POLITICAL SCIENCE 2060 —INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY

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QUOTE: “Really, Ischomachus, I am disposed to ask: ‘Does teaching consist in putting questions?’ Indeed, the secret of your system has just this instant dawned upon me. I seem to see the principle in which you put your questions. You lead me through the field of my own knowledge, and then by pointing out analogies to what I know, persuade me that I really know some things which hitherto, as I believed, I had no knowledge of.”

Socrates in Xenophon’s Oeconomicus (Ch. XIX)

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Political theory is the branch of political science that deals with the conceptual framework for understanding all political phenomena. It teaches how to ask the questions that are significant to all other types of the study of politics. Even those students, who are interested only in very concrete issues, if their interest is genuine, will notice that there is no purely empirical method of inventing relevant hypotheses about politics. The questions political scientists ask ultimately originate from the fundamental political debates that started centuries ago with the establishing of associations extending beyond a single family.

Humans are social by nature; however, our polities (political bodies e.g. a polis or a state) are products of mind that only remotely rely on the simple fact of natural sociability. The original political question is thus without a doubt: “What is the best way of governing?” The answer to this dilemma, naturally, has varied in different times and places; nevertheless, it has been usually dependent on finding a temporary and imperfect resolution of the three fundamental and irresolvable tensions:

1) the tension between the family and the polity (or: Whether the law is more important than the loyalty to one’s family?),
2) the tension between the rule of the many and the rule of the few (or: Who should rule?),
3) the tension between the freedom of the citizens and the expansion of the polity (or: How large should the polity be if it is to serve well its citizens?).

This course’s aim is to provide the students with the conceptual tools necessary to grasp the nature of those tensions as well as some other key concepts that are germane to them. The conceptual tools I am speaking of can be acquired through a careful reading of classical texts on politics. Students, however, need to be warned. Political theorists have to be modest in their endeavors and conscious of the fact that “ideas have consequences.” Pure political theory, not guided by the “lamp of experience,” does not normally give universally true answers to the fundamental questions it asks. Indeed, even if such answers seem to be provided, as in the case of Plato, this is done at the level of transcendence (or abstractness) that makes it impossible to directly implement them in any association of living human beings.
GENERAL EDUCATION

The specific general education objective addressed in POLI 2060, Introduction to Political Theory is as follows: Students will be required to demonstrate an understanding of the informing factors of global interdependence, including economic forces, political dynamics, and cultural and linguistic difference. The course addresses this objective in two ways. First, political theory is an ongoing discussion about the relationship between peoples and cultures, economic and political forces, and the negotiation of human difference more generally. In particular, it tracks different ideas about what kind of government is best. Second, political theory as a discipline draws on the ideas of thinkers from a wide variety of cultures and a span of many centuries.

Obligatory Final Exam Question - Assessment of the Learning Objective:

Sections of Introduction to Political Theory will assess students’ ability with regard to this learning objective with an examination essay question similar to the following:

Describe and compare how two of the thinkers we have studied this semester view human nature. Then briefly describe and compare how each thinker’s ideas about human nature affect his or her understanding of the best regime or form of government. Use one ancient thinker and one modern thinker.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

“Academic Misconduct” includes, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to give an unfair academic advantage to the student (e.g., submission of the same written assignment for two courses without permission of the instructors, providing false information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, or other assignment) as well as attempts to commit such an act. Students should be familiar with the definition of academic misconduct and the Code of Student Conduct, available at http://www.lsu.edu/judicialaffairs/code.htm If a student is found to have committed an act of academic misconduct, s/he will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs and penalized appropriately.

GRADES

Class Participation: 20%
Response papers: 30%
Midterm Exam: 20%
Final Exam: 30%
ASSIGNMENTS

Class participation: Students are expected to actively participate in the in-class discussion. Students are responsible for READING the assigned texts and COMING TO CLASS prepared. Furthermore, every week students have to submit at least one discussion question pertaining to the texts discussed in class. The questions can result from the previous class or touch upon the texts that will be discussed during the next meeting. The most best questions will be used during in-class discussions, and this will naturally increase the number of participation points received by their authors.

Response papers: Each week students will be also asked to write a very brief (not longer than 1-1.5 page, font no. 12, double-spaced) response to any of the assigned texts. The response papers need to be submitted prior to the class during which the text is to be discussed. Guidelines for those papers will be provided. Students are welcome to talk to me about those assignments during office hours. Response papers need not take a fully professional, semi-article form. They are supposed to reflect the student’s impressions on the most interesting points of the readings and serve as notes for future reference.

Midterm Exam: The midterm exam will be a take-home assignment. Four essay topics will be provided prior to the midterm exam-session. Students will chose two out of four questions and answer them in writing (print-outs are welcomed). The answers should be SUCCINCT (not exceeding 3 double spaced pages per question); students are expected to avoid wordiness and write in proper style.

Final exam: Final exam will be comprehensive and will be taken in-class without notes. Students will have 2 hours to answer two questions, one required (see the GENERAL EDUCATION section for a sample obligatory question), and one chosen from a provided list.

Bonus assignments: There is a bonus reading (see schedule). Moreover, during the semester one or two other bonus assignments (such as preparing a short presentation for the class) may be offered.

REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED TEXTS

The following books are REQUIRED and can be purchased at the LSU bookstore:


Readings not included in the required texts list and indicated by (M) will be available in the electronic version on Moodle. Students can read them online or print a copy. Bringing print-out to class will, however, immensely facilitate our work.
Students who have a special interest in Political Theory and/or ample resources are also encouraged to obtain the following recommended readings.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
by Edith Hall. New York: Oxford University Press.

**READINGS SCHEDULE:**

**Week 1**

Jan. 18: Introduction,

**Week 2**

Jan. 23: Plato, *Crito*
Jan. 25: Sophocles, *Antigone (M)*

**Week 3**

Jan. 30: Plato, *Republic*, Book II
Feb. 3: Plato, *Republic*, Book IV

**Week 4**

Feb. 6: Plato, *Republic*, Book V and VII  **(BONUS READING: Students who will read books VI, VIII, IX and X of Plato’s Republic and demonstrate their knowledge of the text by writing a 3-5 page paper before the Midterm Exam will receive a 10% bonus)**
Feb. 8: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I and II

**Week 5**


**Week 6**

Feb. 20: **MARDI GRASS BREAK**
Feb. 24: **Class cancelled, students are asked to participate in the Louisiana Political Science Conference held at our campus**

**Week 7**

Feb. 27: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII and IX
Feb. 29: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X; hand out review questions
Mar. 2: **Midterm Review Session**
Week 8
Mar. 5: Stoner, *Magnanimity and Martyrdom: The Death and Life of Thomas More* (M), I
DISTRIBUTE THE MIDTERM EXAMS.
Mar. 7: Machiavelli, *Prince*, Ch. I-VII
Mar. 9: Machiavelli, *Prince*, Ch. VIII-XVIII

Week 9
Mar. 14: Machiavelli, *Discourses*, Book I, Ch. 1-5, 38; Book II, Ch. 1-4 (M)
Mar. 16: Machiavelli, *Discourse*, Book II, Ch. 15; Book III, Ch. 1, 24-27, 47, 49 (M)

Week 10

Week 11
Mar. 26: Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, Ch. 1-7
Mar. 28: Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, Ch. 8-12
Mar. 30: Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, Ch. 13-15

Week 12
Apr. 6: Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Part II, Book 9-10 (M)

Week 13
SPRING BREAK

Week 14

Week 15

Week 16
Apr. 30: The Federalist, *The Federalist Papers*, No. 52-57
May 2: The Federalist, *The Federalist Papers*, No. 68-73 and 78, distribute the review questions
May 4: Review

Week 17
May 11: FINAL EXAM 7.30 - 9.30