Introduction to Political Theory

Political Science 2060
Instructor: Sean Illing (sillin12@gmail.com)
Classroom: 253 Himes Hall
Office: 310 Stubbs Hall
Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 11:00-Noon; or by appointment.

Course Overview:

This course is intended as a brief introduction to Western political thought as seen through an examination of some of the most important texts and thinkers of the tradition. Throughout the semester we will grapple with such foundational questions as “What is human nature?” “What is justice?” “What is freedom?” What makes a good citizen, and why?” “What is the state?” “Who ought to govern?” “What is the role of violence in politics?” Through discussion and analysis you will learn to think critically and analytically about these difficult questions. More importantly, you will be encouraged to critically examine your own views and to develop arguments based on careful study of 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 science. LSU describes these goals thus:

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, as many of them form the basis for the study of political philosophy.
Grades:

Class Participation/Weekly Quizzes/Papers = 40%
Take Home Midterm = 30%
Final Exam = 30%

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 will generally consist of short essay responses, although occasionally may include vocabulary, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions. Writing assignments will cover the same material, and will be due in class on the following Monday. Students are instructed to present their work succinctly, using no more than 500 words (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, standard margins, etc.)

Note also that plagiarism will not be tolerated. Evidence of academic misconduct will be dealt with according to the LSU Student Handbook.

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.

Final Exam:

The final exam will provide an opportunity for each student to demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the course’s content. The exam will be written in class during the appointed period and will consist of a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and a general essay question. Please note that the final exam will be cumulative. The use of notes will not be allowed during the exam.

Participation:

Studying political philosophy demands debate and discussion. It is only through conversation with others that we achieve a genuine understanding of the essential problems and themes of political life. You are therefore required to attend class every day, having read the assignments closely and prepared to discuss them with your classmates. You must also bring the text we are discussing to class – each session, no exceptions.
Required Texts/Reading:

Plato, *Great Dialogues of Plato*
Aristotle, *Politics*
Hobbes, *Leviathan*
Machiavelli, *The Prince*
Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*
Camus, *The Rebel*
Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*

Tentative Schedule:

Week 1 – Plato:
   a) Socrates, The Apology; b) The Republic, Books 1-5, 7

Week 2 – Aristotle:
   a) Politics, Books 1, 3-6

Week 3 – Hobbes:
   a) Leviathan: the state, politics and human nature; on methodology and the science of politics; the nature and ground of morality; modern liberalism

Week 4 – Machiavelli:
   a) The Prince: a new method of politics; moral realism; the art of governance; religion and politics

Week 5 – Rousseau:
   a) The Discourse on Inequality; the Social Contract

Week 6 – Nietzsche:
   a) Beyond Good and Evil; Will to Power; nihilism and modern politics
Week 7 - Camus:

a) The Rebel; excerpts from Myth of Sisyphus; nihilism and 20th century revolutionary politics