Political Science 209: Introduction to political theory.

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Overview. Political Science 209 is a thematic introduction to some of the major arguments and texts of Western political thought. We will accomplish two primary tasks in this course.

First, in part I of the course, we will explore through analyses of Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Plato’s *Republic* the license and limits of theorizing as an activity. In particular, we will note that theory as an endeavor has been split between two kinds of activities, namely, travel and contemplation. On the one hand, theory involves literal and/or figurative, actual and/or speculative travel away from—or perhaps into the very heart of—what is familiar or ordinary with the aim of gaining new insights into the organization of political life and the operations of power. On the other hand, theory is associated with abstract, seemingly ungrounded, contemplation and therefore sometimes seems to eschew everyday lived human experience.

Second, in parts II-IV of the course, we will survey some of the ways in which past political theorists—from X and Cicero to Hannah Arendt—have tried to mark out the boundaries of politics and the political. For example, theorists in the Western tradition have bounded the political realm by excluding self-interest, violence, nature, ethics, the domestic sphere, or economics from it. We will investigate what might be at stake in making exclusions such as these, take note of their historical character, and consider whether such attempts at boundary-maintenance belie more complex interrelations among politics and other forms of thought and structures of practice.

Note on teaching philosophy. One of the best ways to learn how to engage in the activity of political theory is inductively, by first observing how someone else engages in it. Thus I will often present my own evaluations and interpretations in the lectures. Often these will take the form of questions and critiques rather than definitive answers. You need not take my claims as authoritative. Indeed, I invite you not to do so, but in advancing your own claims, your task is to learn to discern the techniques of reasoning, criteria of judgment, and conventions of interpretation employed in the texts and lectures and to apply the methods that you observe to your own argumentation.

Lecture format. The lectures for this course will follow a more or less traditional European-style format in combination with a quasi-Socratic method. This means that I will read from a prepared text, but I will pause once or twice during each lecture to entertain a brief discussion of a passage from the assigned reading. You are invited to participate in these in-class dialogues—these are voluntary and not required, but in participating you will learn better.

Please be forewarned that if you believe yourself unsuited to listening to me deliver prepared lectures—without PowerPoint pyrotechnics and without stand-up comedy—then it would be in your interest and mine for you not to take this course. A college-level course in political theory is not a form of entertainment that you can absorb passively. Rather, the lectures demand of you that you apply yourself by listening and taking notes, by evaluating the analyses I advance, and, if you wish, by testing the limits of analytical claims in dialogue with me.

Note on letters of recommendation. As a consequence of the size of the course, I regret that I cannot comment on your individual performance. Please do not ask for a letter of recommendation. As a rule, I write these for students who enroll in small classes and/or who have gone out of their ways to distinguish themselves.

Requirements. This course will require that you read approximately one hundred pages each week. Much of the reading is dense and difficult. If you skim the assignments or read them when you are tired or distracted, it is unlikely that you will achieve even a basic grasp of their arguments. You absolutely must set aside the time to read...
the texts closely and carefully. Though this may be an introductory course, both the course assistants and I will hold you to rigorous high standards as commensurate with UW-Madison’s reputation as a top-flight university.

You will be tested on the material at midsemester and in a final, comprehensive exam. You will also be required to write one essay between six and seven pages in length. Study guides for the examinations and essay topics will be distributed in class two weeks prior to the relevant deadlines.

Finally, you will be graded on your participation in discussion section meetings, so attendance of your weekly discussion section is required. I leave it up to the course assistants’ discretion how your participation will be graded. However, be aware that we expect respectful and active section participation. You will learn the material more thoroughly if you engage with it in dialogue with your colleagues and the course assistant.

Your final course grade will be based on the following formula:

- Essay: 40%
- Midterm exam: 20%
- Final exam: 30%
- Section participation: 10%

Essays submitted past the given deadline will be heavily penalized at the rate of one full letter grade per day. It is your responsibility to present your work at the beginning of class on the date due: manage your time wisely. Academic dishonesty of any kind (e.g., among others, plagiarism) is unacceptable and will result in a failing grade for the course and possible suspension or expulsion from the University of Wisconsin.

Final grades will be determined according to the following University of Wisconsin grading scale:

- A 93-100
- AB 88-92.99
- B 83-87.99
- BC 78-82.99
- C 70-77.99
- D 60-69.99
- F < 60

Texts. The following texts are required and are available for purchase at the Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative (426 W. Gilman). Please use the editions and translations listed below. Copies of these books are also available at the Reserves desk at College Library.


Reading schedule.

**Introduction.**

23 January 2013.
- Introduction.

- Thomas More, Utopia, 8-40.

28 January 2013.
- Thomas More, Utopia, 41-77.

30 January 2013.
- Thomas More, Utopia, 77-107, 3-7, 120-2.
1 February 2013.
   Plato, Republic, Book I.

4 February 2013.
   Plato, Republic, Book II.

6 February 2013.
   Plato, Republic, Book III.

8 February 2013.
   Plato, Republic, Book IV-V.

11 February 2013.
   Plato, Republic, Book V-VI.

13 February 2013.
   Plato, Republic, Book VII.

15 February 2013.
   Plato, Republic, Book VIII.

18 February 2013.
   Plato, Republic, Book IX.

20 February 2013.
   Plato, Republic, Book X.

IIa. Politics: end & means.

22 February 2013.
   Martin Luther King, Jr., “Eulogy for the Martyred Children.”
   Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet.”

IIb. The political: virtue or power?

   Cicero, On Duties, 1-37.

27 February 2013.
   Cicero, On Duties, 37-74.

1 March 2013.

4 March 2013.
   Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, 3-33.

6 March 2013.
   Machiavelli, The Prince, 34-60.
8 March 2013.

11 March 2013.
**Midterm examination.**

III. State theories & the state of nature.

13 March 2013.

15 March 2013.

18 March 2013.

20 March 2013.

22 March 2013.


1 April 2013.

3 April 2013.

5 April 2013.

8 April 2013.

10 April 2013.

12 April 2013.
**Lecture cancelled. Work on your essay.**

IV. Is the human a “social” or a “political” animal?

15 April 2013.

17 April 2013.
19 April 2013.
Essay due today at the beginning of lecture.

22 April 2013.
Aristotle, Politics, 139-160, 178-89.

24 April 2013.
Aristotle, Politics, 229-42, 251-60.

26 April 2013.
Aristotle, Politics, 260-90.

29 April 2013.
Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, 1-49.
Note: you may skip or merely skim Arendt’s copious footnotes.

1 May 2013.
Arendt, The Human Condition, 50-78.

3 May 2013.

6 May 2013.

8 May 2013.

10 May 2013.
Review.

16 May 2013.
Final examination. 12.25-2.25 p.m. Location to be announced.

The time of the final examination is absolutely firm. We will neither offer nor administer alternate exams. Make your travel, work, or study arrangements accordingly.
[***SAMPLE***] Midterm examination study guide.

Part I. Identifications.
Five of the following names or concepts will appear on the midterm examination. You will be asked to identify or explain two terms out of those five. Write three or four sentences on each one. Obviously some of these terms have relevance beyond the scope of this course; however, what you write should be germane to the theories and theorists we considered together so far this semester. If the term seems significant to two or more texts or theorists, then you will want to address relevant differences, if any.

This section will be worth 25% of the total exam score. You will want to spend only ten minutes on Part I (approximately five minutes for each identification).

- virtú
- ring of Gyges
- *theoria*
- Cesare Borgia
- natural sociability (natural fellowship)
- *ou topos*
- Thrasy machus
- lion/fox
- “The Statesmen’s Bible”
- *eidos*

Part II. Texts/contexts.
On the exam, you will be asked to write one paragraph on one passage excerpted from a text assigned in this course. You will make your choice from two passages on the exam. In your answers, you must identify (1) the text from which the passage is excerpted, (2) the author of the passage, and (3) the significance or context of the passage. Commenting on the significance or context entails recounting the argument of the text as a whole and where the particular excerpt stands with respect to that whole.

This section of the exam will be worth 25% of total exam score. You will want to allow yourself about fifteen minutes for Part II.

NB. The following passage is an example. This particular passage will not appear on the exam, although other passages excerpted from this same work are fair game.

1. “Everything that is honourable arises from one of four parts: it is involved either with the perception of truth and with ingenuity; or with preserving fellowship among men, with assigning to each his own, and with faithfulness to agreements one has made; or with the greatness and strength of a lofty and unconquered spirit; or with order and limit in everything that is said and done (modesty and restraint are included here).”

Part III. Short essay.
You will be asked to write one short essay, which you will choose from a list of two on the exam. (Those two are among the three questions below.) The suggested length for a short essay on the midterm exam is approximately three to four paragraphs. You will be graded on three criteria: (1) your use of textual evidence and examples from lectures and readings; (2) the argumentation and logic of your essay; (3) the originality and thoughtfulness by which you engage the question.

This part of the exam will be worth the remaining 50% of the total exam score. You will want to allow approximately twenty-five minutes for this part of the exam.

1. Cicero claims that, as a means to retain influence over others, nothing is more suitable than to be loved and nothing less suitable than to be feared. Machiavelli famously concluded that, if one is forced to choose between being feared or being loved by others, then it is safer to be feared. Who makes the more convincing case? Support your argument by discussing both positions and by employing counterargument.

2. In ordinary speech, what do we mean by “utopian”? Of Plato’s Republic and More’s Utopia, which is the more “utopian” theory? Why?

3. If a political leader were to follow Machiavelli’s advice in The Prince, how would Plato judge the state of that leader’s soul? Would Plato say that the three parts of this leader’s soul were well-balanced by logos, or that eros or thymos were more prominent? Why?