) will be available in the political science office, for you to copy. Some of these are also available on JSTOR or MUSE or SPRINGERLINK.

As you can see from the syllabus, the specific subject matter of this course is interpretation and analysis. In the course of examining a variety of interpretive and analytical approaches to the study of political thought, we shall be reading some basic texts from the classical, modern, and postmodern perspectives. Each seminar session will focus on a perspective and a set of particular readings. Emphasis throughout the semester will be placed on a careful and thorough understanding, interpretation, and analysis of those assigned readings.

Interpretation and analysis is best learned in a setting of careful reading and discussion, as well as oral and written presentations. Thus, a portion of your grade – 10% – in the seminar will depend upon my assessment of how effectively you regularly contribute to our weekly discussions and respond to questions raised during those discussions. The class will be divided into two groups. In our session on Machiavelli group I will be asked to make a collaborative presentation and in our session on Camus, Group II will be asked to make a collaborative. This exercise will also count 10% toward your course grade.

According to the academic calendar, we will have fourteen seminar meetings. During ten of our sessions, ½ of the class (group i or ii) will be asked to write a three to five page interpretive and/or critical essay on assigned topics. Those essays will be due on the Monday preceding our Wednesday meetings and will serve as the basis for an oral presentation and discussion in the seminar. Your essays and oral presentations (a total of five for each of you) will count for 50% of your course grade or 10% each.

Finally, each of you will be required to take a final examination. The final will be a take-home examination and will be comprehensive in nature. Indeed, it will be similar in structure and content to a doctoral general examination in political theory, albeit shorter in length. It will count for 30% of your grade.

Office Hours: MWF from 9:00-10:00 & Monday 1:30-2:30 –or-- By appointment at your convenience.

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