

Nature of Politics*

790:101:92

Fall 2014

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Course Description

What does it mean for politics to have a “nature”? Can we identify phenomena characteristic of or relevant to politics throughout human history and within a variety of political contexts? This course offers an introduction to political theory by surveying the major political thinkers of the Western Tradition. Readings will be diverse and will span almost 2500 years of political thought, focusing on themes like the proper ends of government, the origin of political authority, and the significance of power, justice, and political obedience. Selections will be taken primarily from canonical works of political theory.

The course fulfills the following Core Curriculum Student Learning Outcomes:

- II. h. Understand the bases and development of human and societal endeavors across time and place.
- II. m. Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization.
- II. n. Apply concepts about human and social behavior to particular questions or situations.

Course Texts

The core text for the class will be the collection *Classics of Political and Moral Philosophy*, edited by Steven M. Cahn. Although a bit expensive, the wide range of material included will prevent you from having to buy a large stack of books. In some cases, the core text will be supplemented by materials which will be made available through the course website on Sakai. The Cahn book can be purchased in person at either the Rutgers University Bookstore at Ferren Mall or NJ Books on Easton Ave. It can be easily ordered online as well—Amazon.com and Abebooks.com are reliable options.

Required texts:

Steven Cahn (ed.), *Classics of Political and Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press 2011)
ISBN: 9780199791155

Course Expectations

Online Participation (30%)

Midterm (35%)

Final (35%)

Weekly online participation is mandatory. I will provide clear and specific instructions about what you should do in this regard in the introductory section of each weekly unit. Each week, you will be submitting:

* Please note that this is a draft syllabus and is subject to change.

- Reading Quizzes: before accessing the week's lesson, you will be required to complete a timed reading quiz (10 minutes), which poses questions about the assigned text.
- Weekly Forum contributions: *at least* one response to a specific question; *at least* one comment on another student's response

The midterm and final will test your grasp of the course material in four key areas:

1. Context: The historical, political, and personal background relevant to each of the thinkers we discuss.
2. Key ideas and arguments: The main ideas discussed and arguments made by each thinker in the course readings and emphasized in lecture.
3. Connections: The ways in which the different thinkers we encounter engage with one another's work and address shared questions and concerns.
4. Application: The use of the ideas and arguments encountered in the readings and lecture to illuminate aspects of contemporary personal and political life.

Important Dates

Tues., Sept. 2: First day of class

Wed., Oct. 15: Midterm Exam distributed

Wed., Dec. 10: Last day of class

TBD: Final Exam

Course Plan

WEEK 1

Introduction

The Ancient Ideal

WEEK 2

Plato, *Defence of Socrates* (CPMP¹ 5-22)

WEEK 3

Plato, *Republic* (CPMP 59-66 [368c5-377b13; 412b-445e4]; 128-133 [514a-521b14])

WEEK 4

Aristotle, *Politics* (CPMP 213-226, 234-236, 239-244)

Early Modern Political Thought

WEEK 5

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (CPMP 328-349)

WEEK 6

Hobbes, *Leviathan* (CPMP 391-399, 405-411, 420-430)

¹ Cahn, ed., *Classics of Moral and Political Philosophy*.

WEEK 7

Review and **Midterm Exam**

WEEK 8

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (CPMP 451-463, 475-476 [par. 95-99], 482-492, 506-511, 515-516 [par. 240-243])

Jefferson, "The Declaration of Independence" (CPMP 1179-1181)

Madison and Hamilton, *Federalist Papers* (CPMP 685-694, 701-710 [#s 1, 10, 47, 48, 51])

The Constitution of the United States (CPMP 1170-1177)

WEEK 9

Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (selections TBD)

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (selections TBD)

Modern Political Ideologies

WEEK 10

Mill, *On Liberty* (CPMP 958-1018)

WEEK 11

Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (CPMP 862-869)

Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (CPMP 878-896)

Obligation and Civil Disobedience

WEEK 12

Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (excerpts available through Sakai)

Plato, *Crito* (CPMP 22-30)

WEEK 13

King, "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail" (CPMP 1212-1221)

Justice

WEEK 14

Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (CPMP 1038-1060)

WEEK 15

Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (CPMP 1064-1076)

Conclusion