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## **POLS 130: Elements of Political Theory**

### Course Description

This course offers an introduction to and exploration of selected topics in the history of Political Theory. It covers a range of thinkers, from the ancient Greeks to the Enlightenment thinkers of Europe and closes on a contemporary note that asks us to reflect on the theoretical underpinnings of our time. We will probe the resources and limits of texts by Aeschylus, Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx, Nietzsche, Arendt and Foucault, reading them in chronological order with an eye toward changes in concerns and concepts across time. We will watch two contemporary films, *The Lives of Others* and *Citizenfour* to explore the relationships between individuals and society and how they are marked by power and surveillance. The course will involve the consideration of the most vital questions about politics: What kind of a subject of study is politics? What justifies the authority of government, and what legitimates the rule of some people over others? The writers we will read have varying responses to this question, suggesting that there may not be agreement about a “right” answer. Some argue that the notion of a social contract is a fruitful way to think about the nature of political authority and obligation, while others contest this and argue for a more fluid conception that appreciates historical continuity. Other questions we may address include: What is freedom, and how is it related to equality? How does the relation between reason and passion impact our understanding of politics? What is the relationship between politics and culture?

### Course Rationale and Objectives

The fundamental rationale of the course is to bring past writings and concepts to bear on present realities. The thinkers we will read provide conceptual tools with which we can work to understand our own political experience(s) in order to help develop our own political perspectives and ideas. Moreover, the course aims to challenge ordinary understandings of politics by expanding our concept of what politics is and the ways in which politics surrounds us—namely, that politics consists of much more than what happens in City Hall or in State Houses or in Washington and that it involves the micropolitics of ideas and perceptions as much as the macropolitics of governance and legislation.

The course is designed to help you:

- Understand the foundations and functions of political institutions.
- Appreciate the complexity of political institutions and experience.

- Critically analyze philosophical texts and consider different interpretations and applications.
- Ask and confront challenging and difficult questions about politics and common life.
- Improve your ability to clearly express ideas and opinions about politics, both orally and in writing.

Course Requirements

*Attendance and Participation:* This course will require active participation and regular work. You are expected to come to class having done the reading assigned for that day. I will regularly refer to the text in my lectures and ask you questions based on it. Regular attendance is a must. Class participation is essential to this course. You should come to class prepared to actively discuss a range of topics based on the reading and to unpack its broader implications and put it in critical perspective.

*Essays:* You will be required to write three essays for this class at regularly scheduled intervals. Each essay will require you to articulate a clear thesis and argue it convincingly with detailed textual support from the assigned texts in political theory. You will be required to put thinkers in conversation with each other and compare and contrast their arguments. Prompts for each of the first two essays will be distributed two weeks before the due date and the prompt for the final essay will be given out a month in advance of the due date. The essays will gradually increase in length and complexity. The first essay will be 3-5pages, the second, 5-7 pages, and the final essay will be 8-10 pages in length.

*Reading Quizzes:* There will be surprise reading quizzes given periodically throughout the semester in class to ensure attentiveness and comprehension.

Your grade for this course will be computed as follows:

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|------------------------------------|-----|
| Class Participation and Attendance | 15% |
| First essay                        | 20% |
| Second essay                       | 25% |
| Final Paper                        | 30% |
| Reading quizzes                    | 10% |

Course Policies:

- Violations of DePauw University’s Academic Integrity Policy will be taken very seriously and punished accordingly. All violations will be reported officially and the student will fail the assignment for which they are charged with the violation.
- A guide to Academic Integrity that answers most of your questions and also a link to DePauw’s Academic Integrity Policy can be found at:  
<http://www.depauw.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-integrity/>

- Any student who feels she or he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability or learning challenge is strongly encouraged to contact Pamela Roberts, Director of Student Disability Services and ADA Compliance for further information on how to receive accommodations and support. It is the responsibility of the student to share the letter of accommodation with faculty and staff members. Accommodations will not be implemented until the faculty or staff member has received the official letter. Accommodations are not retroactive. It is the responsibility of the student to discuss implementation of accommodations with each faculty and staff member receiving the letter.

Course Materials:

The following book is required for purchase and is available in the DePauw University Bookstore.

- *The Oresteia* (Penguin Classics)
- *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche* (Hackett)

Readings marked with an asterisk on the syllabus can be found on the Moodle page for this course. You should download and complete the readings in advance of the assigned date.

Office Hours and Accessibility:

My office hours are on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4-5PM. Feel free to drop by to talk about the class, discuss future interests or simply to continue a conversation. Send me an email to set up an appointment if you need to meet to on a day when I do not offer office hours. I am also available to meet via Facetime or Skype (my Skype address is smita.a.rahman) if we cannot meet in person. I strongly prefer to have conversations in person so while I am happy to respond to texts and talk you on the phone or Facetime or Skype, please try to come by office hours first.

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| 8/25 | Introduction   |
| 8/30 | Aeschylus, <u>Oresteia</u> , Read <u>Agamemnon</u> in its entirety   |
| 9/1  | NO CLASS —Away for American Political Science Association Conference |

- 9/6 Aeschylus, Oresteia, Read The Libation Bearers in its entirety
- 9/8 Aeschylus, Oresteia, Read The Eumenides in its entirety
- 9/13 \*Plato, The Apology
- 9/15 \*Plato, The Crito  
FIRST ESSAY PROMPTS DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS
- 9/20 \*Aristotle, Politics (excerpt)
- 9/22 Machiavelli, Letter to Vettori, pp.6-8 AND  
The Prince, pp. 9-32
- 9/27 Machiavelli, The Prince, pp. 32-53
- 9/29 FIRST ESSAY DUE**  
Hobbes, Leviathan, pp.117-136
- 10/4 Hobbes, Leviathan, pp.152-199
- 10/6 Hobbes, Leviathan, , pp.208-217 + 228-240
- 10/11 Rousseau, On The Social Contract, pp.427-440
- 10/13 Rousseau, On The Social Contract pp. 440-454 + 482-487  
SECOND ESSAY PROMPTS DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS
- OCTOBER 15-23 FALL BREAK**
- 10/25 Marx and Engels, The Manifesto of the Communist Party  
pp. 798-804
- 10/27** Marx and Engels, The Manifesto of the Communist Party,  
pp. 804-809  
**SECOND ESSAY DUE**
- 11/1 Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality, pp. 865-884
- 11/3 Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality, pp. 884-903
- 11/8 Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism, excerpt 1

11/10 Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism, excerpt 2

11/15 Film: The Lives of Others  
FINAL ESSAY PROMPTS DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS

11/17 Film: The Lives of Others  
Lecture and Discussion

11/22 \*Foucault, Discipline and Punish (excerpt)

11/24 NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/29 \*Foucault, Discipline and Punish (excerpt)

12/1 Film: Citizenfour screening

12/6 Film: Citizenfour screening and discussion

12/8 Conclusion and Review

**FINAL ESSAY DUE BY EMAIL ONLY ON  
Tuesday, DECEMBER 13th BY 5 PM\*\*\***

**\*\*\*Late papers will be penalized by a third of a grade for every day that they are late**