Introduction to Political Theory

Political Science 2060
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Office Hours: Mon-Thurs 11:00-12:15; or by appointment

Mon-Fri 9:50-10:50 AM
Summer – 2010

Course Overview:
The study of political theory or philosophy is the study of meaning: of time, of being, of history, and of individual and communal existence. Though it must necessarily address political practices and how they operate, it must also speak to the beliefs, expectations, and commitments which constitute our symbolic universe. Political theory asks abstract questions and provides diverse but ultimately uncertain answers. The content of this course will draw upon a number of classic political and philosophical texts as well as a rather broad array of other disciplines (notably literature) to realize its objectives, which are: to achieve an understanding of dominant and enduring political questions and the major philosophical responses to these in the Western tradition, to analyze abstract ideas with precision and critical imagination, and to encourage students to critically examine their own beliefs and to formulate their own arguments concerning the best and/or actual foundations of political order.

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:
Class Participation/Weekly Quizzes/Papers = 40%
Take Home Midterm = 30%
Final Exam = 30%
*Extra Credit Assignments will be possible throughout the semester.
Course Requirements:

Weekly Quizzes and Assignments
A quiz or writing assignment will be given to the class each week. The quizzes will include material covered in both the readings and class discussions and may include vocabulary, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions. Students will be allowed the use of books and notes for use during the quizzes. Writing assignments will cover the same material, and will be due IN CLASS on the following Monday. Students are instructed to present their brief essays succinctly, using no more than 500 words (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, standard margins, etc.)

NB: Students are highly recommended to hone their analytical and writing skills on these assignments; longer does not necessarily mean better, and particular attention to grammar, syntax, and punctuation are important for high marks. Keeping up with assigned reading and class attendance are essential to success in this area, and for the class as a whole. Quizzes and written assignments will be graded out of 10, the average of which will constitute 40% of the student’s final grade for the course.

NB: PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. See LSU Student Handbook for information.

Take Home Midterm
The midterm exam will consist of a choice of two out of four essay questions to be distributed one week prior to the due date. Each question will require a 2-3 page essay of original work with proper reference and citation of the texts considered. Students are expected to properly and conscientiously edit all essays and assignments submitted. Exams are due in class on Friday, July 22nd.

Final Exam
The final exam will be an opportunity for each student to demonstrate his or her knowledge of the course’s content in a thorough and mature manner. The exam will be written in class during the appointed exam period and will consist of a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and a general essay question, offered as a choice between several alternatives. Please note that the final exam will be cumulative. Students will not be allowed the use of notes during the final exam.

Extra Credit
Periodically and unannounced, students may be asked to undertake an optional and very short research assignment for later class presentation. Such assignments may include elaborating on a historical detail or issue that arises in discussion, providing a few sentences regarding the etymology of a relevant and noteworthy word or concept, viewing and reporting on an interesting and relevant piece of journalism, literary work or poetry, film, etc. Each extra credit assignment will count as much as a quiz or writing assignment. Students may raise their averages as much as, but no more than, one letter grade of their final score.

NB: It cannot be stressed enough that success in this class requires regular attendance (this means attending all classes) as well as continued, consistent, and careful reading of all assigned texts. Grasping the discussions and arguments of what are sometimes difficult texts requires individual reflection as well as dialogue with others considering similar texts, questions and problems. Together we will have an opportunity for interesting discussion and debate so long as students come to class well prepared.
Required Texts:
Aeschylus I, translated by Richmond Lattimore, Chicago

Plato, The Dialogues of Plato Volume I, translated by R.E. Allen, Yale

Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics, translated by Martin Ostwald, Library of Liberal Arts
or


Cormac McCarthy, The Road, (Vintage Books, 2007). **there are other editions of this book widely available, including an excellent audio book version on iTunes.

Supplemental Texts:
** Additional readings will be provided to students on Moodle as indicated below.

*** Please bring the book(s) or printouts of the readings we will discuss to class so as to facilitate discussion with detailed and direct textual references when appropriate.

Weekly Reading Schedule (Tentative):
Week 1 (June 7-11)
Introduction and course overview
— Life, Death, and Politics —
**Shirley Jackson, “The Lottery”
**Also available online: http://www.americanliterature.com/Jackson/SS/TheLottery.html
Aeschylus, The Oresteia
Plato, The Apology of Socrates (also widely available online, but I recommend purchasing the book).

Week 2 (June 13 -18)
— The Polis & the Establishment of Right Order —
Plato, Apology of Socrates
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics
**Aristotle, The Politics (excerpts)

Week 3 (June 21 - 25)
Continuing and concluding discussions from previous week
Students should begin reading McCarthy, The Road
Week 3 (Continued)
– *Modern Political Science: The Search for Order* –
   Machiavelli, The Prince

Week 4 (June 28 - July 2)
– *Naturalistic Political Science* –
  Hobbes, *Leviathan*

**Midterm Due:** July 2nd (To be submitted in class and not by email)

Week 5 (July 6 – 9)
**No Monday Class – Independence Day Holiday**
Continuing discussion of modern political science & Enlightenment Philosophy
  Rousseau, *Second Discourse & Social Contract*

Week 6 (July 12 - 16)
Continuing Discussion of Hobbes, Rousseau
– *Modernity and its Discontents* –
  **Selections from The Federalist**

Week 7 (July 19 - 23)
  McCarthy, *The Road*
  Sophocles, *Antigone*
  **Wendell Berry, “Fidelity”**

Week 8 (July 26 – 28)
Conclusion and Review
**Final Exam** (Date to be determined; in-class during week of July 28-29)

FINAL NOTE: Laptops will *not* be allowed for use in class, except for official note-takers. Using the ole' fashioned pen and paper method will ensure we are all on the same page, so to speak. Additionally, recent studies show that students understand better and learn more effectively without electronic devices and distractions.