Political Science 2060: 
Introduction to Political Theory

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"The great masters of political theory from Plato to Hegel display an impressive unity in the style of their thought.... With regard to the substance or content of their teaching, there are of course divergences, in some instances seemingly profound ones, between individual thinkers. This is scarcely surprising because a tradition is not a grey monolithic uniformity but a growing and developing entity which admits of variety within a common framework. A tradition is a unity of diversity.” --Dante Germino, Beyond Ideology

Course Overview: This course is designed to introduce students to the tradition of inquiry known as political theory. Germino’s (above) description of this tradition as “a unity of diversity” will serve as the theme for this semester. Conceptually, this course consists of four portions. I) As a means of introduction, students will read pieces by Germino and Eric Voegelin that discuss the nature of political theory and how it differs from other forms of political thought. II) To demonstrate the “diversity” among political theorists, students will be introduced to several of the “master thinkers” from this tradition. Some of the more profound differences among these thinkers will be demonstrated by presenting their thought as belonging to one of two “sub-traditions,” namely, theocentric humanism and anthropocentric humanism: Plato and Aristotle representing the former and Machiavelli and Hobbes representing the latter. Further, we will briefly consider the American founding in light of these sub-traditions. III) This course will then demonstrate that political theorists do exhibit a degree of “unity” in the sense that they focus on common issues, one of which is the nature of human beings. In his Discourses, Rousseau brings to light important questions as to how one might approach the question of human nature. Further, Karl Marx and B.F. Skinner offer divergent perspectives on the nature of human beings that illuminate the important role that the question of human nature plays in political thought. IV) Finally, reading another piece by Germino and C.S. Lewis’ The Abolition of Man, students will consider whether theocentric humanism, or some modified form thereof, offers any guidance for contemporary political thought.

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 interaction 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 responsive 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 members 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.

Students are encouraged to keep these goals in mind throughout this course. Many of these goals form the basis for the study of political theory, and they are essential to a well-rounded education.

**Grades:** Weekly Quizzes/Papers = 30 points or 30% of grade.
   
   Take Home Midterm = 35 points or 35% of grade.
   
   Final = 35 points or 35% of grade.

**Assignments:**

- **Weekly Quizzes/Papers**—On eleven occasions throughout the semester students will be given either an in-class quiz or will be responsible for turning in a short essay (no less than half a page and no more than one page double spaced). Quizzes will be given on Friday (or the last day of the week) and short essays may be turned in at any point during the week they are due (with the exception that students cannot turn in a paper on a topic after we have discussed it in class). The schedule for these weekly assignments can be found in the weekly reading schedule below. Each Friday in class I will confirm what we will be doing the following week: for quizzes I will give some indication as to what you will be responsible for knowing and for papers I will provide suggestions for topics; this guidance will not be provided on Moodle. For papers, students are expected to use correct spelling, grammar, and formatting. Each assignment will receive a grade between 0 and 10. Thus, to determine students’ grades for this portion of the class at the end of the semester I will drop the lowest grade, add the remaining 10 grades together, and multiply this total by .30. **Note:** these weekly assignments will be geared towards preparing you for the midterm and final.

- **Take-Home Midterm**—The midterm exam will be a take home essay exam. On Wednesday, October 7, I will pass out a sheet of paper containing four essay questions. Students will chose two of these questions and write a 2-3 page essay (double spaced) in response to each. This means you will be turning in a **total** of 4-6 pages. Your essay exams will be due at the beginning of class on Friday, October 17. Again, students are expected to use correct spelling, grammar, and formatting. When the essay questions are passed out students will also receive specific guidance as to my expectations. Students can earn a total of 35 points on the midterm.

- **Final Exam**—The final will be an in-class test that will consist of multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and an essay question. For both the short answer and essay questions, students will be provided with several from which they can choose to answer. The final will be cumulative. Students can earn a total of 35 points on the final. Again, the weekly assignments will be a valuable source for studying for the final so be
sure to hold on to them when they are returned. **The Final Exam for this class period is scheduled for Monday, December 7, from 3-5 PM.**

**Attendance:** The backbone of this course consists of the time you spend engaged in careful, reflective reading outside of class. Nevertheless, the importance of attending class cannot be overstated. The texts we are reading are difficult and students will greatly benefit from the class lectures and discussions. **It is important to note that classes will be conducted under the assumption that students have done the assigned readings.**

**Readings:** Those texts specifically ordered for the course may be purchased at the LSU and area bookstores. They are marked with a single asterisk (*). In addition, the items on the reading list marked with a double asterisk (***) will be available as either a link or a PDF on Moodle. It is recommended that students print out the works found on Moodle, laptops will not be permitted in class.

The following works are required and are available at the LSU bookstore:


**Weekly Reading Schedule:** The following schedule lists this course’s readings by week. To allow for some flexibility, I will inform students throughout the semester as to what portion of each week’s readings should be completed for each class period. This information will be provided in class and on Moodle.

**1) Introduction: What Is Political Theory?**
August 24-28:
**Eric Voegelin, Introduction to History of Political Ideas.**
**Germino, Beyond Ideology (Pages 1-44).**
II) Diversity

A) Theocentric Humanism

August 31-September 4:
* Plato, *Apology*, and *Crito*.
**Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.”
Weekly Assignment: Quiz.

September 9-11 (No class Monday the 7th):
* Plato, *Gorgias*.
Weekly Assignment: Paper.

September 14-18:
* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.
Weekly Assignment: Quiz.

September 21-25:
* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.
No Weekly Assignment (However, paper for next week may be turned in during this week).

September 28 (No classes Wednesday and Friday for Fall Break):
* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.
Weekly Assignment: Paper.

B) Anthropocentric Humanism

October 5-9:
** Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*.
Note: Midterm exams will be passed out this Wednesday, October 7.
Weekly Assignment: Quiz

October 12-16:
**Hobbes, *Leviathan*.
Note: Midterm exams due this Friday, October 16.
No Weekly Assignment.

October 19-23:
**Machiavelli, *The Discourses*.
Weekly Assignment: Paper.
III) Unity: Human Nature and Political Theory
October 26-30:
*Rousseau, Discourse on the Sciences and Arts or First Discourse and Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men or Second Discourse.
Weekly Assignment: Quiz.

November 2-6:
**Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto.
**Dante Germino, Beyond Ideology (pages 45-48 and 56-67).
Weekly Assignment: Paper.

November 9-13:
*B.F. Skinner, Walden Two.
**Dante Germino, Beyond Ideology (pages 187-198).
Weekly Assignment: Quiz.

November 16-20:
*B.F. Skinner, Walden Two.
**To be announced.
Weekly Assignment: Paper.

IV) Theocentric Humanism and Contemporary Politics
November 23 (No classes Wednesday and Friday due to Thanksgiving):
*C.S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man.
No Weekly Assignment.

November 30-December 4:
*C.S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man.
**Dante Germino, Beyond Ideology, (pages 214-237).
Weekly Assignment: Paper.

Final:
Monday, December 7, from 3-5 PM.